



# **Social Enterprise in a Global Context: The Role of Higher Education Institutions**

## **Country Brief: United Kingdom**

**August 2016**



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WITH  
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## About the British Council

The British Council was founded to create a friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and the wider world. The British Council creates international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and builds trust between them worldwide. We call this work cultural relations.

We work in over 100 countries, connecting millions of people with the United Kingdom through programmes and services in the English language, the Arts, Education and Society. We believe these are the most effective means of engaging with others, and we have been doing this work since 1934.

[www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

## About Plymouth University

Plymouth University is one of the leading modern universities in the UK, ranked in the top seven institutions under the age of fifty by Times Higher Education. The University was awarded the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education in 2012, and was the first in the world to be awarded the Social Enterprise Mark in recognition of working as a genuine social enterprise, caring for communities, and protecting the planet. The study has been led by SERIO, an applied research unit based at Plymouth University, in collaboration with colleagues from the Institution's Futures Entrepreneurship Centre.

## Using this report

### Overview

This research seeks to identify the benefits and challenges of partnership between higher education institutions (HEIs) and social enterprises (SEs) with a particular focus on those operating within an international context. Specifically it explores:

- Existing partnerships between HEIs and social enterprise across twelve countries, spanning four continents;
- The benefits of existing cooperation between social enterprise and HEIs;
- The impact of such cooperation on a range of stakeholder groups, such as students, social entrepreneurs, and funders; and,
- The role of HEIs in supporting an increased awareness of social entrepreneurship as a career option, and in assisting start-ups and early growth.

In May 2016, the British Council published the core research report<sup>1</sup> emanating from this study - '*Social Enterprise in a Global Context: The Role of Higher Education Institutions*' – which placed a deliberate focus on the macro international landscape for engagement between HEIs and social enterprise. In contrast, this report on the UK provides a specific country focus, enabling a more granular view of social enterprise activity among Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). A similar report has been produced for each of the eleven other countries that participated in this study.

It is expected that the findings of this research will:

- Facilitate dialogue, networking and knowledge exchange, opening up avenues for greater international cooperation between HEIs, and a stronger global narrative on social value and the contribution of this activity to achieving social development goals.
- Assess and promote the role of HEIs in social enterprises and the benefits of existing co-operation, based upon an analysis of opportunities and challenges related to collaboration.
- Provide a body of evidence which supports and informs further research and collaboration opportunities.

All research outputs from this study, including this report, will be made available on the British Council Social Enterprise webpage: [www.britishcouncil.org/society/social-enterprise/reports](http://www.britishcouncil.org/society/social-enterprise/reports)

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<sup>1</sup> Referred to hereon after as 'the global research report'.

## Introduction

### Outlining the research

This research is set against a context of global growth in higher education, and seeks to understand and enhance the role of international cooperation between higher education institutions (HEIs) and social enterprises (SEs). The study, led by Plymouth University for the British Council, is one of the first to attempt to identify the range of HEI activity in the social enterprise sector. Specifically, the study maps and explores existing partnerships between HEIs and SE; the benefits of existing cooperation; and the impact of such cooperation on a range of stakeholder groups, such as students, social entrepreneurs, and funders.

One of the challenges of conducting social enterprise research on a global level is that the term is governed by different legal frameworks, terminology, and cultural approaches. For this study, the researchers adopted the [www.socialenterprise.org.uk](http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk) definition, which considers a social enterprise to be:

*“A business that trades to tackle social problems, improve communities, people’s life chances, or the environment. They make their money from selling goods and services in the open market, but they reinvest their profits back into the business or the local community”*

### Study approach

The global research was undertaken with over two hundred HEIs drawn from Canada, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Kenya, Mexico, Pakistan, Slovenia, South Africa, Thailand, United Kingdom and the USA. These twelve countries were selected to provide a wide range of different geographical locations, higher education structures, and levels of economic development and rates of growth. The study comprised three core methodological stages:

Approach	Overview
<b>Desk-based review of social enterprise activity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This included academic and grey literature, as well as media sources such as HEI and news websites, blogs, and third party partner organisation websites.</li> <li>▪ The review was supported by consultations with British Council representatives from each country and explored country-specific issues such as variations in the definition of social enterprise, legal structures for the sector, and challenges to growth.</li> </ul>
<b>HEI survey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An online survey was sent to all known HEIs in each country to map social enterprise activity, and to explore the benefits and challenges of partnership working.</li> <li>▪ The survey was disseminated to 993 HEIs, yielding a return of 205 (a 21% response rate).</li> </ul>
<b>Consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In-depth semi-structured interviews with up to three HEIs from each country, to capture their social enterprise activity and partnerships in more detail.</li> <li>▪ This data was combined with analysis from the preceding two stages to formulate a series of case studies of practice.</li> </ul>

With specific regard to the UK, 138 HEIs were invited to complete a survey, yielding a return of 28 – a response of 20%. Where possible, the survey was targeted toward named contacts with knowledge of, or responsibility for social enterprise at their institution. Whilst this approach was felt to provide the most rounded view of cross-institutional engagement and practice, it should be noted that any views expressed may not necessarily reflect the official stance of their HEI.

The survey findings have been exemplified and elaborated upon through the inclusion of case studies of practice from three British HEIs, and consultation with representatives from the British Council team in the UK.

### **The British Council's social enterprise programme**

Social enterprises address social and environmental problems through innovative solutions that improve people's lives in our communities and societies. The British Council's global social enterprise programme draws on the UK experience in social enterprise to promote its growth around the world. We build capacity in the sector, forge international networks, and support policy leaders to create ecosystems in which social enterprise and social investment can thrive. Our work supports positive social change, inclusive growth and sustainable development while building trust and creating opportunities between the UK and other countries.

## The landscape for social enterprise

### Country overview

The UK higher education system is long-established and widely considered to be of high quality; evidence of teaching at the University of Oxford dates back as far as the year 1096.<sup>2</sup> Presently, there are approximately 140 HEIs in the UK, and in 2013 there were around 2.4 million student enrolments in the UK, representing around 3.7% of the total UK population.<sup>3</sup> This is slightly higher than the average number of student enrolments as a proportion of the total population across the 12 study countries described in this research, with the mean average across the 12 countries standing at 3.6%.

The term 'social enterprise' is commonly used and understood in the UK, endorsed by the government and SE sector bodies such as Social Enterprise UK. Whilst some countries lack commonality, referring to the social enterprise sector by various different terms and phrases, the UK is relatively agreed upon the use of the term 'social enterprise' and it is recognised across business sectors and disciplines.

