



# Student social enterprise engagement

Capturing contribution, benefits and  
measuring social value



**Written by: Gabriela Matouskova, CU Social Enterprise CIC**

**Research contribution by: Dr Arun Sukumar, Dr Richard Tomlins, Coventry University and Harriet Elvidge, CU Social Enterprise CIC**

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## OVERVIEW

The last decade saw an expansion of student-social enterprise engagement activities in UK Higher Education. 89% of universities engage with social enterprises but the benefits are not yet fully understood. The range of outcomes and impacts often remains hidden within metrics that fail to capture the rich diversity of activities and the value they add to the student experience.

## OBJECTIVE

This report highlights four case studies and findings from going beyond the purely financial measures to provide examples of the social value arising from student-social enterprise engagement activities.

The project was delivered by CU Social Enterprise CIC (CUSE), an independent social enterprise and wholly owned community facing subsidiary, founded in 2014 as a spin-out from Coventry University, in collaboration with the International Centre for Transformational Entrepreneurship (ICTE) at Coventry University, formed to support sustainable socio-economic transformation through systemic approaches to entrepreneurship in communities and formulation of policy and impact that can assist transformational entrepreneurship.

## INTRODUCTION

Since 2009, there has been an expansion of social enterprise, social innovation and social entrepreneurship in Higher Education (HE) in the UK. This engagement takes many forms, including: creating opportunities for students to develop their own social enterprises; providing placements for students in social enterprises; offering specialist courses in social entrepreneurship; providing incubation spaces, dedicated support services, or research expertise to social enterprises (British Council 2018).

Recent review of HEFCE-funded Social Entrepreneurs in Education Change programme (HEFCE/Flourish Together CIC 2018) laid out a number of recommendations that were subsequently in part adopted in The Office for Students (OfS) Business Plan (2018). Together with the upcoming Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) they give emphasis on capturing and measuring the impact, including **social value** and **return on investment of student related engagement** with the **workplace, local communities** and **student and social enterprise**.

However, there is a dearth of existing evidence focusing specifically on social enterprise and in the UK the research on enterprise education interventions reports purely economic and immediate impacts with short term focus (Rae et al, 2014). The full range of benefits and outcomes of social enterprise engagements often goes un-reported or remains hidden within utilitarian metrics that fail to capture the rich diversity of student-social enterprise activities in our universities and the value they add to the student experience more generally (HEPI 2018).



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## METHODOLOGY

The study looked at student engagement with social enterprise, using the experiences of four student/graduate social entrepreneurs. It examined, their motivations to start social enterprises, how opportunities were recognized, how institutional and social factors were addressed in evaluating the opportunities and how these were overcome. Finally, the work also examined, how the entrepreneurs sustained value creation in a changing social sector markets.

Case study methodology was used to explore the topic.

A total of 4 case studies were selected which met all of the following selection criteria,

- completed enterprise education intervention and/or
- took part in SE internships or SE work placement and
- founded SE start-up



Participants were selected from CUSE database who met the above criteria. The four case studies represented a varied sample including,

- gender split (2 male, 2 female)
- SE lifecycle (e.g. recent start-up, established)
- SE work placement sector (e.g. health, education etc)

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Interview questions were designed by ICTE to capture detailed life stories of the graduates, the choice to start a social enterprise, the journey from pre-start up to start up and the support they received. Questions also focused on the current operations of the social enterprise and in their own viewpoint the impact their engagements are making in society.

The data was thematically analyzed to understand the value creation in the context of social enterprise engagements and support received through CUSE. Further data was also collected on the information pertaining to the selected case studies, for example, data relating to SE start-up, SE internship information, founding dates, number of employees, financial statements, social impact, awards received etc. This was gathered to draw out a detailed picture of the four start-ups and the support they received. The data collected was analyzed thematically to draw inferences and provide recommendations.

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# CASE STUDY 1: YOUTH WORK

## BA Youth Work

**Tackling social exclusion by supporting vulnerable young people aged 11-24 who are disengaged from Education, Employment or Training .**

'Youth Work' was established to address problems faced by young people in North Warwickshire, Nuneaton, and Coventry.


The motivation to start the enterprise came from the founder actually experiencing the social unrest during his childhood. After dropping out of school he was supported by a youth worker who helped him to get back on track and eventually got an offer of a place at university.

When he finished his degree he was unsuccessful in number of job interviews.

After completing an extra-curricular graduate enterprise start-up programme he saw an opportunity in addressing issues the younger population was facing in the region and decided to address them.

The organisation employed 10 staff and generated turnover of £100k. Since becoming established it worked with over 40 young people and won number of awards.

After 2 years the business was closed, citing expanding mission drift and limited focus on financial position of the organisation.



**The entrepreneur remains committed to this area of work, using lessons learned as positive motivation to continue delivering value in the community.**

## CASE STUDY 2: CREATIVE OUTREACH

### BEng Aerospace Engineering

**Creative platform for youth development and growth, connecting young people with organizations and stakeholders who have interest in our youth community.**

*The business keeps me going and makes it all worth it. I am more confident and believe in my ideas. It has changed my life.*

The founder of 'Creative Outreach' originally wanted to become a pilot and enrolled on an engineering degree. Whilst at university he ran a string of successful entertainment events offering students and young people from varied backgrounds a platform to express themselves.

