

FERTILE GROUND

Creating the conditions for social innovation
to flourish in Northern Ireland



ABOUT THE YOUNG FOUNDATION

The Young Foundation works to create a more equal and just society. Inspired by Michael Young and his life-changing work pioneering new innovative projects and ideas, we work with communities across the UK and beyond to harness the power of social innovation to tackle inequality. We undertake research on the theory and practice of innovation, set up new initiatives and ventures, and support communities, social entrepreneurs and ventures to scale up and deepen their impact.

You can read more about our work at www.youngfoundation.org.

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It is based on interviews with people from the Northern Ireland Executive, councils, voluntary and community sector, funders and investors, enterprise hubs and business leaders, as well as with local people and communities across Northern Ireland. We are grateful to everyone who has given up their time to share their thoughts and engage with our work.

Our findings build on recent research into social innovation in Northern Ireland including the 2014 Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment report on 'Harnessing the power of social innovation to drive the Northern Ireland economy'¹ and the 2013 'Growing Social Innovation in Northern Ireland' and 2014 'Digital Social Innovation in Northern Ireland' reports that we produced with the Building Change Trust².

In producing this report the Young Foundation has collaborated with the Mondragon Corporation, the world's largest industrial network of cooperatives.

You can read more about their work at www.mondragon-corporation.com.



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CONTENTS

GLOSSARY	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	9
INTRODUCTION	11
METHODOLOGY	12
PART 1	
SEIZING THE POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE	13
PART 2	
BUILDING A FLOURISHING SOCIAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM	19
Promoting an innovative culture	23
Increasing demand for new solutions	27
Supporting the supply of new innovations.	32
Facilitating the sharing of knowledge	37
PART 3	
FOCUSING ON NICHES SHOWING PROMISE	39
Improving outcomes for young people	41
Tackling poverty and debt.	46
Reducing inequalities in health and wellbeing.	51
Creating inclusive employment	56

GLOSSARY

We refer to a number of terms throughout this report that deserve clarification and explanation at the outset, both to define what they mean and to clarify the differences between them.

Social Innovation

At the Young Foundation we define social innovations as new solutions (products, services, practices, processes, rules, organisational forms etc.) that simultaneously meet a social need and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and better use of assets and resources. In other words, social innovations are both good for society and enhance society’s capacity to act. Social innovation is not new. It has been happening throughout human history. But by thinking about how it happens, we can increase our chances of developing the new solutions society needs.

Social Innovation Ecosystem

We define a social innovation ecosystem as the full range of factors that influence the ability of social innovations to flourish in any given place. This includes local culture, demand, support, knowledge sharing and the wider social and economic environment. Every town, city, region and country has its own unique ecosystem. We explain this concept and why it is useful in **Part 2** of this report.

Social Innovation Finance

We use the term Social Innovation Finance to describe the range of mechanisms that can be used to supply the money needed to implement or scale new initiatives with social aims. This can include **philanthropy** (individuals or private organisations giving money for innovation), **grants** (funding given by public or independent bodies for specified activities, usually following an application process), **contracts for services** (the provision by a supplier of an agreed service, at an agreed standard, for an agreed price) and **social investment** (investment by a social investor in a social venture to enable the venture to grow with an expectation of both social and financial returns to the investor).

Scaling Social Innovations

We define scaling (or growing) a social innovation as any process that increases the impact it has on society. When social innovations scale more people benefit from them and/or the benefit they provide to each person increases. There are many ways to scale a social innovation including growing an organisation to implement it, increasing the number of organisations who implement it, promoting a model that individuals can implement in their own lives or work and advocating for an innovation to be adopted as a legal or regulatory requirement.

Social Enterprise

Social Enterprise UK define social enterprises as organisations that trade 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.³ Not all social enterprises claim to be innovative (some use tried and trusted models), though many are.

Social Entrepreneur

Ashoka (one of the largest networks of social entrepreneurs worldwide) define social entrepreneurs as people with new solutions to society’s problems. Rather than leaving societal needs to existing institutions, social entrepreneurs find what is not working and solve the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution, and persuading entire societies to move in different directions.⁴ They can be found in all sectors, working both inside organisations and independently. Where social innovations are the new solutions, social entrepreneurs are the people who develop and/or grow them.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Northern Ireland is in the midst of a period of intense social and economic change. We face both profound challenges and a complex web of new opportunities. This is a moment that requires creative solutions to address the greatest issues of our time. This report sets out a path to create the conditions in which innovative responses to social needs in Northern Ireland can blossom and flourish.

SEIZING THE POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE

For many in Northern Ireland the pressures of recent years have felt like a perfect storm. The global recession, austerity and the recent EU referendum have led to a climate of pervasive financial uncertainty. These economic headwinds have combined with deep social challenges. Population ageing, entrenched social inequalities and changing aspirations are all generating intense demands for change. To navigate through this storm Northern Ireland urgently needs new creative solutions that build on the region's many strengths.

Our research suggests that this new wave of social innovation has already started but that its success is far from guaranteed. Through our work interviewing people across all sectors and all parts of the community we have seen a groundswell of people working to develop new solutions to the region's problems. We have also found a small but growing number of people – in communities, across sectors and in politics – who are dedicating their time to creating the conditions needed for these new ideas to thrive.

If nurtured this emerging movement for social innovation could significantly transform the region. Northern Ireland's small size means a rapid revolution in the social economy is possible. This is a transformation that other comparable regions have achieved, including for example the Basque Country and San Diego.

Yet whilst there is real momentum, the success of this emerging movement is far from certain. Significant barriers to social innovation still persist across Northern Ireland. If we are to realise the potential of this current wave of creativity, people and organisations across the region need to work together to build a more supportive

environment and culture, and to ensure innovations have the practical and financial support they need to flourish.

BUILDING A FLOURISHING SOCIAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

This report sets out the barriers and opportunities that exist in building a thriving social innovation ecosystem in Northern Ireland. We define a social innovation ecosystem as the full range of factors that influence the ability of social innovations to flourish in any given place. Drawing on our work on success factors around the world, we have identified four key building blocks:

Culture

The most innovative societies have a culture of open innovation, where everyone can contribute to the development and implementation of new ideas and where creativity, collaboration and healthy competition are the norm. There is a strong creative culture in Northern Ireland, but nervousness about collaboration and competition is holding back progress. There are also pervasive barriers to participation in social innovation. Many people in communities and in organisations across all sectors do not feel they have the 'permission' to develop new solutions. To build a truly innovative culture social innovation needs to become everyone's business, not just the domain of certain groups of professionals, or people of particular backgrounds.

Demand

Demand for social innovation comes both from the people who can benefit from new solutions and the people with the resources to pay for them. For social innovation to flourish good ideas need to connect with both. In Northern Ireland all too often barriers in commissioning, procurement and funding processes prevent this happening. These barriers exist throughout the commissioning cycle. Commissioners

and funders (as well as procurement professionals) need to adopt more open models that remove barriers to the entry of new solutions, learning from success in Northern Ireland and beyond.

Supply

Every society has people with good ideas but societies with a strong supply of social innovations have a wealth of people trying to put good ideas into practice. Whilst this can be deeply rewarding, it is usually hard work. Most innovators need both financial and non-financial support at various points along the way. Northern Ireland has a growing social innovation support offer but there are still significant gaps in provision including introductory support on basic concepts and tools and more intensive support to help promising innovations scale. Current provision can also be hard to navigate and most has only short term funding leading to a sense of stop, start. Northern Ireland's Social Innovation Finance offer also has many strengths, but it has gaps too, particularly middle band finance options that can support established innovations to scale up. Crowdfunding could also play a more influential role in supporting the start-up of new ideas than it has so far.

Knowledge sharing

the sharing of ideas, insights and expertise is the life-blood of innovation. In the world's most innovative societies knowledge is shared across organisations, sectors and communities and with the wider world. More needs to be done to break down silos between potential innovators in the business, public, voluntary, community and faith communities in Northern Ireland so insights and expertise can cross pollinate. One key element of this is building stronger intermediaries (institutions, platforms and networks) that enable the transfer of knowledge and support networking

across society. The establishment of Social Innovation Northern Ireland is paving the way for this work. There is also potential for Northern Ireland to collaborate globally and become an influential player in a wider social innovation platform that shares learning from one country to another.

