

**Response by the Social Enterprise Coalition to the Raising
Expectations: enabling the system to deliver consultation**

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Introduction

The Social Enterprise Coalition (the 'Coalition') welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills' joint consultation on Raising Expectations: Enabling the system to deliver.

The Coalition was established in 2002 as the national voice of social enterprise. The Coalition represents a wide range of social enterprises, umbrella bodies and networks, with a combined membership reaching over 10,500 social enterprises. These include co-operatives and mutuals, development trusts, housing associations, leisure and football supporters' trusts and Social Firms. Social enterprises are businesses with primarily social or environmental objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners. This response was informed by consultation with members of the Coalition practicing in education and children and young people's services.

We are fully supportive of the government's aims to ensure that all young people and adults have access to high quality training and education which enables them to participate fully in today's workforce and in society more broadly. In particular, we share the government's position on the need to provide high quality education and training services for disadvantaged groups in order to ensure that no-one leaves education prematurely and without the skills which will equip them to succeed in all aspects of life.

We further believe that social enterprises can make a real and sustained contribution to education and training services applying innovative and efficient approaches to addressing the complex and diverse needs of young people and adults.

Local leadership

The Coalition supports the government's desire to create strong local leadership on education and training for young people.

Moreover, through our consultation process, social enterprises working in this field have expressed their support for local authorities taking responsibility for 14-19 education. Comments suggest that social enterprises have found the LSC difficult to navigate and engage with and that local authorities tend to be more accessible to smaller and newer social enterprises.

The Coalition also believes that social enterprises are well placed to help inform local authorities about local education and skills needs, thereby strengthening commissioning practice. Social enterprises are frequently characterised by a close understanding of and commitment to their client groups, often including the involvement of these clients in the organisational structure. As such, the Coalition believes that local authorities could benefit from working with social enterprises to better understand the education and training needs of local communities.

An example of good collaborative working between a social enterprise and their local authority is given by StreetVibes Youth, a social enterprise which uses music as a means of engaging with young people including young offenders and disadvantaged youths, and which has a strong track record of working with local authorities. StreetVibes Youth has commented that;

"we participate in local and community forums, networks and meetings, we already work with local schools and 14-19 Partnerships, we meet with commissioners from local authorities and are well-placed to collaborate on joint solutions to local issues and local need".

Despite this example, our consultation has highlighted a lack understanding by many local authorities of what constitutes a social enterprise, their potential role in delivering education and training services and the added social benefits they bring.

To address this we recommend an intensive and extensive capacity building programme for local authority commissioners as well as for all of the organisations outlined in the consultation document which are involved in strategic planning for education and training, including the Young People's Learning Agency, the Regional Development Agency, the DIUS Skills Funding Agency and the Government Office.

This is necessary to bring about the required cultural change including increasing commissioners' understanding of social enterprises, ensuring they are aware of the wider social, environmental and economic impacts of their decisions and are empowered to take advantage of the innovation that social enterprises can offer.

Commissioning

The Coalition welcomes the government's recognition that delivery of the full curriculum and qualifications entitlement across an area requires the active involvement of a variety of providers including third sector organisations.

We believe that social enterprises have a unique contribution to make in the provision of services for young people.

Because social enterprises are businesses with primarily social or environmental objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, the primary goal of social enterprises working in education and training is to provide high quality services which are tailored to the needs of their users.

Social enterprises, which combine this energy and entrepreneurialism with an emphasis on engaging directly with users and local people, are also well placed to design and deliver services which are tailored to the needs of users and the local community. Indeed, social enterprises are frequently characterised by a close understanding of and commitment to their users, often including the involvement of these clients in the organisational structure.

Despite the strengths of social enterprises working in this area and the support shown to social enterprise by central government, social enterprises continue to encounter problems at the commissioning stage of service delivery.

Commissioners are often reluctant to contract to social enterprises due to a perception of high risk and because social enterprises are often not on 'approved provider' lists.

This may result in increased commissioning to larger providers, perceived by commissioners to be lower risk, at the likely disadvantage of social enterprises, particularly those that are smaller scale or with specialist areas of expertise.

There also remains a lack of awareness among commissioners of what social enterprises are, their potential role in delivering young people's services, and the added social benefits they bring.