### Approaches to social enterprise

The UK has an active, thriving social enterprise sector that is growing in both strength and stature. Viewed as a pioneer of social enterprise, a recent report suggests that the UK currently has around 70,000 social enterprises in operation, contributing £24 billion to the economy and employing nearly a million people.<sup>4</sup> Following the 2008 economic crisis that led to public sector austerity and budget cuts to various services, the use of social enterprises is increasingly being considered as a viable method to achieve economic recovery. Based on a sustainable business model and clear social purpose, social enterprises are considered the solution to many societal and environmental issues, both in the UK and globally, and as such are operating in a diverse range of business sectors.<sup>5</sup>

There is no legal definition for what constitutes a social enterprise in the UK and so they tend to operate within a spectrum of legal and operational structures. Recently, however, the UK government has introduced two hybrid legal structures; community interest companies (CICs) and charitable companies, which enable social enterprises to trade in pursuit of social impact. With an increasing focus on social responsibility and social investment, the social enterprise sector is attracting multi-sectoral partnerships, funding and support, enabling the continued expansion and development of the sector.

### Support for social enterprise

The government is undertaking various actions to promote, develop and enhance the UK social enterprise sector. For example, the Public Services (Social Value) Act came into law in January 2013; stipulating for the first time that all public sector bodies in England and Wales must consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area. Similarly, the Office for Civil Society, responsible for charities, social enterprises and voluntary organisations in the Cabinet Office, has recently published a strategy outlining plans for the UK to become a global social investment hub. They hope to use

<sup>2</sup> British Council (2013) Introduction to the UK higher education system. Available at: [https://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/default/files/higher\\_education\\_system\\_of\\_uk.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/default/files/higher_education_system_of_uk.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2016). Enrolment by level of education. Available at: [http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EDULIT\\_DS](http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EDULIT_DS)

<sup>4</sup> Social Enterprise UK (2015) State of Social Enterprise Survey: Leading the World in Social Enterprise. Available at: [http://socialenterprise.org.uk/public/uploads/editor/SEUK\\_StateofSocialEnterprise\\_FINAL\\_WEB.pdf](http://socialenterprise.org.uk/public/uploads/editor/SEUK_StateofSocialEnterprise_FINAL_WEB.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> British Council (2015) Social enterprise in the UK: Developing a thriving social enterprise sector. Available at: [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/social\\_enterprise\\_in\\_the\\_uk\\_final\\_web\\_spreads.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/social_enterprise_in_the_uk_final_web_spreads.pdf)

social investment to transform public services, develop the social economy, and to strengthen the UK's social investment market.

'Social Enterprise UK' is the national body and membership organisation for the SE sector in Britain; responsible for raising awareness through media and campaigning, working closely with the government to push SE up the policy agenda, and running a number of programmes throughout the UK to promote and develop the social enterprise market. For example, launched in April 2016, the 'Buy Social Corporate Challenge' is a world-first initiative connecting a group of high profile businesses who have committed to spending £1 billion with social enterprises by the year 2020. A collaborative partnership between 'Social Enterprise UK' and the government, the challenge utilises businesses' purchasing power to help UK social enterprises to grow, access more diverse suppliers and expand their reach.

### **The role of HEIs**

HEIs in the UK are becoming a key source of support for the social enterprise sector; embedding the concept across academic courses, running social business plan competitions, and supporting students to run social enterprises themselves. There is also evidence that UK HEIs are positioning themselves at the core of the social enterprise support ecosystem. For example, since 2009, UnLtd, the Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs, and HEFCE, the Higher Education Funding Council for England, have been working with more than 50 UK HEIs and multiple industry partners to build a national ecosystem of support for HEIs. They encourage universities to act as 'hubs', supporting new and emerging social entrepreneurs and to embed the concept of social enterprise into their communities. Further to this, four UK HEIs to date (University of Salford, Plymouth University, University of St Mark and St John, and Coventry University) have been awarded the Social Enterprise Mark, demonstrating that they operate as a genuine social enterprise and have a commitment to make a difference to society and the communities they serve.

In terms of academic support, many HEIs in the UK are integrating social enterprise into the taught curriculum. For example, in a world first, Glasgow Caledonian University now offer an MSc in Social Business and Microfinance, providing students with the opportunity to critically evaluate the power of business and to implement positive social change in global environments. In addition, HEIs such as Liverpool John Moores University and the University of Reading are embedding social enterprise education across the academic curriculum and not just within traditional disciplines such as Business. For example, at Liverpool John Moores, the School of Humanities and Social Science run a 'Social Enterprise and Entrepreneurship' module; and at Reading, the School of Management provide an interactive and practical undergraduate 'Social Enterprise' module as part of their offering. Further to this, students are encouraged to participate in social enterprise endeavours outside of the academic curriculum. Enactus is an international student-led organisation where teams of students are supported to create social enterprises. Enactus is currently present on more than 50 HEI campuses in the UK. In addition, many HEIs are running the Social Impact Internship Scheme, enabling high-calibre students who are committed to affecting social change, to partner on projects with host organisations in the social enterprise sector.

Other forms of support commonly offered by UK HEIs include the provision of incubation space and mentoring support. For example, the University of Cambridge is a key partner for Social Incubator East, a dedicated incubator for social enterprises operating in a range of fields including health, transport, housing, ageing and education. Incubates receive regular business advice and coaching, access to loan finance and free shared workspace. Similarly, BSEEN (Birmingham Skills for Enterprise and Employability Network) is a collaborative initiative between Aston University, Birmingham City University, University College Birmingham and Newman University, offering incubation, business grants and workshops to students and graduates from these universities who are interested in becoming social entrepreneurs.