This report predominantly focuses on the four direct building blocks set out above. Although we also recognise that there are many contextual, indirect factors that influence the growth of social innovations - including the landscape of people, organisations, technology and physical spaces as well as the broader social, economic, political and legal climate.

We have set out our recommendations to respond to these issues throughout this report and summarised them in the next section.

FOCUSING ON NICHES SHOWING PROMISE

In a region rich with opportunities and fraught with challenges that need to be overcome it can be hard to know where to start in promoting social innovation. We believe that an initial focus on innovation in areas showing promise can inspire further socially innovative action. We have identified four areas that are in need of bold, creative, imaginative and deliverable ideas that will provoke deeply transformative and sustainable outcomes:

Improving outcomes for young people

Despite strong efforts to improve outcomes at school, in training and in accessing work, too many young people are struggling to achieve the future they aspire to. We highlight a series of niche areas where there is particularly strong potential for innovative solutions. These include a focus on engaging young people in digital

communications, technology, computing and engineering as well as investment in social entrepreneurship programmes. The development of the new NI Children and Young People's Strategy is an important opportunity to advance this work. There is much to build on. Northern Ireland has a long history of innovative youth work and we have also found a host of new innovations that are demonstrating what can be done like YPLC (Young People Leading Change), the Resurgence Academy and NEET Youth Forum.

Tackling poverty and debt

Northern Ireland has some of the highest levels of poverty and personal debt in the UK. Too often people are making choices between keeping the cupboards stocked, the house warm or the children clothed. We have identified key niches where there is potential for further innovation, which include the sharing economy, co-operative and collective energy models, place-based regeneration, alternatives to high cost credit and low cost retail options. The forthcoming Housing Executive's Social Housing Investment Scheme has the potential to make a significant contribution to supporting work in this area. There is also a proud history of credit unions to build on as well as the progress made by more recent innovations like EnerGenius, ReStore and Social Supermarkets.

Reducing inequalities in health

Recent decades have seen major advances in health in Northern Ireland yet people from less affluent communities are still more likely to become ill, to die young and to live more of their life in ill health, both physically and mentally. Niches that are in need of investment and focus include end of life care, support for healthy living and the advancement of digital health technologies. The Northern Ireland Executive's forthcoming Health and Social

Care Innovation Fund has the potential to be one a powerful driver of work in this area. There is much to build on including the region's network of Healthy Living Centres and Connected Health Innovation Centre as well as new social innovations like CLARE CIC and the proposed NI Assisted Living Centre.

Increasing employment of disadvantaged people

The number of people excluded from work in Northern Ireland is causing serious harm to the society and economy. This burden is felt most strongly by some of the most vulnerable in society. New ideas are already helping people into work, but more innovative solutions are needed to tackle this challenge. We identify a series of niches that require greater focus and investment including outreach and brokerage; training and development; support with retention and progression and creating new employment markets with focus on digital technology, distributed manufacturing, heritage industries, health and social care, tourism and diversification of food production. Wider use of the Social Clauses (that allow public bodies to require wider benefits like employment of marginalised people when they buy goods, services and works) is one development that could make a significant contribution here. Innovative ideas from organisations like the Now Group, Specialisterne and Book Reserve are already showing what is possible.

We encourage people and organisations across all parts of society to actively explore how they can contribute to social innovation in each of these four areas and the identified niches within them. We also encourage funders and investors to seize the opportunities they present by targeting specific innovation funding and support in each area.

SUPPORTING IDEAS THAT CAN GROW

We have profiled some examples of the innovations people are already advancing in Part 3 of this report, and many more at www.amplifyni.org. Many of the social innovations currently being developed across Northern Ireland are small scale but some are already having significant impact. The potential for current ideas to grow and new larger scale ideas to be developed is real. Below we have highlighted just a few ideas that are showing what is possible.

The Resurgence Academy

aims to equip young people to lead new enterprises. Building on work in Finland and Spain, they are establishing a new model of training in Derry/ Londonderry that will enable young adults to develop finance, marketing, leadership and strategy skills by developing real businesses that generate real income.

ReStore

is ensuring more people can afford to improve their home. The first of its kind in Europe, it is the low cost DIY store that sells donated new and used building supplies and home improvement materials at 50-75% of the normal retail price, as well as donated and onsite up-scaled furniture.

EnerGenius

is a revolutionary new Energy Management System aimed at driving down fuel poverty for low-income families. It actively interprets the energy data generated in a household, making it easier to reduce costs as well as charting progress over time and providing comparisons to similar homes.

Specialisterne NI

is helping people on the Autistic Spectrum to prepare for, secure and progress in graduate level jobs in Northern Ireland. As one part of their work their new employment agency is breaking down barriers and matching people who would otherwise be cut out of employment with employers who value their skills.

The Book Reserve

is two social enterprise in one, a café (The Thinking Cup) and an online retail business (selling second hand books) that has been set up to train, employ and support young parents who have had contact with the justice system, helping them turn their lives around.

Collectively new ideas like these and many more have the potential to radically improve the lives of people in Northern Ireland. Not all will succeed, but many will, and in doing so can inspire further innovation.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



PROMOTING AN INNOVATION CULTURE

Key finding	Recommendation
Northern Ireland has a strong creative culture, but there are also significant cultural barriers that mean many people feel unable to participate.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Commissioners and funders should prioritise social innovation finance and support towards people who have historically been excluded. 2. Providers of social innovation support and finance should review their processes and support to remove barriers to participation by people who have historically been excluded. 3. Social Innovation NI should consider the development of a campaign to encourage people from all walks of life to think of themselves as potential social innovators.
Successful open innovation cultures are based on creativity, competition and collaboration.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Social Innovation NI should agree a joint action plan that identifies how existing sector support programmes can promote a culture of open innovation.
Past approaches to grant funding have played a significant part in reducing collaboration in Northern Ireland.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. All public sector and independent funders and commissioners should actively promote collaboration, whilst also leading by example.
Social innovation has a key role to play in offering direction and paving the way for changes to be made.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Social innovation should be embedded as a core component of all existing leadership programmes in the public, voluntary, community and public sectors.



INCREASING DEMAND FOR NEW SOLUTIONS

Key finding	Recommendation
There is strong underlying demand for new solutions to Northern Ireland's social challenges but this does not always connect with promising innovations.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Commissioners and funders should prioritise social innovation finance and support towards people who have historically been excluded. 8. Providers of social innovation support and finance should review their processes and support to remove barriers to participation by people who have historically been excluded. 9. Social Innovation NI should consider the development of a campaign to encourage people from all walks of life to think of themselves as potential social innovators.
Northern Ireland has benefited from a wide range of initiatives aimed at increasing demand for social innovations over recent years. We now need to build on and learn from them.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Social Innovation NI should agree a joint action plan that identifies how existing sector support programmes can promote a culture of open innovation.
Procurement practices are the most commonly cited demand side barrier to social innovation in Northern Ireland.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. All public sector and independent funders and commissioners should actively promote collaboration, whilst also leading by example.



SUPPORTING THE SUPPLY OF NEW INNOVATIONS

Key finding	Recommendation
Northern Ireland has an increasingly vibrant social innovation support offer. We now need to strengthen and sustain it.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Commissioners and providers should undertake a collaborative review to identify how non-financial support can be sustained and enhanced. This could be an early product of Social Innovation NI.
Northern Ireland's social innovation finance offer has firm foundations and is starting to grow, and now is the time to take a more planned approach.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Funders and investors should collaborate to strategically identify and address gaps in Northern Ireland's Social Innovation Finance offer. An initial review could be an early product of Social Innovation NI.
There is a missing middle in the finance options available that is holding back innovations that could scale.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Priority should be given to improving the availability of £75,000-£200,000 options, including consideration of an investment fund.
There is potential for crowdfunding to make a transformative contribution to the growth of social innovation in Northern Ireland.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Commissioners should invest in sustained practical support to help innovators take up crowdfunding models; this work could be led by the NI Executive's Social Innovation Working Group.



