



Developing a Successful Social Economy

The NI Government's Three-Year Strategic Plan and the Action Plan 2004-05 and the work undertaken by the Social Economy Network and the Inter-Departmental Steering Group are welcomed by NIPPA.

The following comments to the consultation questions come from NIPPA staff.

1. Objective1

The key objective to increase awareness of the sector and establish its value to the local economy is appropriate.

A comprehensive communication plan to raise the profile of and knowledge about the sector across Government Departments and relevant bodies is necessary to recognise the depth and breadth of the social economy and to create pathways for development.

When a true value is calculated for the social economy in terms of employees and turn over and the 'added value' of social impacts a marketing plan will enable effective promotion of the sector.

2. Objective2

To increase the number of social economy enterprises and strengthen existing ones to enable them to be more competitive and sustainable the range of programmes offered to all enterprise start-ups needs to be extended to encourage applications from the social enterprise sector.

Opportunities to enable social enterprises to appoint business advisor would generate the change in prospective that may be necessary and give a skills resource specific to the needs and ethos of the organisation.

Information and financial products that are available to the social economy must be easily accessed through a central directory and it is important that assumptions are not made in regards to internet connections and I.T. skills.

The training needs within a social enterprise are constantly changing as it strives to meet its double bottom line. Many employees within this sector are

returning to work and through the personal development of work may move on to alternative employment within a few years demanding constant skill building.

Financial incentives to attract long term un-employed from benefits to main-stream employment would offer potential for growth within this sector.

3. Objective3

As with all small businesses resources can be stretched to conform with the necessary bureaucracy and a more supportive environment would encourage development and create opportunities for growth.

Duplication of services by a government department, which have previously been supplied by a social enterprise should be avoided.

The proposed introduction of CIC may encourage growth as the enterprise will maintain its dynamism.

Main aims for developing the social economy should include:

- partnership with industry to create business mentors bringing skills and experience
- easier access to finance through a central information bureau giving advice on applications and direction to appropriate resources
- services provided to the sector must be consistent and professional regardless of location
- the basic skills may not exist within a community to operate a social enterprise and training should be delivered to develop basic skills and help with long term objectives
- an awards scheme specifically for the social enterprise sector will raise awareness and give affirmation for excellence
- welfare to work will encourage involvement in mainstream economic activity