## Overview of social enterprise activity

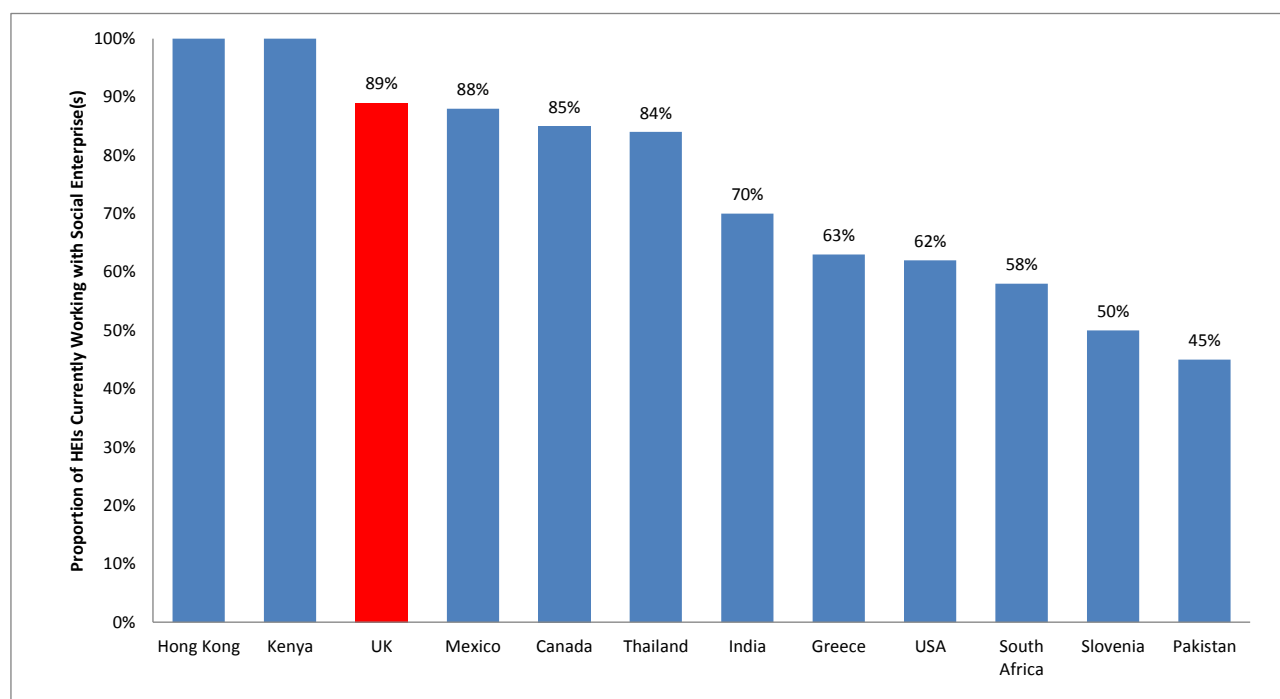
### Introduction

This section firstly summarises the scale and characteristics of HEI and SE partnerships in the UK, followed by a review of priority areas, and discussion on the benefits and approaches to supporting social enterprise. Where appropriate, the analysis draws on findings from the eleven other countries of focus in order to provide a comparator position to the UK (see *'Using this report'*).

### The scale of social enterprise activity

Social enterprise activity amongst UK HEIs was found to be commonplace. As illustrated in Chart 1, of the twenty-eight responding UK HEIs, twenty-five (89%) were found to have active partnerships at the time of the survey - the third highest proportional concentration of HEI/SE activity across all study countries. Notably, of the three remaining HEIs, two (7%) were not currently working with social enterprise(s) but stated an intention do so in the future, and one (4%) had previously engaged with social enterprise. The level of current engagement, or stated future intent to engage with SE, perhaps reflects the aforementioned role played by HEIs in the UK as a key source of support for the SE sector (see *'The landscape for social enterprise'*).

**Chart 1: Proportion of institutions from each country currently working with social enterprises**



Source: Social Enterprise in a Global Context Survey, 2016  
Base: 205

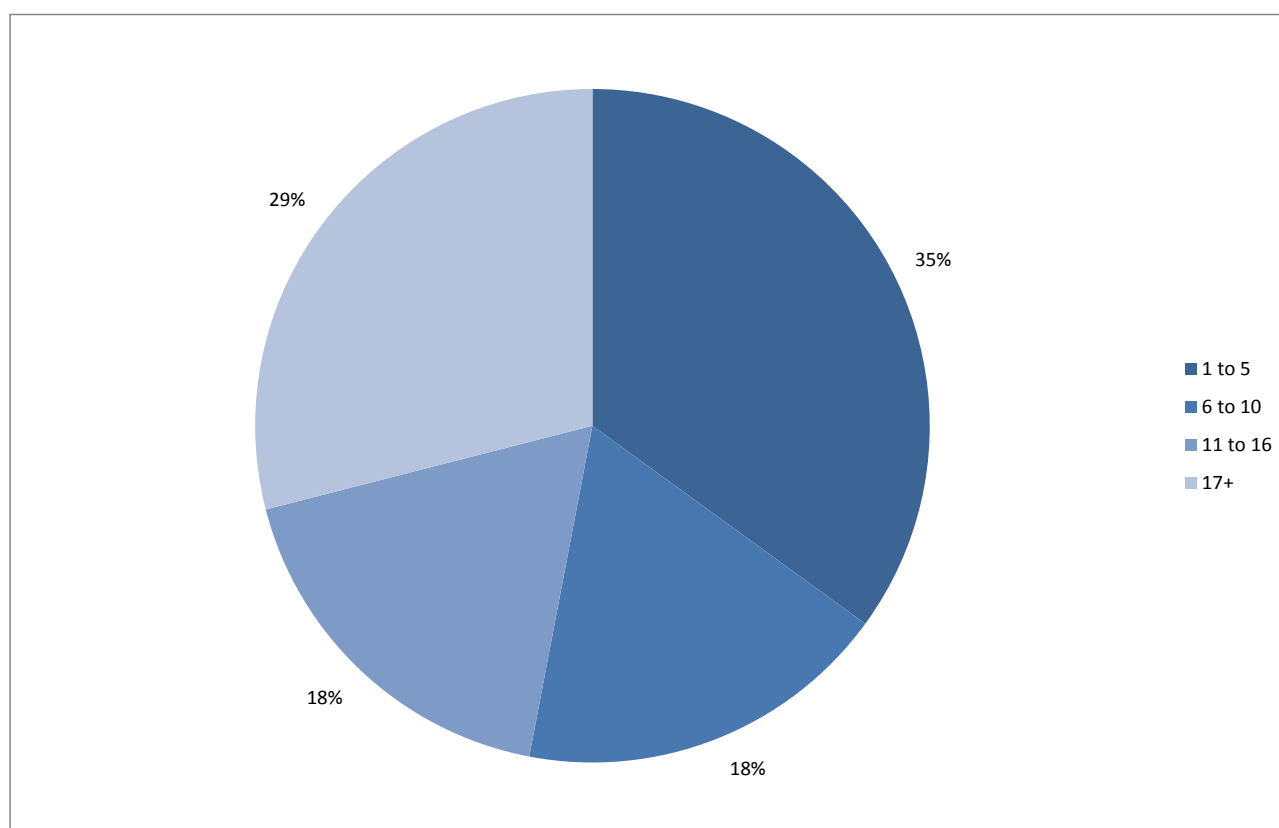
With regard to the number of active partnerships for each of the responding UK HEIs, there was no obvious trend; six (35%) indicated they worked with between one and five social enterprises; three (18%) stated that they had between six and ten partnerships; a further three (18%) reported that they had between eleven and sixteen; and five (29%) proposed the HEI had seventeen or more active partnerships (Chart 2).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Eight respondents were unsure how many partnerships their HEI currently had.