FACILITATING THE SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE

Key finding	Recommendation
For Northern Ireland's social innovation ecosystems to thrive we need to ensure ideas, insights and expertise are shared across the region.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Partners in Northern Ireland should collaborate through Social Innovation NI to develop a complimentary set of platforms and hubs that enable people to share knowledge and ideas for social innovation.
Northern Ireland's links with the wider world are one of its strengths. We need to build on these to ensure new knowledge keeps flowing into the region.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Partners in Northern Ireland should collaborate with other cities, regions in the UK and beyond, as well as with global social innovation networks, to establish a shared learning platform (i.e. a global, collaborative exchange on social innovation) focused on using social innovation to reduce inequality. Consideration should be given to establishing a 'What Works' centre in Northern Ireland (these government initiatives already exist in England, Wales and Scotland).



NURTURING NICHES SHOWING PROMISE

Key finding	Recommendation
Our research has identified four areas showing promise each contacting a number of niches: Improving outcomes for young people; Tackling poverty and debt; Enhancing health and wellbeing; and Creating sustainable employment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. We encourage people and organisations across all parts of society to actively explore how they can contribute to social innovation in each of these four areas. We also encourage funders and investors to seize the opportunities they present.

INTRODUCTION

Peace has transformed Northern Ireland, creating for the first time in generations the space for social and economic transformation. The appetite for social renaissance is palpable. Through our research we have found that this demand for change is heralding a new wave of social innovation that, if nurtured, has the potential to elevate Northern Ireland as a world-leading social economy.

This report charts our research findings, but it is also a call to action. We want to encourage people across all sectors to own and shape a deep culture of social innovation in Northern Ireland, creating new ways to improve people's lives. On the following pages we have set out the very real opportunities that exist to:

Seize the potential for change

There is a wealth of energy and enthusiasm for social innovation in Northern Ireland. This report highlights the potential for change, the region's innate strengths, and why now is a moment that needs to be seized.

Create a flourishing social innovation ecosystem

Northern Ireland has a rich seam of creative and committed people brimming with new ideas. But these ideas will only flourish and grow if they receive the support they need.

This report explores how we can foster an increasingly collaborative and open social innovation ecosystem in Northern Ireland.

Nurture niches showing promise

There is much to enthuse social innovators and those who seek to support them in Northern Ireland. This report sets out four short provocations, highlighting key areas that are ripe for social innovation and specific niches within them. We hope they will inspire people across society – including funders and investors - to seize the opportunities they present.

Together these chapters set out a path to capitalise on current progress and opportunities, creating a lasting culture of open social innovation. It is an approach that we believe can help to transform Northern Ireland into one of the world's most socially creative and successful regions.

Methodology

Our research has comprised a number of different methodological approaches:

A comprehensive literature review and extensive desk-based research has ensured an up to date data picture and contextual framework for this report.

We have carried out interviews with key stakeholders from across Northern Ireland. These have been from a broad range of sectors (public, private and voluntary), backgrounds and geographical areas to represent and assimilate a broad spread of perspectives and experiences.

Mondragon Corporation has carried out a series of detailed interviews and held discussion groups with enterprise hub representatives, local government bodies and a selection of other influential stakeholders and innovators.

We have carried out semi-structured interviews with UK-wide funders and

investors to capture a range of perspectives and recommendations with respect to funding priorities and intentions.

We have carried out qualitative research (using ethnographic and participatory methods) with individuals and families in order to draw together a set of case studies that produce illustrative snap shots of people's lives across our four areas of focus.

Our four 'spotlight' areas (youth outcomes, poverty & debt, health and wellbeing and sustainable employment) were chosen because they are indicative of social problems that are proving deeply challenging to address in Northern Ireland using current interventions. They are examples and we recognise there are other social challenges that could have equally taken priority. They are of interest here because they are illustrative of areas where social innovations are beginning to take root and have impact.

PART 1

SEIZING THE POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE

THE CURRENT STORM OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PRESSURES IN NORTHERN IRELAND CAN SEEM OVERWHELMING BUT IT ALSO BRINGS NEW ENERGY FOR CHANGE...

1
GDP figures from the Office for National Statistics demonstrate that growth in Northern Ireland is lagging behind the UK as a whole. See, for example: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/news/northern-ireland-growth-to-remain-slower-than-rest-of-the-uk-warns-pwc-34405331.html>

2
The proportion of people in Northern Ireland aged 65+ is set to increase from 16% to 25% between 2014 and 2039. See: <https://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm/a-profile-of-older-people-in-ni-annual-update-2015.pdf>

For many people in Northern Ireland the combined economic and social pressures of recent years have felt like a perfect storm. The global recession hit the region hard and the recovery has been slow and uncertain.¹ After years of intensive public investment, austerity is now biting. With so much of the economy – social and private – dependent on public money, this transition to reduced state funding is impacting all sectors. This climate of financial uncertainty has been increased by the recent European Union referendum result, with the future of the substantial European funding coming into Northern Ireland now uncertain.

“ We are in that perfect storm. And I think the only way out of insufficient resources is finding smarter and better ways to deploy what you’ve got: Get more for less, get better for less using existing structures and resources. **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CEO**

These economic headwinds are also combined with profound social challenges. For all its many successes the peace process has not yet ushered in the fairer and more prosperous society so many want and need⁵. At the same time demand for many services is rising rapidly, not least because of the region’s rapidly ageing population².

“ [We are] grappling with a whole host of longstanding, seemingly intractable social problems.

NORTHERN IRELAND FINANCE MINISTER ⁶

“ We are top of all the wrong tables for generations despite strong local efforts - why? **LOCAL AUTHORITY DIRECTOR**

The combined force of this storm can feel overwhelming but the scale of the challenge is also creating new opportunities. Through our research we have heard how a shift in culture has begun across the region’s social sector – from one all too often dominated by division and grant giving and receiving, to a resurgence of collaboration and social entrepreneurship. This shift is already starting to generate a new wave of innovative solutions to the region’s challenges.

“ We are at the stage of looking toward solutions. No more same old, same old approaches expecting different results; they’re not working

CITY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE

“ It feels like Detroit, there’s a feeling of potential under the surface.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, BELFAST

...THIS ENERGY IS GENERATING A NEW WAVE OF CREATIVE SOLUTIONS.

THIS NEW WAVE OF SOCIAL INNOVATION HAS THE POTENTIAL TO TRANSFORM NORTHERN IRELAND...

Across Northern Ireland there is a renewed energy for creative solutions. Economic and social necessity is inspiring people across all sectors and communities to look afresh at how they can better meet social needs. In the wake of the peace process, new opportunities for collaboration and innovation are opening up. A younger generation is bringing new thinking. The region’s rapidly growing digital expertise is bringing new possibilities.⁷ New approaches to social design and social finance are percolating into the public, third and private sectors. Together these changes are inspiring a new wave of social innovation.

“ People are up for change and new movement; we have had so much of a grant dependency culture here but now folk are beginning to do things for themselves. **FAITH LEADER**

If nurtured this emerging movement could transform the region. In researching this report we have met hundreds of people across all sectors and communities committed to creating and scaling new solutions to the region’s social challenges. We have profiled some examples of the

innovations they are developing in Part 3 of this report, and many more at www.amplifyni.org. Collectively these innovators have the potential to radically improve the way social outcomes are achieved in Northern Ireland. Not all will succeed, but many could and each can inspire further innovation.

This new wave of creativity builds on Northern Ireland’s strong history of leading the way in developing new solutions in many social fields, including restorative justice, youth work, community enterprises, credit unions and peace building.⁸

Whilst there is real momentum, the success of this emerging movement is far from certain. Significant barriers to social innovation do still persist across Northern Ireland.

If we are to realise the potential of this current wave of creativity, people and organisations across the region need to work together to build a more supportive environment and culture, and to ensure innovations have the practical and financial support they need to flourish.

...TO REALISE THIS POTENTIAL WE NEED TO CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION TO THRIVE.

THERE ARE ALREADY RAYS OF LIGHT IN THE GROWING SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION ACROSS ALL SECTORS...

