

CASE STUDY

Expansion of the School for Social Entrepreneurs: increasing the reach of their innovative support programme through social franchising

The School for Social Entrepreneurs

The School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE) was founded in 1997 by Michael Young, a social innovator who had previously launched a number of successful organisations, including the Open University. The first School was, and still is, based in East London and since its launch developed a unique and innovative support programme for social entrepreneurs based on tailored packages of practical action-learning; a proven model that helps entrepreneurs establish charities, social enterprises and social firms.

Following its initial success in London, the School decided to expand its reach by franchising their model. Key partnerships were formed and a number of franchises of the School were established in other locations, with the Central SSE in London overseeing guidance, support and monitoring: Liverpool, East Midlands, Cornwall, Scotland, Northern Ireland and even Australia. The value of the Schools was clearly voiced by its students, strategic partners and the communities benefiting from the resulting enterprises. It was also recognised by a number of key research projects. Specifically, research commissioned by Capacitybuilders during 2006-2007¹ identified the School's model as a key example of peer-to-peer support and recommended that it was expanded further. This research informed the planning of Capacitybuilders' [Social Enterprise Programme](#) of which SSE London was a sub-project. It also led in part to the creation of the Big Lottery funded [Investing in Social Enterprise Expansion \(I-SEE\) programme](#).

Expanding the School further through the I-SEE programme

The I-SEE programme was launched in 2009 and will run until 2012. It was designed to complement the Capacitybuilders' Social Enterprise programme and aims to improve the social enterprise business support landscape by developing proven tools and services for *national reach*. The SSE was chosen as a sub-project of this programme due to its previous success and the aim is to expand the School further by establishing franchises in five new regions: Yorkshire and Humber, the North East, the West Midlands, the South East and the East of England. It is hoped that these new Schools will benefit 150 additional entrepreneurs over the course of the three years, rising to over 400 after five years. The impact of which will be felt by the communities and beneficiaries of the Schools' resulting enterprises and the wider social enterprise sector.

Social franchising

Social franchising can be a great model for social enterprises who want to expand their businesses through replication. Likewise, it is also a great model for individuals who want to set up a social enterprise and would prefer to do so by establishing a franchise of a business with a proven record of success. Franchising is a widely adopted model in the private sector and, although there are distinct issues to consider with 'social franchising,' it is a promising model that could enable the social enterprise sector to grow and thrive. As it is a relatively new concept, there is limited evidence of it in place and only a handful of successful cases. It is therefore hoped that a lot can be learnt from SSE's project.

¹ **An Assessment for Capacitybuilders of the Infrastructure Support Priorities for Social Enterprise 2008-2011**
(Rocket Science 2007)



The new Schools



A year in, the project has made a promising start with two of the five new Schools open: SSE Yorkshire & Humber and SSE Hampshire.

These new Schools have already welcomed a total cohort of 35 social entrepreneurs and the results have been immediate, particularly from SSE Yorkshire & Humber: Chris Tremlett of TREE was awarded 'Best Social Entrepreneur' by the UnLtd/Leeds LEGI and 'Most Promising New Start-Up' by the ABDN Awards; and Mani Ray's social enterprise Invincible Circle Education won 'Best Social Impact' award by the UnLtd/Leeds LEGI. There have even been suggestions to expand the School further within this region alone.

Key partnerships have been identified in the East of England and in the North West alongside development work in other regions. These partnerships will hopefully lead to the establishment of two further franchises over the coming months. The interest from the North West is of particular significance, as this region was not initially focused on in the original project plans - something which clearly demonstrates the potential of the project to expand beyond its original parameters.

Key insight gained on franchising

The value of the School

The project success so far has strengthened Central SSE's belief in the value of the School as a key social enterprise business support service. The proven model is gaining support and momentum across the country and is developing increasing numbers of prominent, high quality social entrepreneurs and ventures.

In order to ensure the Schools continue to thrive and deliver results, the project has highlighted to Central SSE the need to constantly monitor the approaches and techniques used to ensure they are suitable for all different locations, groups and tutors.

Establishing new franchises

The project has enabled Central SSE to increase their understanding of social franchising. When establishing a new franchise, finding the correct partner has been a key point of learning. The School found it crucial to identify a partner who shares the commitment and vision for the School; ensuring the reputation and brand is upheld. They also found it important to work closely with the chosen partner to secure the necessary funding and to make contact with key stakeholders and supporters – increasing the likelihood of success.

When establishing the franchise, Central SSE found it was also important to allow as much time as possible to prepare and lay the necessary foundations. In this case, it was the matter of allowing as much time for student recruitment as possible, to ensure the Schools started with a promising cohort. During this start-up stage, Central SSE found strong and clear support from themselves as the franchisor, to the franchisee, essential.

Supporting and developing existing franchises

Through the project, Central SSE identified the need to continue to support and develop existing franchises, as well as new ones. Much has been learnt from the success of the new Schools this

knowledge and best practice can be successfully applied to the ongoing strategic development and sustainability of the existing Schools. Central SSE has identified the need to balance this with their work on new ventures and as a consequence has developed an additional strand of work: a Network Away Day. The first of these took place in early August. The concept was one of great value; mobilising knowledge between the Schools and uniting them on a common focus.

Future plans

Over the remaining two years of the project, the Central SSE will continue to work closely with their franchisees to ensure that the Schools grow, thrive and continue to support social entrepreneurs to reach their potential.

Further investment will also be made to grow the franchise further, hopefully seeing additional Schools established over the coming months.

For further details please contact:

Larissa Litchfield

Project Manager, SSE

larissa.litchfield@sse.org.uk

www.sse.org.uk

Craig Carey

Projects Manager, I-SEE Programme, Social Enterprise Coalition

craig.carey@socialenterprise.org.uk

www.socialenterprise.org.uk

