

Knowledge Sharing Workshop: Business Support Projects – follow up

As you might have read in the last newsletter issue, SEC held a national event in Birmingham earlier this year bringing together all the projects from the BASIS and Capacitybuilders funded programmes that fall under SEC's overall business support programme.

The project portfolio encompasses a number different of different social enterprise support themes - **Scaling-up, Impact Assessment, Networks, Peer Support, Knowledge Management and Business Development**. The event allowed the project managers and other stakeholders to learn about projects being delivered in similar geographical and thematic areas, allowing them to share valuable knowledge and experience (on the successes, challenges, key learning and affect on beneficiaries) and find key contacts for future collaboration.

Over the next few months we will look in more depth at the different business support themes and analysing some of the information collated to date. This will focus on the knowledge and experiences gained across the whole portfolio which can then feed into future discussions on the business support landscape. Ensuring that future support available for Social Enterprises is focused, complimentary and is not unnecessarily duplicated.

In this newsletter issue the focus is on consortia building, part of the scaling-up theme, looking at two projects based in the South East and the North West. However there are some common challenges noted by the projects and faced across all the themes that we thought that are worth highlighting –

- **Variation** – Social Enterprises are as varied as the issues they are addressing and the products or services they are providing. It is important therefore to ensure that information and support is suitable for all types of organisations, and a range of materials/services are available which a variety of users will find applicable to their particular circumstances and area.
- **Awareness** – There may be a lack of awareness of the development tools available, especially amongst newer or smaller enterprises, and the interest or demand for information can be variable across areas/regions. This challenge requires intensive awareness-raising and promotional activities. Working in partnership with the support of local organisations will help to increase participation, target specific social enterprises, and establish ongoing local relationships.
- **Accessibility** – Ensure that support or training workshops are accessible to organisations in all areas by organising events in various different locations. The size and scale of an organisation may limit the time or finances available for training and development, so workshops and courses should be held in conjunction with information freely available or accessible over a short time period.
- **Time pressures** – Taking time away from “the business” to invest in development may seem counterintuitive, especially for small or new businesses, but it is important that this is encouraged and supported in order to see the long-term benefits of the tools or training available.
- **Partnership Working** - When looking to replicate a business through franchising or licensing, working in consortia, or seeking tenders from commissioning bodies, it is essential to identify the correct partner(s). Working with others who share the commitment, vision, and common objectives will ensure the social values of the enterprise are upheld. Sharing information and learning with other social enterprises and networks can help to determine likeminded individuals or enterprises, and establish relationships built on shared objectives. Working closely with commissioners and funders to assess their objectives, and maintaining regular communication will ensure both parties are satisfied with the contractual arrangements.