Since we produced our last report on Growing Social Innovation in Northern Ireland in 2013⁹ support for social innovation across Northern Ireland's public and third sectors has moved on apace.

Social innovation is now a key part of the Northern Ireland Executive's Innovation Strategy.¹⁰ Trusts and foundations are increasingly keen to invest, with notable examples including the Building Change Trust, Big Lottery Fund and UnLtd. Key third sector umbrella bodies including the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), Social Enterprise NI and CO3 are increasingly seeking to promote and facilitate social innovation across the region. There are also early signs of engagement from the private sector spearheaded by organisation like Ulster Bank, Business in the Community and the NI Science Park.

“ Innovation is essential in our collective efforts to address key societal and environmental challenges, whether that be an aging society and supporting people to stay healthier and live independently for longer or limiting the effects of climate change. NI MINISTER OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT¹¹

...WE NEED TO BUILD ON THIS SUCCESS TO ENSURE NORTHERN IRELAND HAS THE ECOSYSTEM OF SUPPORT NEEDED TO GROW SOCIAL INNOVATION IN THE FUTURE.

This commitment has already translated into new practical support. New provision from Ulster Bank, Techies in Residence, Collaboration NI, Cooperative Alternatives, Social Entrepreneurs Ireland, Ashoka and the network of Social Enterprise Hubs as well as our own Young Foundation Amplify NI initiative are transforming the support available to social innovators.

A Social Innovation Working Group has now been established under the leadership of the Department of Social Development to help drive progress. Work is also underway, at the instigation of the Building Change Trust, to establish Social Innovation NI¹², a collaborative approach for all interested partners to support social innovation across the life-cycle.¹³

The momentum is now there to build an exemplar social innovation infrastructure in Northern Ireland. Section two of this report sets out a path to seize this opportunity.

“ We've had huge progress and the place is transformed. But we've a long way to go in terms of creating a genuine social innovation ecosystem. Having said that, there's a lot of good will. FUNDER

‡
The Basque Country has been an excellent example of social, economic and industrial transformation over the last 25 years. The steel and shipbuilding crisis of the 80s affected the area intensely but a long tradition of a vibrant economy powered by a deep social approach created the conditions for a new economy based on the new automotive sector, machine tool, renewal energy and aeronautics.

NORTHERN IRELAND'S SMALL SIZE MEANS A NEW SOCIAL INNOVATION MOVEMENT CAN HAVE IMPACT QUICKLY...

Northern Ireland's size is one of its strengths. Whilst in larger regions it can be impossible to engage the number of people needed to build momentum, Northern Ireland's relatively small population of 1.8 million and strong sense of connection across the region brings real advantages.

The scale of the infrastructure needed to support social innovation in Northern Ireland is relatively modest. The sustained engagement of just a few hundred people through social innovation support and collaboration platforms can therefore have a transformational impact.

“ Northern Ireland is small enough for news to travel fast. People are well connected. It's not only small enough; it's big enough too: Two major cities with enough energy and ideas to generate something interesting. Social innovation ideas are not going to fall on deaf ears or stony ground.” UK FUNDER

The opportunities for innovation to take place in small regions are also significantly enhanced. When it comes to innovation small nations and regions often outperform the largest nations. League tables of the world's most innovative nations regularly include countries with small populations like Finland, Estonia, Israel and Singapore.¹⁴ This advantage comes from the closer integration across sectors. Put simply, in small places people can get to know each other personally.

...WE NEED TO SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD A WORLD LEADING SOCIAL ECONOMY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

From there collaboration and the cross pollination of new ideas becomes possible and increasingly more likely.

Of course, being a small region does not guarantee the growth of social innovation. But compact size does bring potential for a rapid revolution in the social economy. This is a transformation that other comparable regions have achieved, including for example the Basque Country[‡] and San Diego.¹⁵

NESTA's 2014 report 'When Small is Beautiful: Lessons from Highly Innovative Smaller Countries', highlighted five common features of a highly innovative small nation: 1) collaboration across sectors to support the supply of early stage innovation; 2) the presence of strong and effective institutions dedicated to promoting innovation; 3) public services that support innovation throughout their wider activities; 4) openness to the world, its ideas and opportunities; and 5) a sense of national mission, with a shared narrative that 'innovation is what we do'.¹⁶

The next section of this report sets out a path that responds to each of these features to build that sense of mission in Northern Ireland of capitalising on recent progress to create a lasting culture of open social innovation. It is an approach that we believe can help to transform Northern Ireland into one of the world's most socially creative and successful regions.

PART 2

BUILDING A FLOURISHING SOCIAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

FOR SOCIAL INNOVATIONS TO GROW, THEY NEED THE RIGHT CONDITIONS...

People across all sectors and communities in Northern Ireland are already developing innovative ways of meeting social needs. But for new ideas to take hold and grow they need the right conditions. In this report we make the case for a strategic focus on creating those conditions in Northern Ireland. We do this not because innovation for social ends is new - it has been happening throughout history - but because by thinking about how it happens and how it can be supported we can increase our chances of the new solutions society needs emerging and succeeding.

The factors that affect the blossoming and growth of innovations across our region are multiple and integral to our society. Local culture, demand, support, knowledge sharing and the wider social and economic environment all interact to either inspire or facilitate the generation and growth of new ideas or to deter and hinder them.

“ Northern Ireland needs a complete step change in its culture, priority and performance in respect of innovation.

NORTHERN IRELAND INNOVATION STRATEGY ¹⁷

“ We need to create an environment and infrastructure – a lot more than building a hub. SOCIAL IMPACT ADVISOR

These interactions act much like a natural ecosystem where the climate, landscape

and existing wildlife all interact to condition what can grow and flourish. Just as the success of plants varies in a natural ecosystem as the climate, landscape and wildlife around them change, the success of social innovations vary as local cultures, investment patterns and support offers change. This ecosystem analogy is helpful because it provides a framework for understanding all the interactions, resources and actors involved in social innovation in any place¹⁸.

“ An ‘ecosystem’ framework creates conceptual common ground, allowing us to listen to existing systems, discover their properties, understand how to align emergent opportunities with our values, and work together to transform current systems into those that nurture and sustain innovation for transformational systems change. DRAIMIN & SPITZ¹⁹

Taking an ‘ecosystem’ approach allows us to consider the processes and interactions that we can influence to encourage social innovation to take hold across our region. It goes beyond input-output correlations (such as research and development investments) and instead allows us to identify a range of successful policy strategies that can drive innovation across Northern Ireland²⁰.

...WE NEED TO CREATE AN ECOSYSTEM IN NORTHERN IRELAND THAT HELPS SOCIAL INNOVATION TO BLOSSOM AND FLOURISH

OUR RESEARCH HAS HIGHLIGHTED KEY ELEMENTS OF A FLOURISHING SOCIAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM...

Successful social innovation ecosystems have the range of conditions needed to support the growth and development of social innovations. Our work on success factors for social innovation ecosystems across Europe has identified key building blocks²¹:

Culture changing the way people ‘do things round here’. Including the degree to which there is an ethos of healthy competition, collaboration and creativity.

Demand influencing the extent to which society is willing to pay for (or allocate other resources like volunteers and buildings etc.) to the delivery of new solutions. Including demand from public services and private individuals.