As with the findings from the global research report, and as illustrated in Chart 2, the number of active social enterprise partnerships that HEIs in the UK reported they have was found to be diverse, and do not represent one homogenous group. However taking into account the size of a social enterprise could go some way toward accounting for these differences. For example, in the global research report, one university was found to have between one and five active partnerships; but one of these was with an umbrella organisation which is home to several large scale social enterprises.

**Chart 2: Number of active social enterprise partnerships per UK institution**



Source: Social Enterprise in a Global Context Survey, 2016

Base: 17

### International activity

In terms of the geographical scope of engagement, of the twenty-six UK HEIs with either an active or previous partnership(s) at the time of the survey, all but one (96%) stated that this included a partnership within their own country. Further, almost three in five (58% / 15) stated that their partnerships also involved international activity, for example: working with another HEI in a different country; working with an international partner organisation; project activities taking place in another country; the social enterprise itself operating in another country; or the social enterprise being part of an international network. These typically took the form of international community development projects, research collaborations or student exchange programmes.

*“We collaborated with a university in Uganda to improve entrepreneurial business start-up success rates in the Lango region and to create new sustainable energy sources for crop production”*

*“We run a joint student and staff initiative where upcycled clothing is created in Kenya and profits are reinvested into the community”*

*“Our research culminated in the publication of a case study related to improving mobility in rural Africa. In 2015, the UK Collaborative on Development Sciences (UKCDS) named the case study as one of the top 20 most impressive examples of UK research contributing to development out of almost 7,000 case studies”*

*“We established a student exchange programme with universities in the US for students interested in social enterprise. Students undertook placements with US/UK social enterprises to understand cultural and structural differences”*

Regarding the scale of this international activity, 67% (10) of HEIs that work (or had previously worked) with international SE partnerships stated that this amounted to between one and five projects. This compares with 20% (3) that worked with between six and ten projects, and 7% (1) that worked with seventeen or more.<sup>7</sup>

As a proportion of total work with social enterprise, the largest majority of HEIs who have (or had) worked internationally stated that international partnerships accounted for between one and ten per cent of their social enterprise engagement and activity (33% / 5). A further three HEIs (20%) reported that international activity accounted for between eleven to twenty per cent; two (13%) specified that it accounted for between forty to fifty per cent; whilst the remaining five (33%) were unable to attribute a proportion.<sup>8</sup>

For those HEIs that had previously been, or are currently engaged in an international partnership, key motivations included having social enterprise at the heart of their HEI mission; the opportunity to address identified international needs; and to expand knowledge share opportunities.

*“Working with social enterprise on an international level is part of our mission, and we have a tradition of working internationally. We are also motivated by the enormous potential for learning and research in those collaborations”*

*“We develop international partnerships in response to requests that come from various countries”*

*“We’re motivated to work internationally because of the learning opportunities which come from different approaches in different countries and cultural contexts”*

Notwithstanding the prevalence of international activity in the UK, a number of challenges were faced by institutions in brokering and supporting these partnerships. A total of eleven institutions highlighted areas in which they had experienced barriers to working internationally.

Cultural differences were the most frequently cited barrier to international working (highlighted by six UK HEIs). A total of three HEIs also reported how the availability of funding was a challenge to collaboration on an international scale. Finally, a further two HEIs also cited difficulties in

<sup>7</sup> One HEI did not provide a valid response.

<sup>8</sup> Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

maintaining international collaborations, with one institution asserting how institutional commitment to working internationally is fundamental to sustainability.

*“When working internationally, it’s difficult to create a common understanding at various levels, for example language and terminology, social and economic conditions, and the role of HEIs”*

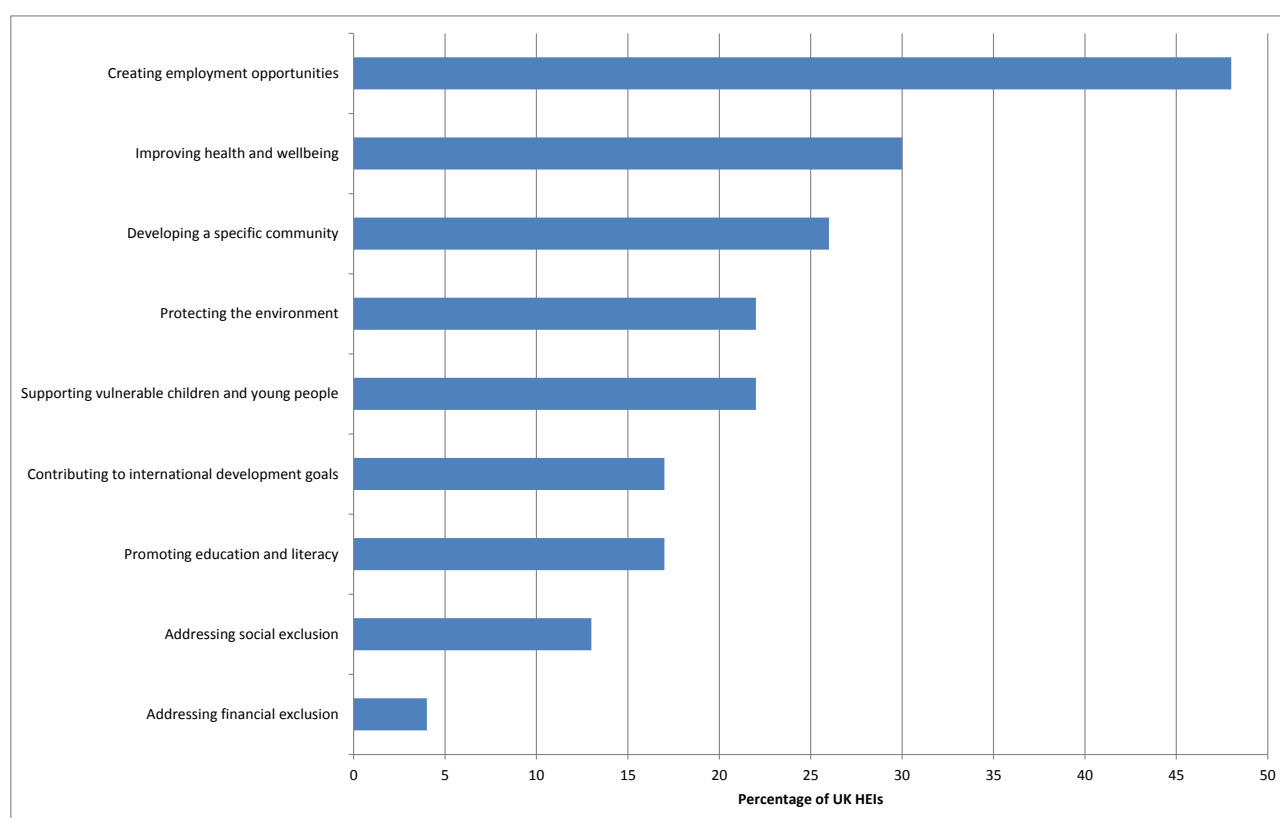
*“Finding the funding for international collaborations is particularly difficult”*