Commissioning recommendations

The Coalition believes measures need to be in place to support and incentivise commissioners to shift investment into new models of service. This needs to be addressed to ensure a neutral commissioning process which is open to social enterprises and other third sector service providers.

The Coalition welcomes DCSF and DIUS' emphasis on ensuring that local authorities will put first good quality provision and outcomes for young people. Moreover, we believe that a focus on outcomes rather than processes should inform commissioning decisions.

Firstly, there is a need for redefining value-for-money in relation to public service delivery. Many social enterprises look beyond traditional public service delivery mechanisms developing services which address needs in a much more holistic way. For example, social enterprises often provide services which address multiple needs such as youth centres which provide recreational facilities as well as training courses and counselling services. These approaches add value to public spending which is often not recognised.

Secondly, in order to realise the advantages that more holistic service provision can offer, an outcomes-based approach to commissioning should include the development of more unified commissioning and programme budgets including children and young people's services, social care, housing, healthcare and benefits.

Encouraging commissioners both to meet multiple objectives and join up different types of service for efficiency gains, and to commission preventative solutions to some of the problems faced by young people today, should be integral to this approach.

The aims of the Every Child Matters agenda cannot be achieved until such commissioning becomes the norm.

Finally, the Coalition supports the introduction of Skills Accounts as a way to empower individuals to have more power to take control of their learning. This allows a greater degree of flexibility and will result in services tailored to each individual's specific needs.

Service provision for young people in juvenile custody

The Social Enterprise Coalition supports DCSF and DIUS' aims to improve the standards of education and training provision for young people in juvenile custody.

We believe that social enterprises are well-placed to deliver services to these groups based on their strong records of delivering education and training services to disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups including young offenders.

Hill Holt Wood provides an excellent example of this. The organisation provides work for the long-term unemployed running sustainable woodlands as well as education, training and employment opportunities for school children, young offenders and unemployed or otherwise disadvantaged young people.

The impact Hill Holt Wood's work has had on the local community is described in a letter from Lincolnshire Police in April 2008 which states,

'During the last year the anti-social behaviour and criminal damage in our policing team area has reduced by at least 25%. Joint agency working has been seen by members of the community as vital and this has contributed to the level of service they have received...without the assistance from staff from Hill Holt Wood we wouldn't be achieving such high standards'.

The Coalition urges DCSF and DIUS to ensure that its commitment to improving outcomes for young people in custody is reflected in and supported by its commissioning and funding strategies. As with the

commissioning of all services for young people, the Coalition strongly recommends an outcomes-based approach to commissioning as outlined above.

Transport provision for travel-to-learn students

The Coalition fully supports the measures involving planning across local authority boundaries that DCSF and DIUS' aim to put in place to meet the needs of young people who travel to learn.

However, social enterprises working in this field have expressed concern about the increases they have seen in the closure or merger of educational sites, which has resulted in young people having to travel further to learn. In particular, concerns have been raised over inadequate transport provision for young people to access educational facilities that are located far from their homes, especially in rural areas.

Community transport is an area in which social enterprises have great strength and are well placed to support local authorities to address this issue. Social enterprises such as Hackney Community Transport, one of the largest community transport providers in the UK, aim to provide affordable community transport services which meet local needs.

The Coalition urges DCSF and DIUS to explore community transport as a solution to this need, in order to ensure that all young people have easy, reliable and affordable access to education and training.

Curriculum

The Coalition supports DCSF and DIUS' aims to equip all young people with qualifications and skills which will enable them to succeed in all aspects of life.

The Coalition believes that social enterprise and entrepreneurship should feature as part of any business studies or enterprise curriculum. Government has been committed to ensuring that social enterprise is included within GCSE and A' level business studies courses, with the Office of the Third Sector's Social Enterprise Action Plan (2006) stating that this was a key priority.

Including social enterprise within business studies courses is important for several reasons. Firstly, it is an important part of increasing understanding of social enterprise and stimulating interest among young people. Secondly, learning about social enterprise teaches young people about how business models can be used to bring about social and environmental change, allowing pupils to recognise that businesses exist for reasons other than to create private profit. Finally, it is vitally important to make young people aware of the wide variety of career options available to them, including working for or setting up a social enterprise.

Social enterprise has now been successfully included on the GCSE business studies curriculum. The Coalition would, however, like to see social enterprise on the curriculum across the breadth of qualifications now available to young people to help foster culture of enterprise and develop young people's awareness of their career options.