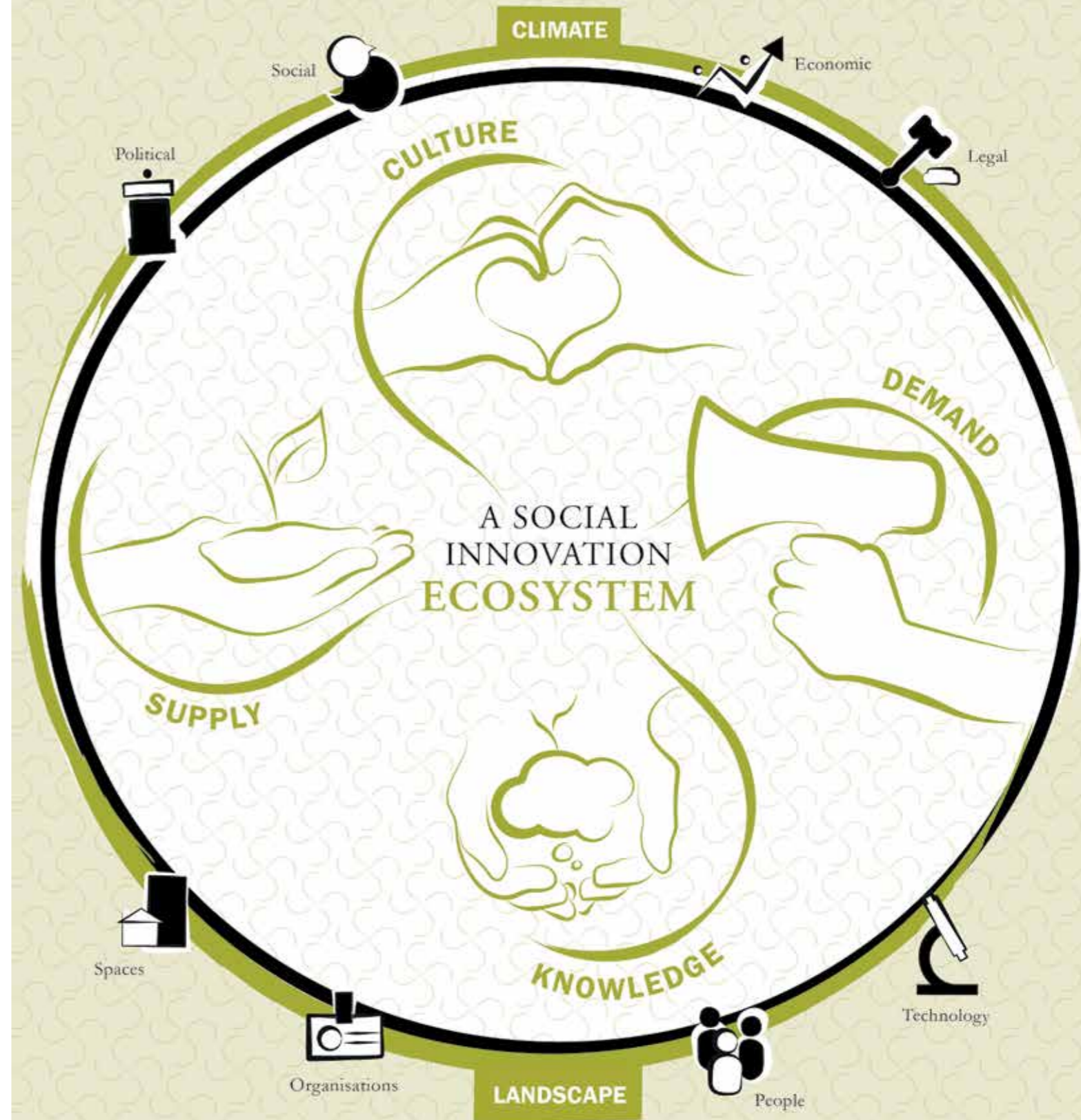
Supply increasing the generation and growth of innovations by providing *financial and non-financial* support to help people and organisations develop and grow their new ideas.

Knowledge sharing ensuring the effective transfer of both knowledge on how to do social innovation and knowledge that can inspire and support individual innovations. Including building stronger intermediaries (institutions, platforms and networks) that enable the transfer of knowledge across society. We explore each of these factors in the rest of this section.

Importantly, these factors all interact. So action to improve supply will not be effective if there is no demand (and vice versa), and even if both are in place without change to culture or broader environmental factors little progress may be made.

There are of course many wider factors that influence the growth of social innovations - including the landscape of people, organisations, technology and physical spaces as well as the broader social, economic, political and legal climate. While these contextual factors are important considerations, this report focuses on the four key building blocks set out above.

By modifying our behaviour and actions we can influence how effective this ecosystem is in Northern Ireland.





PROMOTING AN INNOVATIVE CULTURE

NORTHERN IRELAND HAS A STRONG CREATIVE CULTURE, BUT THERE ARE ALSO SIGNIFICANT CULTURAL BARRIERS, WHICH STOP PEOPLE FROM REALISING THEIR FULL POTENTIAL...

The world's most innovative societies and organisations have an open innovation culture, where everyone can contribute to the development and implementation of new ideas. Innovation is not a magical art that only the gifted can perform, nor is it always so complex as to require years of training. It is more often a tweak on an existing idea or combination of ideas. As such, it can come from anyone and anywhere.

Some people do not feel they have 'permission' to develop new solutions. We have heard how this is both a consequence of written rules (such as health and safety, support and funding requirements) and an issue of social norms and social capital, best captured in the response "people like us don't do things like that." This is compounded by a lack of confidence that is widely felt, with many people being quick to play down the potential of their ideas.

“ The 'modesty trait' exists within many small scale projects which prevents taking up the option of scaling up.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE HUB REPRESENTATIVE

These combined factors have serious consequences as many of the people and ideas that could unlock the answers to Northern Ireland's challenges are being locked out or limited only to small scale impact. For social innovation to truly flourish these barriers need to be broken down.

...SOCIAL INNOVATION NEEDS TO BECOME EVERYONE'S BUSINESS, NOT JUST THE DOMAIN OF CERTAIN GROUPS OF PROFESSIONALS, OR PEOPLE OF PARTICULAR BACKGROUNDS.

Our research suggests this is most likely to happen when communities share the values underpinning innovation processes, when they can relate to those involved, and when they agree that new actions are addressing genuine community priorities. Addressing these deep cultural realities requires sustained collective efforts by all those involved in social innovation in Northern Ireland. Including leadership from people in positions of influence, be that government, civil society or successful innovators.

“ **Changing culture is slow here and we must recognize and respect that. A whole new infrastructure is needed and this will be led by people more than ideas.**

SOCIAL IMPACT ADVISOR

We recommend that: 1) commissioners and funders prioritise social innovation finance and support towards people who have historically been excluded; 2) Providers of social innovation support and finance review their processes and support to remove barriers to participation by people who have historically been excluded (including elitist language and imagery and unnecessary experience or qualifications); 3) Social Innovation NI consider the development of a campaign to encourage people from all walks of life to think of themselves as potential social innovators (celebrating success and promoting real people as role models, including through awards for new role model innovators).

OPEN INNOVATION CULTURES ARE BASED ON CREATIVITY, COMPETITION AND COLLABORATION...

Recent decades have brought profound changes to the way innovation happens in our society. In the past much innovation took place through 'closed' processes within large organisations that held much of society's knowledge. However as knowledge has shifted into public spaces so has innovation. New ideas are now much more likely to emerge from interactions that cross community and organisational boundaries. This has given rise to the prominence of 'open' innovation, characterised by a constant cross-pollination of ideas, questions, knowledge and technology across organisational, professional and community boundaries²². To flourish, it requires three common cultural features²³:

Creativity	Competition	Collaboration
To innovate people and organisations must be open to trying new things. To be productive this creativity needs to be matched with perseverance, accountability and resilience. Recognising that innovations that have lasting impact can take time, that resources need to be used well and that some innovations will fail (but that is OK so long as lessons are learnt).	Healthy competition raises the achievement bar, sparks new ideas and encourages self-assessment. Competition is healthy when competitors know and respect each other, taking inspiration from each other's work and maintaining an openness to future collaboration.	Collaboration is paramount in all innovation. New ideas are more likely to emerge and succeed when people combine their different insights, experience, skills and resources. Effective collaboration is based on honesty, taking time to understand each other and the fair sharing of risk.

When these factors are aligned, the resulting culture can generate lasting change and have ever-growing impact. The challenge is to be able to compete, collaborate and be creative at the same time. In Northern Ireland this requires a profound cultural shift that will only happen if people across all parts of society make a concerted effort together. The NI Executive and sector bodies (including NICVA, SENI, CO3, NISP, BITCNI and the NI Chamber of Commerce) all have a role to play.