*“The sustainability of international initiatives depends on the strategy of the institutions. Individuals can do a lot, but can’t always make sustainability happen”*

## Priority areas

Somewhat echoing global findings, the most commonly cited social purposes that UK HEIs would be most likely to support<sup>9</sup> were creating employment opportunities (48%/ 11); improving health and wellbeing (30%/ 7); and developing specific communities (26%/ 6). As shown in Chart 3, protecting the environment, and supporting vulnerable children and young people were also deemed to be important social purposes, both cited by 22% (5) of HEIs.

**Chart 3: Types of social enterprise UK HEIs would be most likely to support**



Source: Social Enterprise in a Global Context Survey, 2016

Base: 23

<sup>9</sup> HEIs nominating each variable as their first or second choice they would be most likely to support.

## Motivations for engagement

UK HEIs identified a range of motivating factors that underpinned their engagement with social enterprises and mirrored findings from the global research report. Of the institutions providing a valid response, the majority indicated that they were particularly motivated<sup>10</sup> to engage with social enterprise to improve the student experience and because it was part of their HEI mission or strategy, both of which were cited by 46% (11). This was followed by a motivation to both address local and regional needs (38%/ 9) and include SE as part of the curriculum on some the HEIs' courses (21%/ 5).

*“Engagement with social enterprise provides students with opportunities to test entrepreneurial activities, to learn from them and to provide extra employability skills”*

*“Engaging with social enterprise not only raises our profile but proves that we intend to do what we say in our strategy”*

*“Our work produces societal benefits such as economic and social inclusion, education and empowerment”*

*“Through embedding social enterprise into business school activity and course curriculum, staff and student co-participation increases, which in turn improves the reputation of the institution”*

## Working with and supporting social enterprise

UK HEIs that were found to be currently working with a social enterprise(s) were asked to indicate the ways in which this took place, and to exemplify the associated type of support they provide.

As shown in Table 1, (and in common with the findings from the global report), by far the most commonly cited approach was through a project, partnership, or joint activity – identified by twenty-two (92%) responding UK institutions. This was exemplified by the provision of: expertise (96%/ 23); collaboration or research opportunities (96%/ 23); placement students (83%/ 20); business support services (76%/ 19); access to facilities (74%/ 17); and training (63%/ 15).<sup>11</sup>

The second most commonly cited support approach was through student-led social enterprises – cited by four in five (80%/ 20) UK HEIs. Institutional membership of a social enterprise network was also prevalent amongst UK HEIs, cited as a support approach by 79% (19) of responding institutions.

<sup>10</sup> HEIs nominating each variable as their first or second most motivating factor.

<sup>11</sup> Percentages may vary due to differing base numbers.

**Table 1: Approaches to working with social enterprise**

Approach	Percentage	
	UK	Global
A project, partnership or other joint activity with one or more social enterprise(s)	92%	96%
Student led social enterprises	80%	78%
Institutional membership of a social enterprise network	79%	70%
HEI/ Staff-led social enterprises	74%	67%
Institutional commitment to working with/ supporting social enterprises in mission/ strategy	63%	81%
Incubation space/ facility where new social enterprise(s) can develop	61%	68%

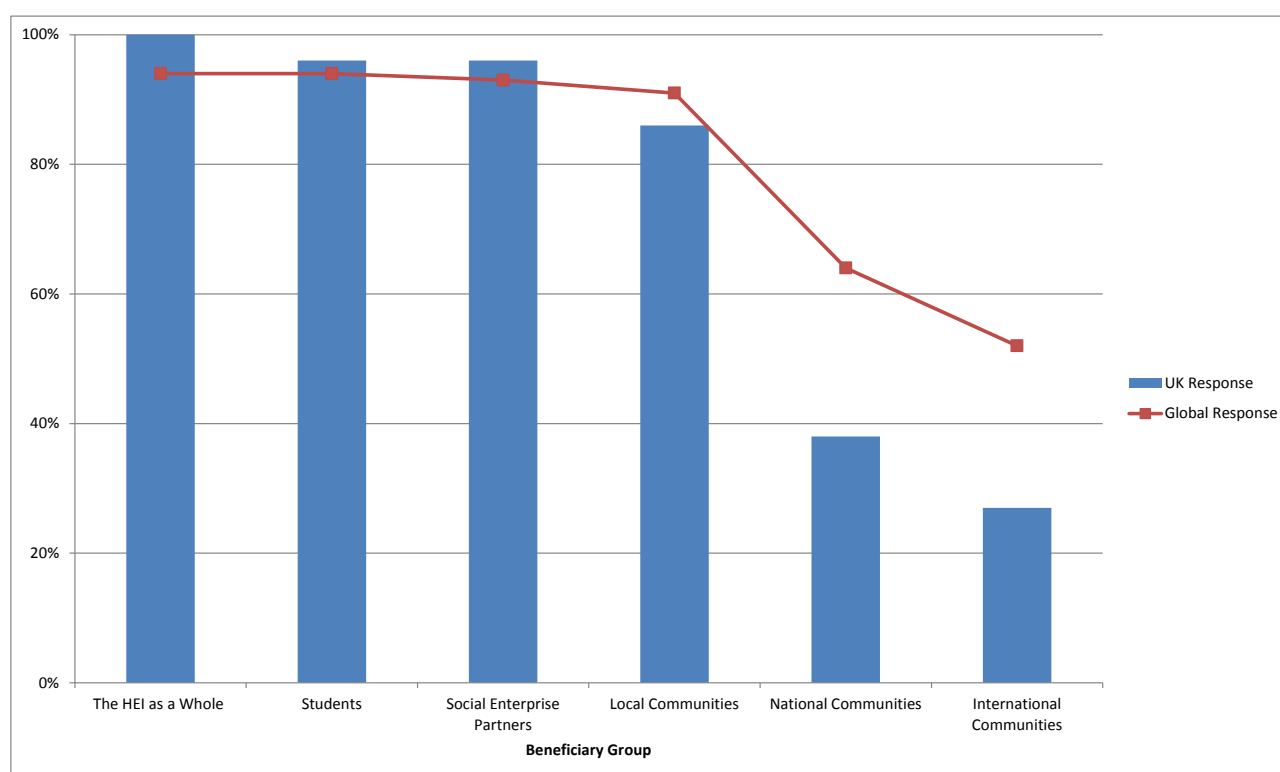
Source: Social Enterprise in a Global Context Survey, 2016