Influenced by the entrepreneurial flair of his mother and after completing a start-up programme and working with a mentor, he started a business now employing 12 staff and 30 volunteers, running specialist events engaging 150+ clients per month.

The business has become a staple household name in creative youth community development in London and more recently in Africa. Addressing social issues such as knife crime and raising the interest of young people in charity and alternative ways of doing business.



## CASE STUDY 3: MINDFUL GIFTS

### MSC Mindfulness and Compassion

**Promoting wellbeing by teaching mindfulness workshops, delivering chakra balancing therapy and selling self-care focused homemade body butters.**

'Mindful gifts' is a boutique of positive wellbeing and mindfulness products and services.

During her studies, the founder undertook an internship in a social enterprise supporting mental health and wellbeing of people with long term conditions. During this time she has learnt about collaborations, business skills and social impact.

After completing the extra-curricular start-up programme at CUSE, she combined her two ideas of making handmade body butters and her degree specialism in mindfulness and registered as self-employed with a social mission to encourage people to prioritise self-care.

In the first year, she has been running the business part time, working in hospitals, offering workshops at universities and hosting stall at pop-up markets.

Now in her second year, she has put the business on hold to concentrate on finishing her final year of studies.

She is still deciding what to do after university. She will most likely be looking for employment but also plans to continue and grow the business. Eventually she would like to diversify to support more people and bring out new range of products.

When the business reaches the level of sustaining her salary, she wishes to work on it full time.

“

*My enterprise has allowed me to bring other ideas that I've got into fruition or to at least know that I can manifest it one day.*

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## CASE STUDY 4: LANGUAGE CONNECTIONS

### LLB Law and French

**Translation, interpreting and migrant community outreach company with plans to branch out nationwide.**

'Language translations', was founded to offer commercial translation services, as well as language teaching and community integration for disadvantaged people.

The opportunity was identified when the founder personally experienced inequalities in pay and work conditions for qualified translators alongside difficulties in finding affordable translation services when asylum seekers and non-native English speakers were using public services including NHS, government agencies and judicial bodies.

She returned to university and alongside her studies completed a range of enterprise support programmes.

After securing seed funding she started her business and began to train local linguists (students, migrants etc.),

offering fair pay, qualification gain and good working conditions.

The founder continues to work with the university, offering employment opportunities for students. As a graduate she draws on follow-on support offered by mentors at CUSE to continue growing her business.

For value creation, she has secured a grant to train 10 migrants to become translators and interpreters and to investigate the feasibility of working with the NHS and becoming their preferred supplier of language services.

The founder was named in the WISE100 celebrating leading Women in Social Enterprise.



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## FINDINGS

After reviewing the interviews, business documents and other information available on the ventures, three themes emerged from the analysis:

**Theme 1: Identification of opportunities; how did the entrepreneurs identify the opportunities, what was the motivation and factors that led to the starting of the enterprises?**

The personal circumstances and the social environment played a major role in shaping their entrepreneurial behavior. Their experiences and frustrations of the current state of affairs led them to address these issues through innovation.



**Theme 2: Negotiation of barriers; what sort of barriers did the entrepreneurs face in the distilling and supporting the opportunities, interventions and support received to pursue the opportunities. Testing the social innovation.**

The entrepreneurs who were studying at university at the time of venture creation were able to utilize the university's social enterprise incubation center to explore their business ventures. Each of the entrepreneurs went through systematic programs that not only gave them theoretical knowledge of setting up businesses but also practical internship experience that allowed them to develop their skills and reflect on solutions to social issues they were trying to address.

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## FINDINGS

**Theme 3: Continuing value creation; how do entrepreneurs sustain value creation in the changing social market sector; since the formation of the business, how the entrepreneurs are managing the need to create value (social/economic) and further investments in innovation.**

All four entrepreneurs showed strong interest in continuing their work and look at further innovations. Each of the case study businesses had an embedded commitment to uplift marginalized members of the society through employment opportunities. Further exploring their commitment, two of the respondents highlighted that it is extremely important for them to trade in an environmentally stable way that included looking at the entire supply chains and the sourcing of ethically and fair-traded suppliers and raw materials.

All the respondents noted that by being in a social enterprise, their work-life balance is better and able to devote themselves to causes they believe in. There are financial pressures but they are able to derive satisfaction from the work they are doing and the personal experiences play a major role in continuing commitment and future direction of the business.



The study has shown that personal circumstances and situations faced by the entrepreneurs played a major role in identifying opportunities that they could exploit and create sustainable social and economic value. Realizing their entrepreneurial dreams meant that these entrepreneurs faced hurdles and barriers in their journey but there were support systems like CUSE and university tutors who actually helped them to shape the dreams better and follow an entrepreneurial journey. The businesses are constantly innovating to sustain their journey and have a strong commitment to continue value creation.