“ **This will take a new mind-set – we really are victims of a past of grants making and it will take time to change this.** LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER, DERRY/LONDONDERRY

“ **People are scared of working together – small organisations are scared of getting swallowed up by larger empires.** SOCIAL IMPACT ADVISOR

We recommend that: 4) Social Innovation NI agrees a joint action plan that identifies how existing leadership and sector support programmes can promote a culture of open innovation based on creativity, healthy competition and collaboration. This should be done in collaboration with the proposed Northern Ireland Innovation Council.

...THE NI EXECUTIVE AND SECTOR BODIES SHOULD AGREE A JOINT ACTION PLAN TO PROMOTE AN OPEN SOCIAL INNOVATION CULTURE ACROSS ALL SECTORS IN NI.



PAST APPROACHES TO GRANT FUNDING HAVE REDUCED COLLABORATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND...

Both public and independent funders have a key role to play when it comes to fostering collaboration. A past culture of grant giving and receiving in Northern Ireland has had a profound impact on both the recipients and providers of funding, leading to a less collaborative culture.

“ The culture amongst the voluntary sector to compete against each other for increasingly limited funding and even beneficiaries has been driven by the commissioning cultures of the sector. **FUNDER, NORTHERN IRELAND**

“ People are still preserving their own patch. Resource allocation is still preserving local territorial mind-sets and to an extent segregated narratives. **FAITH REPRESENTATIVE, NORTHERN IRELAND**

Public and independent funders in Northern Ireland are moving towards a collaborative culture. For innovation to thrive this progress needs to be maintained and accelerated. At the simplest level, they can routinely encourage organisations who approach them with complimentary ideas to explore collaboration. More formally, they can commission and fund for collaboration. This way, they can use their role to encourage providers to design and deliver services in collaboration with each other and with the communities that they serve. In addition, funding and investment

...ALL PUBLIC SECTOR AND INDEPENDENT FUNDERS AND COMMISSIONERS SHOULD ACTIVELY PROMOTE COLLABORATION, WHILST ALSO LEADING BY EXAMPLE.

can also be matched with non-financial support that encourages and enables prospective and/or successful applicants to network and learn together.³

“ Matching up with likeminded organisations adds to sustainability and growth. **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE HUB MANAGER**

It is important public bodies, independent trusts and foundations also lead by example, including by collaborating when designing new funds. They can open up their own processes to involve citizens and social entrepreneurs so ideas and insights can be shared. It is also important to be mindful of language and how it can influence the way people and organisations behave. Many organisations are nervous about ‘partnerships’ but warm much more quickly to collaboration.

“ We used to be fixated with formal partnerships. Now we’ve changed the language to collaboration and it’s gone down much better. **UK FUNDER**

We recommend that: 5) all public sector and independent funders and commissioners should actively promote collaboration, whilst also leading by example by collaborating on the design of their own funds and commissions.

3

The Big Lottery Fund has led the way across the UK in establishing funding programs that are combined with practical support to encourage applicants and recipients to learn together, including for example the Realizing Ambition program see [www.youngfoundation.org/projects/realising-ambition]

SOCIAL INNOVATION LEADERS CAN OFFER DIRECTION AND PAVE THE WAY FOR CHANGES TO BE MADE...

Our research has highlighted the key role a small but growing number of people are playing in building a new social innovation culture in Northern Ireland by dedicating their time to creating the conditions needed for these new ideas to thrive. These new leaders are operating in varied fields including civil society, government, grant-giving, public and private sector, as well as social innovators themselves.

The influence that these new leaders bring to bear cannot be underestimated. By setting the tone and mentoring others they are influencing the extent to which social innovation is embraced within society more widely. In particular, they have a role to play in shifting the focus towards an expectation to innovate, i.e. that it becomes the norm rather than the exception. By sticking their neck out to promote change they are creating the conditions for other to succeed. These attempts to ‘not just look at the usual approaches and suspects’ will encourage a more ambitious approach to social innovation that seeks to touch on everyone in society, rather than a selected few.

“ [Large scale social innovation] can only be fostered by involving the voluntary, public and private sectors and a sense of shared ownership.

SOCIAL IMPACT SPECIALIST, NORTHERN IRELAND

Correspondingly, senior professionals across society and in positions of influence (across government, heads of departments, chief executives etc.) need to work together across and between sectors to support leaders in social innovation, explicitly recognising the challenges at different levels and in different sectors. An openness and acceptance to doing things differently will help to let these people lead the way. Action is also needed to build the leaders of the future. At present the concepts and tools of social innovation are not well known by many emerging leaders across the social sectors in Northern Ireland.

We recommend that: 6) that social innovation be embedded as a core component of all existing leadership programmes in the public, voluntary, community and public sectors in NI.

...STRONG LEADERSHIP IS MORE LIKELY TO RESULT IN CULTURAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE THAT EXPLICITLY PROMOTES AND EXPECTS SOCIAL INNOVATION.



INCREASING DEMAND FOR NEW SOLUTIONS

THERE IS STRONG UNDERLYING DEMAND FOR NEW SOLUTIONS TO NORTHERN IRELAND'S SOCIAL CHALLENGES, BUT THIS DOES NOT ALWAYS CONNECT WITH PROMISING INNOVATIONS....

The ultimate drivers of demand for social innovation are the needs and aspirations of the population, and the resources people (individually and collectively) are prepared to allocate to meeting them. At this level there is clear demand for innovative solutions in NI. There are a significant number of areas where current interventions are not achieving the progress that people want to see in tackling social problems. New demand is also emerging, not least due to the region's rapidly ageing population. As funds reduce, many current service models are also becoming unsustainable. We explore some of these wider demand factors in section three of this report.

Demand for social innovations is complex since in many cases it is not expressed directly but is often mediated.²⁴ For example, young people not in education, employment or training are usually unable to express demand themselves by paying for an innovative new product or service that is right for them; instead public services need to step in to procure this on their behalf.

Unfortunately in Northern Ireland this mediation often brings with it barriers that reduce the chances of innovative solutions - many of which could better meet needs, often at lower cost - reaching their potential beneficiaries.

“ There is simply too much governance, procurement and red tape – social innovation is treated like a private company. The pressure to deliver doesn't half limit our social innovation.
SOCIAL IMPACT EXPERT

...ALL PUBLIC SECTOR AND INDEPENDENT FUNDERS SHOULD REVIEW PROCESSES THROUGHOUT THEIR COMMISSIONING CYCLE TO MINIMISE BARRIERS TO INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

“ We need to build a culture of enough faith in others who have the expertise, to do the work.
INVESTMENT BOARD REPRESENTATIVE

INVESTMENT BOARD REPRESENTATIVE

These barriers to entering the market exist throughout the commissioning cycle - from needs assessment through to strategic planning, procurement, performance management and evaluation. At each stage there is a tendency towards closed processes that result in many innovations being shut out of the market. We summarise the differences between open and closed commissioning on the next page. For social innovation to flourish in Northern Ireland all public sector bodies and independent funders need to review their commissioning processes to see how they can adopt a more open model. One important opportunity to further open up demand for social innovation is the proposed Northern Ireland Social Value Act. This will extend the existing power that public services have to maximise social value when procuring goods or services into a duty to do so, maximising the social outcomes they achieve.

We recommend that: 7) The NI Executive Social Innovation Working Group put in place a programme of support to help all public sector and independent funders to review processes throughout their commissioning cycle to minimise barriers to innovative solutions. 8) Learning from the 2015 review of the UK Social Value Act²⁵ be used to ensure the Northern Ireland Act maximises opportunities of social innovation.

PROMOTING INNOVATION THROUGHOUT THE COMMISSIONING CYCLE

Inspiring and informing innovative responses

by working with a full range of people to understand and promote insight into 1) the needs and aspirations of the population, 2) the strengths and weaknesses of current provision and 3) the assets in the local area and community that can be built upon

Providing clarity on broad areas where innovation is being sought

by developing long-term outcome based strategies with the public and providers that set out clear priorities, so innovators can understand the impact that commissioners want to achieve over the coming years

Giving advance notice of specific calls for innovation

by publishing clear commissioning intentions that set out the specific outcomes for which innovative solutions will be commissioned in the coming period (1-3 years), with an indicative timetable for the proposed process



Investing in evaluation, securing funding for evaluation of impact (is it working) and process (how is it working & why) and the dissemination of learning. Using standards of evidence that increase proportionately as innovations mature

Flexible management of delivery, based on a shared commitment to making it work, with proportionate monitoring and performance processes that allow for the model to be refined during implementation and where needed advance payment to enable entry to the market

Using procurement models that are open to innovation and 1) are outcome based; 2) allow for competitive dialogue; 3) have multi-year contracts so impact can be proven; 4) require standards of evidence that are proportionate to the stage of innovation; 5) include smaller contracts so new models can be tested and 6) minimise criteria that prevent entry to the market



NORTHERN IRELAND HAS BENEFITED FROM A RANGE OF INITIATIVES AIMED AT INCREASING DEMAND FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION...