Base: 25 except 'A project, partnership or other joint activity with one or more social enterprise(s)', 'Institutional membership of a social enterprise network', and 'Institutional commitment to working with/ supporting social enterprises in mission/ strategy' where B=24; and 'Incubation space/ facility where new social enterprise(s) can develop' and 'HEI/ Staff-led social enterprises' where B=23.

### Benefits of partnership working

UK HEIs identified that their work with social enterprise(s) had created benefits for a range of groups. This is presented in Chart 4, and benchmarked against findings from the global research report, indicated by the red trend line.

Views on the beneficiaries of partnership working partially echoed the global findings. The HEI as a whole was commonly identified as the primary beneficiary by 100% of those providing a valid response (22) compared to 94% globally. Students and social enterprise partners were also considered key beneficiaries, both in the UK (96%/ 21 each), and globally (94% and 93% respectively). Local communities were also cited as beneficiaries of HEI/SE partnerships by 86% (19) which was comparable to the global response of 91%. However, national and international communities were least likely to be reported as beneficiaries by UK HEIs, each cited by 38% (8) and 27% (6) respectively, in comparison to 64% and 52% globally. The tendency for UK institutions to perceive local communities as more likely to benefit from their HEI/SE partnerships, as opposed to national and international groups, may reflect their roles as a 'community hubs', concerned primarily with addressing local needs.

**Chart 4: UK views regarding the key beneficiaries of HEI/SE partnership**

Source: Social Enterprise in a Global Context Survey, 2016

UK Base: 22 except 'National Communities' where B=21

Global Base: 157, except 'Social Enterprise Partners' where B=156; 'Students' and 'Local Communities' where B=155; and 'National Communities' and 'International Communities' where B=148

### Embedding social enterprise in higher education

Partially echoing findings from the eleven other participating countries, 84% (21) of UK HEIs providing a valid response commonly used social enterprise in the delivery of extracurricular activities such as being a mentor or a judge in a business competition, compared to 86% globally. Notably, a further fourteen institutions (61%) indicated that they offered at least one accredited social enterprise course, which was considerably higher than the global average of 42%. For example, as described in *'The landscape for social enterprise'*, Glasgow Caledonian University now offer an MSc in Social Business and Microfinance, the first university in the world to do so. In addition, a total of six UK HEIs (26%) involved SE in the delivery of curriculum teaching, compared to 67% on a global scale, however, unlike the 30% of HEIs globally, only one institution in the UK (5%) reported that it incorporated SE across all courses.

## Good practice in developing partnerships

### Introduction

As noted previously, the research sought, in part, to facilitate dialogue and knowledge exchange, and to inform further collaboration opportunities (see *'Using this report'*). In support of these objectives, the survey asked HEIs to share examples of good practice stemming from their experience of developing partnerships with social enterprises.

HEIs in the UK provided a range of good practice approaches that could be shared more widely, which were broadly categorised as follows: developing cooperative networks; communication and knowledge exchange; student involvement; and focusing on impact and sustainability. These are discussed in turn, and exemplified by quotes from responding institutions.

### Developing cooperative networks

The creation of expert networks to support the development of social enterprise was repeatedly stressed by HEIs in the UK as an important element of good practice. Networks which incorporate a range of organisations with different skills and expertise were considered vital, especially to early stage social enterprises where advice and practical support were often felt to be the most important ways to support social enterprise.

*"Focus initially on developing a network of expertise and a support infrastructure, rather than focusing on awards funding. Most student enterprises need help, advice and support more than they need money. In fact money can often be paralysing to a social enterprise that is still really only at the ideas stage"*

*"Creating the Social Enterprise City activities and programme through working with key partners (City Council, Social Enterprise Network etc.) enabled a cohesive approach to social enterprise support within the city leading to a commitment to continue this approach into the future"*

*"We work in close partnership with other organisations and have developed a network infrastructure of support within and outside the university community"*

### Communication and knowledge exchange

HEIs in the UK highlighted the importance of clear and honest communication between social enterprise partners. In order for partnerships to last, respect and understanding in dealing with each other were stressed as key. HEIs underlined the value in taking time to understand the social enterprise and the context within which it operates, as well as developing a collaborative mind-set to ensure success. Furthermore, a number of HEIs in the UK underlined the importance of reciprocity in building lasting relationships, highlighting that benefits need to be felt on both sides of the partnership and that HEIs need to look for unique opportunities to support the sector.

*"Make sure involvement with a social enterprise is more than tokenistic. Go for longevity and seek honest interaction and feedback to make the relationship as mutually useful as possible"*

*"Don't spend forever deliberating on defining what a social enterprise is. Let the social enterprises tell you what they need rather than you tell them what they need. Do things for people not to people"*



*“It’s not about going there as saviours. It’s about treating all as equals and promoting a culture of mutual respect and learning. The social enterprise abroad may lack resources, but they will probably more than make up for this with resilience and practical wisdom. If doing research, consider together how both parties may gain from the experience”*

*“It’s about reciprocity, give and take. As part of a study of social enterprise at our HEI, many were interviewed. We reciprocated by having a social enterprise fair at an international conference to which participating social enterprises were invited to have a stall free of charge. This was appreciated. Poor practice would be expecting others to give their knowledge and experience away for nothing”*

## **Student involvement**

As was shown globally, involving students in HEI/SE partnerships is an important goal for HEIs and this was no different in the UK. Evidence from the survey showed that student involvement in social enterprise partnerships is embedded in the approach adopted by HEIs in the UK. As highlighted in the ‘*Overview of social enterprise activity*’, 83% of HEIs with an active partnership supported social enterprise through the provision of placement students, and 80% indicated that they facilitated student-led social enterprises. HEIs discussed a variety of different opportunities for students to get involved with social enterprise in the survey, including supporting student internships, and student funding for working with SE. As was demonstrated in the global survey, involving students in partnerships is associated with mutual benefits for students, the HEI and social enterprises.

