



How can policy support sustainable social innovation through entrepreneurship?

Lessons learnt supporting social entrepreneurship with the Outset programme

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With the recent “hype” around Social Entrepreneurship, policy makers often wonder whether they should support social entrepreneurship in a unique way. YTKO’s experience with the [Outset programme](#) offers a practitioner’s viewpoint of how policy can support social innovation through entrepreneurship.

YTKO’s award-winning¹ Outset programme (www.outset.org) is a highly innovative, cost-effective, flexible and scalable solution to unemployment. In the last three years alone, it has engaged with 10,455 people and supported people who are unemployed – often long-term - or economically inactive, to overcome their barriers, unlock their potential and increase their confidence and skills to give themselves a sustainable job through self-employment, enterprise and social enterprise. To date, Outset has created 1,776 businesses, a number of social enterprises such as Redruth Community Radio Station² and the Green Trust CIC and more than 2,000 UK jobs.

We learnt from our experience with the Outset programme that a different ethos is crucial to engage clients and build their trust: working alongside our clients, doing things with them, not ‘for’ them or ‘to’ them. Our teams therefore need to be innovative, enthusiastic and entrepreneurial themselves. Aspiring social entrepreneurs, for instance, are supported by advisers with a social entrepreneurship background: nothing is more valuable to the client groups than first hand experience. Our advisers are role models with whom potential clients can easily identify and whom they can trust.

Social values are important in order to deliver social innovation, but social businesses first need to become economically sustainable enterprises. Commerce, not grants, needs to be the vehicle to achieve economic growth. Our advisers found out they had to first help people get the ‘enterprise’ bit right...from the Outset! If social enterprises are no different to any enterprise from the outset, then why support them differently? What they do with their profit sets them apart from purely profit-driven enterprises. We discovered that a “braided” programme is the ideal support at start-up stage:

- An integrated communication programme for maximum engagement with a mix of grassroots and community outreach activities, referrals from local employment partner organizations – some specialized in social entrepreneurship –, and tailored marketing communications campaigns.
- A standard core delivery – with modules on business start-up skills – and a few tailored modules on governance and legal structure, access to finance, monitoring and evaluation, and market positioning to encourage clients to develop a clear brand strategy to turn the “social value” difference into a competitive advantage.

¹ Outset won the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) 2012 Award for Enterprise Promotion and the European Commission 2012 Grand Jury’s Award for Enterprise Promotion.

² Outset case history is located at <http://www.outsetcornwall.co.uk/outsetcornwall-case-studies/stu-williams-redruth-radio/>

Before commissioning support though, it would be helpful if policy makers improved the climate for social entrepreneurs by:

- Communicating, are pre-start stage, what are social enterprises
- Promoting role models
- Promoting accessible and affordable financial support
- Encouraging corporate engagement (corporate social responsibility)

Policy makers should also request their providers report on Social Return on Investment (SROI).

Looking back at the past three years, we realized that all the publicity with successful social entrepreneurs – e.g. the Eden Project CEO in Cornwall – had a beneficial impact as it proposed more acceptable role models for future generations. It also allowed local policy makers to secure GVA for the long term, and derive extra social value, from and for the community, to benefit society and the environment.

Finally, we learnt that innovation in business support services does not necessarily lie in creating entirely new programmes for each segmented audience, but rather in keeping the core of what has already worked and tailoring some communication aspects and key delivery modules to reach these new clients and best address their needs.

Note to readers: The Outset service is constantly adopted by new UK councils, Huntingdonshire and Swindon are the two latest starts, and its approach is eminently scaleable into Europe.