Over the last few years a significant number of initiatives have been launched in Northern Ireland aimed at securing innovative responses to key social problems.

The NI Executive’s Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes have funded new solutions across key social challenges.²⁶ The Pathways to Success Collaboration and Innovation Fund sought to transform services for young people not in education, employment or training.²⁷ The social clauses have opened up large scale public contracts to solutions that deliver additional social value by improving access to work for disadvantaged people.²⁸ Direct payments are allowing social care beneficiaries to purchase support services direct from the providers that best meet their needs.²⁹ Supporting People has funded new models of housing related support services for vulnerable people.³⁰ The Asset Transfer programme is seeking to offer alternative resourcing for innovative social provision.³¹ Two pilot ‘Social Economy Growth’ projects have also been initiated³².

It is important that where these approaches show promise they are sustained over the long run so they can deliver their full

value. Social innovation takes time to develop, sustain and to have full impact. To succeed at scale, they require multi-year backing.

“ **There is no point in funding many things for say 12 months and expect results. It takes a very long time in the area of health.**

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE ADVISER

We also need to make sure people across Northern Ireland can learn from these initiatives. We have heard mixed stories of their success in securing new solutions. Some have clearly attracted innovative responses, others seem to have had less success. The time is right to undertake a review to capture and share learning from these trail blazers – spearheading a wider transformation in the demand for social innovation.

We recommend that: 9) the Northern Ireland Executive undertake a review of these recent initiatives and report on key learning. This learning should be shared right across the public sector and beyond in a user friendly format. This review could be led by the Northern Ireland Executive’s Social Innovation Working Group.

...THE NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE SHOULD UNDERTAKE A REVIEW OF THESE RECENT INITIATIVES AND REPORT ON KEY LEARNING.

PROCUREMENT PRACTICES ARE THE MOST CITED DEMAND-SIDE BARRIER TO SOCIAL INNOVATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND...

The public sector dominates the market in Northern Ireland, spending £3 billion a year on goods and services. Whilst there are pockets of good practice, in the main procurement processes for innovative products and services are not widely innovative,³³ with over half of business leaders in Northern Ireland feeling public contracts do not encourage innovation at all.³⁴ This is a view that is shared by many in the social sector³⁵.

“ **Public procurement is another dampener on the ability to be innovative because it feels the fear of challenge therefore it has to specify. So it specifies the comfortable not the innovative, although it aspires to be innovative.**

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR

“ **A risk aversion mentality in the public sector stifles creativity and confidence in innovation. It leads to and produces bureaucratic procedures and form filling.**

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT SPECIALIST

There is a widely held perception across public services in Northern Ireland that alternative procurement processes carry a higher risk of challenge from suppliers. This perceived threat has largely led the public sector to choose more pre-determined and output orientated grant giving and procurement procedures (rather than open and outcome focused processes).³⁶

Yet there are well established procurement processes for innovation. This includes

clear provision in Northern Ireland, UK and EU procurement law.³⁷ Together these allow both for the use of outcome-based specifications and variants that encourage innovative solutions and also the use of competitive dialogue procedure which provides considerable scope for commissioner / supplier collaboration.³⁸ They include specific innovation funding mechanisms including grant funding variants, Small Business Research Initiative, Forward Commitment Procurement, Procurement Compacts and innovation prizes.

We recommend that: 10) the NI Executive work with wider partners (including Councils and Health and Social Care Trusts) to change the way procurement for innovation happens in Northern Ireland. UK and EU guides are already available to support commissioners in procuring innovative solutions. We think there would be real value in translating these into a user-friendly guide specific to the Northern Ireland context. This would highlight the differences to the wider UK and EU context and set out the mechanisms for procurement in Northern Ireland, highlighting learning where they have already been used locally. A guide will not achieve the change needed. A cultural change programme for commissioners and procurement specialist is also needed. This work could be led by the NI Executive’s Social Innovation Working Group.

...THE NI EXECUTIVE SHOULD WORK WITH WIDER PARTNERS (INCLUDING COUNCILS AND HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUSTS TO CHANGE THE WAY PROCUREMENT FOR INNOVATION HAPPENS IN NORTHERN IRELAND.



SUPPORTING THE SUPPLY OF NEW INNOVATIONS

NORTHERN IRELAND HAS AN INCREASINGLY VIBRANT SOCIAL INNOVATION SUPPORT OFFER, WE NOW NEED TO STRENGTHEN AND SUSTAIN IT...

Creating, sustaining and growing an innovative solution to social needs is almost always challenging. Innovators may need assistance with many different aspects of their work, from generating a viable idea in the first place to growing it to scale. Meeting these needs requires an ecology of support. Successful social innovation ecosystems have a range of accelerators, incubators, mentoring and coaching, labs and professional services.³⁹

The good news is the ecology of support in Northern Ireland has significantly improved in recent years. Dedicated social innovation provision established since our last report in 2013 includes our own Young Foundation Amplify NI programme (with its Accelerators and wider social innovation support), a public sector Innovation Lab and the Techies in Residence programme. This is complimented by a growing range of wider support, that whilst not specially targeted at social innovation does meet key needs of social innovators. New initiatives include the Entrepreneurial Spark Hatchery enterprise incubator, the network of Social Enterprise Hubs, Cooperative Alternatives and Collaboration NI as well as Ireland wide initiatives from Social Entrepreneurs Ireland and Ashoka. These have added to existing longstanding provision, including mentoring facilitated by organisations like Business in the Community and CO3. As well, there has been specialist support provided by organisations like UnLtd, NICVA, Social Enterprise NI, Development Trust NI, Buy

Social, the NI Science Park, NORIBIC, the Connected Health Innovation Centre, HSC Innovations and a range of enterprise agencies.

This success in growing support has completely changed the landscape. But there are still significant gaps in provision including introductory support to the basic concepts and tools of social innovation (including business modelling, prototyping, service design, theory of chance and more innovate finance options) and more intensive support to help promising innovations scale. We have also repeatedly heard that people find the current provision hard to navigate, with much support limited to particular geographies or sectors. As many support programmes are funded through short term funding, there is also a need to establish sustained funding streams if the progress to date is to be embedded.

“ The [social innovation] support sector is disparate and either has selective criteria or isn't well known outside its own networks so accessibility is a problem.

FUNDER

We recommend that: 11) commissioners and providers (including the NI Executive and local councils) undertake a collaborative review to identify how non-financial support can be sustained and enhanced, ensuring support is complimentary and identifying how gaps in provision can be filled. This could be an early product of Social Innovation NI.

...COMMISSIONERS AND PROVIDERS SHOULD UNDERTAKE A COLLABORATIVE REVIEW TO IDENTIFY HOW NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT CAN BE SUSTAINED AND ENHANCED.

NORTHERN IRELAND'S SOCIAL FINANCE OFFER HAS FIRM FOUNDATIONS AND IS STARTING TO GROW, NOW IS THE TIME TO TAKE A MORE PLANNED APPROACH...

For social innovation ecosystems to thrive they need a range of funding and investment options to support the supply of different types and stages of innovation.⁴⁰ Though Northern Ireland's Social Innovation Finance sector has many strengths and has grown in recent years^{**}, it is still underdeveloped compared to leading regions and it is under pressure from austerity. However the infrastructure is developing all the time and the goodwill and commitment is firmly established.

Mature social innovation finance systems have a range of grants for different stages of development, loans for those who are confident in their ability to generate income and venture philanthropy for innovators who want a financier who will also be a partner in their work. Globally social investment funds are also making an increasing contribution - providing repayable finance to innovations that have real potential to scale and produce future returns to the fund.⁴¹

“ We need mixed models for investment, including grant and loan finance.