Measuring the impact they have created, it can be seen that the social enterprises were engaging with some of the most fundamental social challenges facing the UK such as youth social inclusion given the decline in public service provision and issues such as knife crime; wider social inclusion and community cohesion and cross cutting well-being services.

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## CONCLUSIONS

When it comes to student engagement in social enterprises, student entrepreneurs face different set of challenges/barriers when compared to more established entrepreneurs.

The innovation on which the social enterprises are built is developed based on personal experiences and the sustained commitment to produce social value is dependent on the individuals and the increased use of technologies like social media, internet, and online networks.

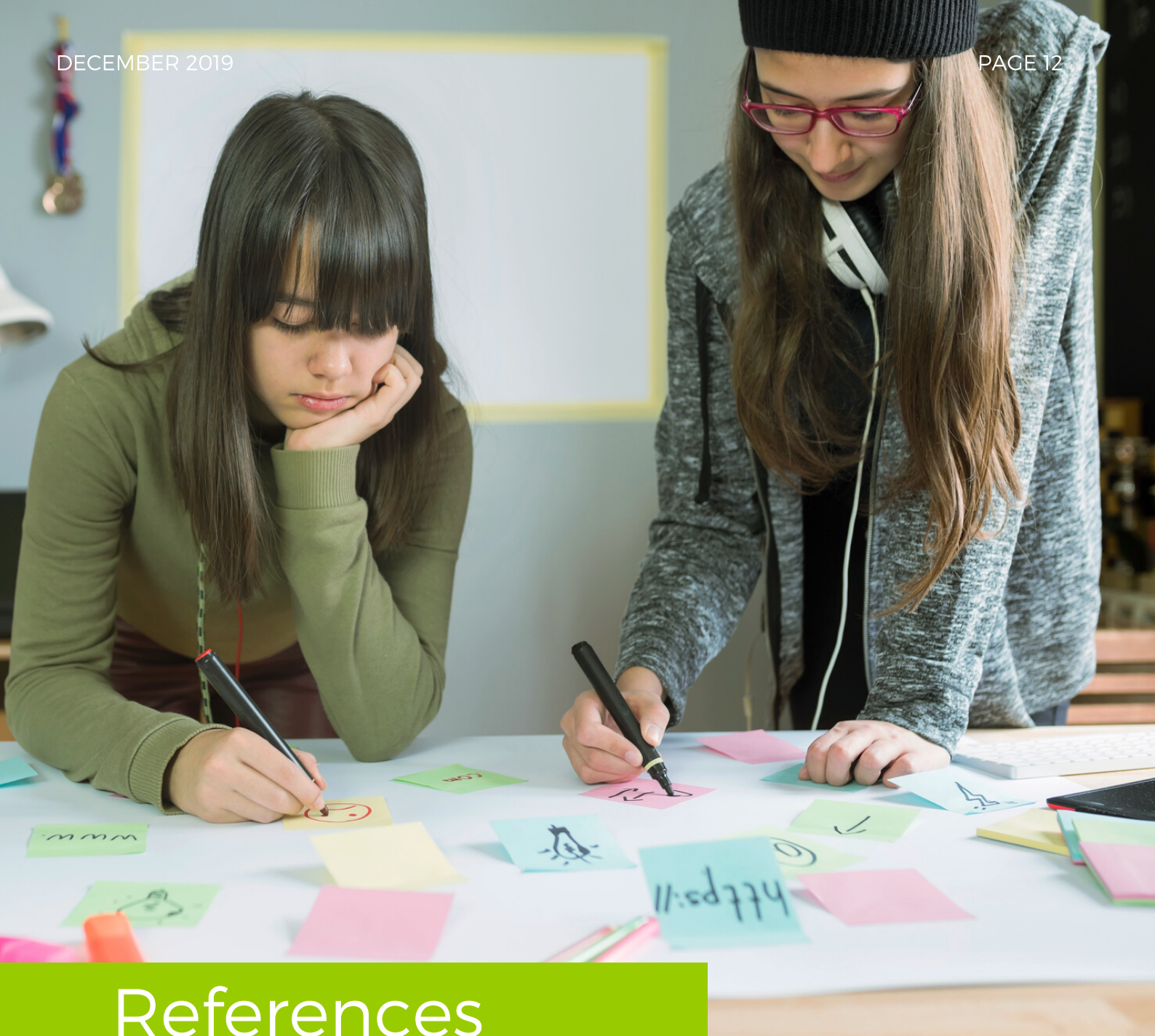
The Office for Students outcome evaluation framework is due to be published in 2020 and the details of the Knowledge Exchange Framework are yet to be finalised. As such there is some way yet to define how to measure and present the benefits and social value arising from these engagements in the Higher Education sector.

The project has shown that social enterprise engagement meets the students' strong desire to address social issues and develop solutions that can create value, providing an alternative to the dominant "profits only" model.



*Capturing the journey and longitudinal impacts of student-social enterprise engagement activities will be retained as a practice at CU Social Enterprise CIC.*





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