*“Start local, but also build on the international links of your students. Do not be tied to Business schools as the students who are more interested in social enterprise may be in health or arts etc.”*

*“Our Enterprising Internships Programme funded by Santander offers social enterprises the opportunity to recruit a student for 4 weeks over the summer, to solve a particular challenge/problem or to identify opportunities. The programme is a success because we work with the companies as partners. They are involved in our 1 day enterprise training for students prior to their start date. A member of staff also meets the intern and the employer during the four weeks to help both parties reflect on the experience”*

*“Our Student Development Awards are able to make a positive difference. Students can apply for up to £250 to support them to work with social enterprise or local charities. Students gain an understanding of how to apply for and manage funding, and gain experience of outreach work. The organisations can access talented and committed students to bring fresh ideas, enthusiasm and practical support”*

## **Focus on sustainability**

HEIs in the UK also underlined the need to establish and implement clear action plans; outlining individual roles and expectations for all those involved in the partnership, whether they are staff or students from the HEI, or those working at the social enterprise. Without such clearly defined roles, institutions warned there is a risk that partnerships will fail. Notably, UK HEIs also focused on the benefits of developing a bespoke marketing and branding campaign under which all social enterprise activity can sit. Institutions perceived that the development of a ‘brand’ for partnership activity reflects positively on the HEI, helping to raise its profile and support the growth of social enterprises in the local area.



*“You must have a champion at a senior level who is enthusiastic. They need to see the benefits of this work in terms of its impact and have it as a strategic priority of the HEI, or it will run the risk of being side-lined”*

*“Understand what you can offer and ensure that the social enterprise has a realistic grasp of this. Expectations can be too high or too low from the perspective of both the social enterprise and the staff/students involved”*

*“Establishing the parameters of student and staff involvement with social enterprises on a voluntary basis is important. Quite a lot of these issues are common to placement learning but have not been fully extended into the charity and social enterprise field”*

*“We've created a development programme in the city, Social Startup, which has led to a number of social enterprises being set up and the creation of a toolkit of parts. The creation of a distinct brand for this programme has helped to raise the profile of the university amongst local leaders who have been talking about our dynamic programme. It has reflected well on the institution and on our students”*

## Summary

The UK is widely considered to be a leading global figure in the development and promotion of the SE sector. Although social enterprise is not a new concept in the UK, the 2008 economic crisis and subsequent budget cuts to various public services has led to a peak in interest regarding how social enterprise can be used to support the country's economic recovery. Along with government endorsement and engagement from various SE sector bodies, the higher education sector is now also becoming a key source of support for social enterprise, providing various opportunities for sector promotion and engagement. For example the survey found that 89% HEIs reported having an active partnership with a social enterprise; benchmarked against a 75% level of engagement from across all twelve study countries.

Furthermore, given that the UK has an active and thriving social enterprise sector, and the scale of opportunity this creates for HEI / SE partnerships, it is unsurprising that 96% of HEIs with either active or previous partnerships stated they worked with social enterprises within their own country. A further 58% also indicated that their work with social enterprises included some element of international activity, which was higher than the global trend of 52%. Underpinning this engagement was a motivation to have social enterprise at the heart of their HEI mission; address identified international needs; and include social enterprise as part of the curriculum on some of the HEIs' courses.

In line with the desire to address local and regional needs, the most commonly cited social purposes that UK HEIs would be most likely to support were those which create employment opportunities, improve health and wellbeing, and develop specific communities. With specific regard to the latter, this can be exemplified by UnLtd's and HEFCE's national partnership as described in '*The landscape for social enterprise*', where HEIs are encouraged to become 'community hubs' for social enterprises in their region.

The research indicated a breadth of different ways in which UK HEIs approach their work with social enterprise(s). By far the most commonly cited was through a project, partnership, or joint activity, such as the provision of expertise, collaboration, or research opportunities, reported by 92% of responding institutions. This was followed by support for student-led social enterprises, which was cited by 80% of responding HEIs; and institutional membership of a social enterprise network, which was reported by 79% of responding institutions. All of these approaches were in line with the global findings. Indeed, membership of a social enterprise network was found to be more commonplace in the UK than on a global scale, which is perhaps due in part to the establishment of 'Social Enterprise UK', promoting and developing the social enterprise market. However, responding UK HEIs were less likely to provide incubation space or have an institutional commitment to working with social enterprise within their mission or strategy, than the global average. In addition, the HEI as a whole was identified by UK HEIs to be the primary beneficiary of partnership working, as cited by 100% of responding institutions. This was followed by students and the social enterprise partners, each cited by 96% of responding HEIs.

Looking forward, although the prevalence and variety of UK HEI/SE partnerships highlights the UK as a good exemplar of how to develop a cohesive eco-system of support for social enterprise, the survey has also illustrated that there is scope for further engagement. For example, whilst many UK HEIs reported involving social enterprises in the delivery of extracurricular activities, and offered accredited SE courses, only six HEIs (26%) reported engaging social enterprises in the provision of curriculum teaching, compared to 67% globally. Moreover, unlike the 30% of HEIs globally, only one responding UK institution (5%) reported that it incorporated SE across all courses. So whilst HEIs in the UK are providing a range of support to the SE sector, there exists further opportunities to build on this foundation, perhaps through involving social enterprises in the academic curriculum.

## Case studies of practice

### Case study: University of York

#### **Institution overview:**

Established in 1963, the University of York is a research-intensive public university located in York, England. A member of the elite Russell Group of universities, the University of York aims to be a world leader in research, to offer outstanding teaching and learning experience for students and to be sufficiently large to be an excellent, resilient and financially sustainable institution. There are between 15,000 and 20,000 students currently enrolled.

#### **Approach to social enterprise:**

Through the provision of both curricular and extracurricular forms of support, the University of York takes a widespread approach in supporting social enterprise. Students are encouraged to consider social entrepreneurship as a career path and the university promotes the sector by encouraging charity organisations to adopt an enterprising business plan through training and consultancy support.

#### **Students and social enterprise:**

The University of York hosts the social enterprise 'York Community Consulting', a student-led consultancy service providing other social enterprises with a range of support. They have conducted market research for a disabled workers' co-operative, coordinated the distribution of an ethical drinks enterprise and helped a youth activity centre to obtain higher paying corporate clients to cross subsidise their youth work.

