

UnLtd policy events: Time for People Powered Solutions – Key points emerging

UnLtd ran two policy events attended by a total of c80 social entrepreneurs, support agencies and political advisers – one with the Conservative Party and one with Labour. Each event included policy input followed by discussion workshops to generate ideas on how social and community entrepreneurs can contribute to tackling the problems of UK society, and on how to improve the support infrastructure and operating environment for social entrepreneurs. Results were fed back to senior politicians (Francis Maude, John Denham) and manifesto writers, as well as providing input to a policy report by Respublica.

Overview

There is a double win to be had by supporting social and community entrepreneurs - providing and improving public service delivery, whilst at the same time building trust and social capital within local government providers, communities and wider society.

Social entrepreneurs are a growing movement, motivated by personal passions and often understanding the problem they seek to solve from the inside. Their motivation is not to be a “social entrepreneur”, not to meet anyone else’s priorities, but to solve the problem they have experienced - usually first hand. People from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to become social and community entrepreneurs but need support and networking to fulfil their potential as they are less likely to have role models around them.

Tapping into the pool of social Entrepreneurs can return major benefits:

- Confidence and learning, - Social capital, - Social impact, - Economic impact - Social innovation.

UnLtd award winners develop an average of 4 jobs, 14 formal training places, 15 volunteering places

Key ideas from social entrepreneurs:

Jobs

Tweak the rules of Future Jobs Fund to allow people to enter self employment as social entrepreneurs

NB we reckon it takes a little longer than the 6 months and slightly more cost than £6500

Disadvantaged communities

A New Deal for People – investing in people in the most disadvantaged areas, who step forward as community entrepreneurs, with seed funds, support, networking, a hub space, and back office services

NB this is close to ideas already being designed by staff in CLG and the Cabinet Office (Ben Monks)

NB government to encourage use of empty national/local government buildings

Highly local version of Total Place, with local people voting on investment and revenue decisions, and possibly co-owning community assets

Build on US Tides Center model as umbrella for start ups- a full service workspace and shelter for new social and community ventures

Business contribution

Encourage and reward pro bono mentoring and advice from businesses – awards schemes, kudos, possibly corporation tax breaks for time donated

Starting up

Seed finance, support and networking for people to take first steps in their journey as social entrepreneurs

NB only 1 in a 100 people trying to start a social venture currently receive formal support

Low regulation “charity-lite” legal form with limited liability for people just starting a social project, to enable them to get started quickly and not have to make a big choice of legal status before they see how their venture is developing

NB a key point here is a form of entity which can be transferred into a company, CIC, charity, or coop legal form later on, without penalty. The new start up legal entity would have a time limit and probably a turnover limit, after which it would have to transfer to a permanent form of registration.

Proportionate regulation for start ups and small scale community agencies (eg on health and safety, CRB checks, liability issues)

One stop shop or navigation point with user ratings for advice on where to go for help, using simple language accessible to people who know what they want to do but not the jargon

Scaling up

Extend tax breaks available for early stage scaling up enterprises to social enterprises – this means giving the tax breaks for loans not just equity as most social ventures do not have share capital routes

Ensure investment readiness services are created alongside social investment funds, to make sure the pipeline of investable candidates is available

Intermediary agencies providing back office services to speed up how fast you can grow

Role of Government

Improve mutual understanding through a pro bono mentoring and secondment scheme from central and local government to social entrepreneurs

NB civil servants already have a set number of volunteering days they can take as paid leave, and the “a week in business” model; this simply needs a broker service like UnLtd Connect and ideally encouragement through the HR and career development systems

Tax on efficiency

Remove the vat penalty on social enterprises securing back office services from other social enterprises, eg bookkeeping or hr

NB already proposed in budget for a consultation as between charities – lets see the consultation extended to other social ventures

Demonstrating impact

Intermediaries to assist in demonstrating social impact/return on investment.

Transparency and visibility of work eg via online platforms as an alternative to bureaucratic measurement, particularly for smaller agencies

Youth services

Back and fund young people to create their own youth services – the authentic way to tackle gang culture and other problems facing young people

NB already a DCSF commitment in the youth sector development plan, but not yet auctioned

Get the experience of social entrepreneurship into schools and youth groups for people to try it out for real – not just learn it from books

Environment

Build on the learning from the NESTA/UnLtd Big Green Challenge by backing a national scheme for community entrepreneurs to lead their communities in carbon behaviour change

Social entrepreneurs at community level can reframe the issue to something we do, not something we are told to do

Community cohesion

Back social entrepreneurs to bring new ideas, authenticity and trust in broken communities.

Government should engage social entrepreneurs to provide a communication link, bridging people and local authorities.

Social entrepreneurs as role models in disillusioned communities, especially grass roots entrepreneurs. A ladder of role models from the bottom up

Public services

Fund and support a programme for social entrepreneurs developing public service innovations – the best ideas often come from recipients of the services. A modest budget could create an inspiring national competition.

NB high achieving examples include Patients Know Best, Enabled By Design, Star Wards, Vision Housing, Cool to Care, Motiv, Jamie's Farm (just awarded social investment)

Social entrepreneurs turn recipients of services into active contributors. Government should make it easier not direct it. The right legal framework for trust and enterprise, reducing barriers to entry, enabling social investment, and making the resources they have like information available to citizens

Enabling agencies should help people who have the passion and drive for change to take control, making knowledge/networks/confidence available to them, providing the shelter and structure for the first steps of setting up, to get social entrepreneurs robust enough to deliver with success

Ageing Society

The burden of an ageing society can only be tackled by engaging older people as the solution – active older people as social entrepreneurs

Talent

You don't know what you don't know. Success in a venture is 99% about execution, ideas are the easy part. Getting access to the talent to make it work is critical. Lets have a talent board online with skills diagnostic, toolkit, a national talent pool of job applicants/ volunteers/mentors for social entrepreneurs.

How about a virtual advisory board system as a turnkey for social entrepreneurs?

Definitions – social entrepreneurs should invent their own dictionary. We need to take the term apart and have a language for its different components

Enabling organisations – plurality, specialism, new types that don't exist yet, scaling up by enabling others

Inspiring more – the conversation needs to be with the public at large, not just those already involved

Go with the grain of human nature, this is inspiring, rewarding and fun

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