The university also operates Enterprise Internships and a Community Fund for students aspiring to be social entrepreneurs. Recipients of the Community Fund are encouraged to consult with community-based partners, evidencing a need for their idea in the local area, and are given financial awards to help them develop and launch their own social enterprise. For example Minds in Motion (MIM) is a community group supporting people with dementia and their carers. Set up and run by students, and with support from the Community Fund, the venture now runs several workshops, events and social activities throughout the year.

Another venture founded by a member of staff at the university and supported by the Community Fund is Artistic Autistic, a social enterprise run by student volunteers on an annual basis. They sell products displaying artwork created by a local artist living with Asperger's Syndrome; their aims being to raise awareness of Autism and reward the talents of a local artist.

Enterprise Internships are also available for students at the University of York and recipients are given a living allowance, workspace and access to professional business support services to help them explore the potential of their social entrepreneurial ideas. The social enterprise 'Ambitio' was created by a 2015 Enterprise Intern; a motivational tracker allowing users to track their own personal goals, share their progress and compete with friends. Currently in development phase, the internship allowed the founders to establish a legal entity, register trademarks and develop a working app that continues to be built upon.

#### **Community engagement:**

The University partners with York Cares, the city's employee volunteering charity. Twice a year the charity holds a 'Charity to Business Review', matching senior members of staff with start-up social enterprises and charities seeking to be more business-like. Organisations are supported on a range of areas including marketing, finance, HR and legal issues.

Contact Information: [www.york.ac.uk](http://www.york.ac.uk)

**Case study: Plymouth University****Institution overview:**

Established in 1992, Plymouth is a public university and has more than 30,000 students currently enrolled. With subject specialisms in Marine, Health, and Business and Entrepreneurship, the university's mission is to advance knowledge and transform lives through education and research.

**Approach to social enterprise:**

Plymouth was the first university in the world to be awarded the Social Enterprise Mark in recognition of working as a genuine social enterprise, caring for communities and protecting the planet. As well as being a social enterprise in its own right, Plymouth University acts as a driving force, using world-class research and entrepreneurial expertise to boost social enterprise in the community, helping to drive sustainable growth by creating jobs, wealth and social cohesion.

**Multi-sector collaboration:**

As part of a local network 'Social Enterprise City', they are engaged in several regional initiatives to support social enterprises through advice and support. In collaboration with partners such as the City Council and the Social Enterprise Network, they help organise and deliver a programme of activities and events comprising conferences, webinars, seminars and a bespoke training programme of support for high growth social enterprises.

Plymouth are also one of the lead partners of SEEDBED, a £1 million social accelerator programme that runs across the South West Region, supporting selected social enterprises to access financial investment to promote growth within their enterprises. The university provides project management and quality control of the programme, coaching and mentoring and specialised workshop input for the enterprises.

In addition, the university also runs the Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise (PDSE), which brings dental treatment, education and care into the local community through the provision of four Dental Education Facilities across the South West. Under the supervision of qualified dental care professionals, dental students treat NHS patients as part of their training. To date, more than 16,000 NHS patients have received care at the centres and the enterprise was a winner at the Guardian University Awards, in the Social and Community Impact category.

**International engagement:**

Plymouth University is one of six European partners in an ERASMUS+ programme, providing insight into social enterprise in each partner country and creating social enterprise training toolkits for teachers in vocational training in various European settings. The Increasing Students' Employability Skills and Economic Growth through Social Enterprise (ESSE) project brings together expertise from various transnational partners and aims to share best practice of social entrepreneurship taking place at organisational, sector, city and/or regional level within each of the transnational partner countries.

The Farm Shop Trust is a Kenyan social enterprise providing smallholder farmers with an agribusiness platform in Africa. Plymouth University and Duchy College are partners of the enterprise through a project funded by Comic Relief, helping to develop a sustainable farming network in Kenya. Using their collective expertise in social enterprise and business growth, the project team are helping to train local farmers and expand the number of franchisees developed by the Trust, creating jobs and opportunities for young, unemployed and disadvantaged people in the region.

**Contact Information:** [www.plymouth.ac.uk](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk)

## Case study: Warwick University

### Institution overview:

Founded in 1965, the University of Warwick is a public research university located in Coventry, England. Originally created as part of a government initiative to expand access to higher education, the university now has between 25,000 and 30,000 students currently enrolled. The university's mission is to be world-class, using a dynamic, enterprising approach to solving global challenges, enabling students to create their place in the world.

### Approach to social enterprise:

The University of Warwick engage with social enterprise primarily to improve their student experience and to develop research opportunities. They encourage the development of new start-up ventures led by students and staff and are committed to working alongside the wider community to strengthen the social enterprise sector and advance solutions to societal issues.

### Fostering students' social entrepreneurial spirit:

Enactus (formerly known as Students in Free Enterprise) is an international organisation encouraging students to create their own social enterprise endeavours. Warwick University's Enactus society is particularly active, with students catalysing various local, national and international projects each year. This includes the Refugee Gateway Initiative, an employability programme aimed at empowering refugees and asylum seekers through workshops and mentorship.

Students also run Enactus Warwick Consulting (EWC) and the Intelligence Unit; both aimed at creating strong links between the university, the social enterprise sector and the wider business community. They achieve this by providing pro-bono business advisory projects, student-oriented market research services and a tailored community-led approach. The executive team finds struggling third sector organisations that require help, recruits student consultants on campus and the best recruited students work in teams to consult clients. The teams conduct various tailor-made analyses depending on the needs of the client, ranging from strategy, marketing and operational efficiencies, and present their findings to the organisations' management teams.

In addition to Enactus student-led projects, the University of Warwick runs an enterprise incubator and business support service for students starting up their own social enterprise, providing ventures with access to expert mentors, funding opportunities and networking events. Similarly, the social impact internship scheme enables high-calibre students committed to affecting social change to partner with host organisations in the social enterprise sector. Warwick University are one of six HEI partners in this national scheme and successful students are placed with organisations that match their interests, learning about running a social enterprise and undertaking projects.

### Advice for good practice:

Warwick University advise other institutions to focus initially on developing a network of expertise and a support infrastructure rather than focusing on awards funding. They note how most student and start-up enterprises need help, advice and support more than they need money, and that money can often be paralysing to a social enterprise that is still at the ideas stage.

In addition to this, Warwick identify that funding is needed to help sustain infrastructure and build capacity for a local/regional network with universities being valued as a central pillar. They also emphasise the importance of educating entrepreneurial students and staff about social enterprise; noting how they need to be sustainable beyond grant funding and if they can't make a 'profit' then they can't make a long-term social impact.

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