UK FUNDER

In Northern Ireland the sector is dominated by a small number of well-established organisations, including public sector (primarily government departments, councils, SEUPB and the

Housing Executive), independent grant funders (including the Big Lottery Fund, UnLtd and Community Foundation NI) and social investors (including UCit and Charity Bank). Further funds are also now being rolled out including the Housing Executive's Social Housing Enterprise Scheme and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's new Health and Social Care Innovation Grant Scheme.

We need to attract wider sources of funding and investment into the market. This includes increasing the engagement of UK wide organisations that have a Northern Ireland remit^{††} as well as encouraging Northern Ireland based public, private and independent funders and investors to do more to finance social innovation.

“ If foundations want the UK remit to mean anything then they need to get on a plane and go over there [to Northern Ireland]. Find out more about the place, the networks, and the connections. Northern Ireland has good networks; it isn't difficult to find good stuff on the ground. UK FUNDER

We recommend that: 12) funders and investors collaborate to address gaps in Northern Ireland's social finance offer, an initial review could be an early product of Social Innovation NI.

...FUNDERS AND INVESTORS SHOULD COLLABORATE TO ADDRESS GAPS IN NORTHERN IRELAND'S SOCIAL INNOVATION FINANCE OFFER.

**

Including for example the NEET Collaboration and Innovation Fund, Social Housing Enterprise Scheme and Health and Social Care Innovation Fund.

††

Key UK wide social finance organisations include: UnLtd, the Big Lottery Fund, Big Society Capital, Big Issue Invest, Clearly So, The Social Investment Business, VentureSum, Access Social Investment, NESTA, Impetus PEF, Bride Ventures and Social Finance.



††

The Community Finance Fund will use £7 million from dormant bank accounts to provide a unique and innovative funding opportunity for social investment in Northern Ireland. It is currently being developed by the Big Lottery Fund on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive.

THERE IS A MISSING MIDDLE IN THE FINANCE OPTIONS AVAILABLE THAT IS HOLDING BACK INNOVATIONS THAT COULD SCALE...

At different stages of their growth social innovations need different levels of finance. In Northern Ireland, as with other parts of the UK and Ireland, there is a significant gap in funding for organisations that are trying to sustain and scale their impact.

Early stage innovations - that typically need seed finance up to £50,000 – are reasonably well supported in Northern Ireland by funds from BLE, UnLtd and local councils amongst others, though a stronger range of options would help more ideas to grow (particularly above the £15,000 level).

At the other end of the spectrum established innovations that have been able to start to prove their impact need to focus on developing sustainable income streams from trading, public sector contracts, long-term grant funds or charitable giving etc.

However our research across the UK and in Northern Ireland has found a ‘missing middle’ in financing for organisations making the leap from early stage to scale.⁴² Typically this is the point at which full time staff are needed to implement the new product, service, model or process, but before detailed evidence of impact can be provided to commissioners. This requires more substantial and sometimes

more complex funding including risk capital, which can be elusive.

“As they grow, businesses need smart and sustained grants and loans in the £75,000-200,000 range to fill the “missing middle” of finance.

YOUNG FOUNDATION⁴³

In collaborating to address gaps in Northern Ireland’s social innovation finance offer, funders and investors should prioritize action to fill this gap. One opportunity for public and independent funders and investors to explore is the establishment of one or more social innovation investment funds within the region, combining funds from multiple partners so risk is shared. This model has been increasingly tried and tested across the UK as a way to finance the scaling of social innovation with potential. One opportunity that already exists that could perhaps contribute is the planned £7 million Northern Ireland Community Finance Fund.^{††}

We recommend that: 13) in the above review of gaps in Northern Ireland’s social finance offer priority be given to improving the availability of £75,000-£200,000 options, including through potential investment funds.

...PRIORITY SHOULD BE GIVEN TO IMPROVING THE AVAILABILITY OF £75,000-£200,000 SOCIAL FINANCE OPTIONS.

CROWDFUNDING COULD MAKE A SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE GROWTH OF SOCIAL INNOVATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND...

As austerity bites, many of the traditional sources of funding in Northern Ireland are drying up. However there are a range of proven crowdfunding models that are underused in Northern Ireland. They are certainly not the answer to all social challenges in Northern Ireland, but they can play a supporting role, for commissioners as well as social innovators themselves.

“As it gets harder to secure public funding, innovators will need to look to other sources of funding and investment, such as crowd-sourcing. DETI 2015

Crowdfunding is one of the fastest growing alternative finance models in the UK.⁴⁴ It directly raises funding and investment from citizens and organisations. It includes a range of options including those that raise equity, loans, rewards and community shares.⁴⁵ These models have significant advantages as they bring new funds into the sector whilst also building community backing that can be of equal importance in ensuring the success of an innovative service or product.

Commercial firms in Northern Ireland are already starting to have real success

with this strategy, including notable examples like Brewbot and Newtownards bike light firm.⁴⁶ Whilst crowdfunding is not for everyone, there are now countless example across the UK showing it can be successfully used to get a wide range of social innovations going⁴⁷. Take up of crowdfunding to help meet social needs in Northern Ireland has been slow to date, but the potential is there.

Advice on setting up community shares in Northern Ireland is available from Cooperative Alternatives.⁴⁸ However high quality advice on other crowdfunding options is currently hard to find in Northern Ireland.

We recommend that: 14)

Commissioners and funders invest in sustained practical support to help innovators take up crowdfunding models. One or more dedicated advice services (with a role providing direct support to social innovators as well as building the capacity of existing support providers to provide advice in this area) could make a real difference. This work could be led by the Social Innovation Working Group.

...COMMISSIONERS AND FUNDERS SHOULD INVEST IN SUSTAINED PRACTICAL SUPPORT TO HELP INNOVATORS TAKE UP CROWDFUNDING MODELS.



FACILITATING THE SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND'S SOCIAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM TO THRIVE WE NEED TO ENSURE IDEAS, INSIGHTS AND EXPERTISE ARE SHARED ACROSS THE REGION...

The flow of insights and ideas is the life-blood of innovation. Just as natural ecosystems become parched and barren without water, social innovation ecosystems dry up if knowledge stops flowing. The most creative societies have open flows of ideas across organisations, sectors and communities.

There is much to be optimistic about here. In 2015 Northern Ireland had the second fastest growing regional Knowledge Economy (KE) index in the UK for the second year running⁴⁹. The two Northern Ireland universities and further education colleges have a strong record of supporting knowledge transfer across the region. Dublin City University is supporting social innovation across Ireland including through its partnership with Ashoka. Bodies such as the Building Change Trust, Young Foundation, NICVA, Social Enterprise NI, Invest NI and NI Science Park Connect are all playing an active role. The NI Executive's public sector Innovation Lab and Social Innovation Working Group are also contributing. Festivals like Imagine and Culture Tech bring vibrancy. There are also some well-established knowledge transfer mechanisms

including Invest NI's Innovation Vouchers and Knowledge Transfer Programmes.⁵⁰

Combined these activities are reaching a wide audience across sectors. Take up suggests there is clear demand for more high quality opportunities for people to engage in shared learning. However we have also heard repeatedly during our research that current opportunities to network and share knowledge for social innovation are fragmented, hard to navigate and sporadic. The development of Social Innovation NI provides a unique opportunity to address this.

“**Tech guys can create platforms but they miss the content. You need to connect [them with the social sector]. But the problem is they never meet and they don't speak the same language. If they can't know each other's needs they won't come together to work together.**

TECH SECTOR REPRESENTATIVE

We recommend that: 15) Partners in NI collaborate through Social Innovation NI to build and market a complimentary range of knowledge sharing opportunities that engage people across all sectors and parts of the community.

...PARTNERS IN NI SHOULD COLLABORATE THROUGH SOCIAL INNOVATION NI TO DEVELOP AND MARKET A COMPLIMENTARY SET OF PLATFORMS, NETWORKS AND HUBS THAT ENABLE PEOPLE TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION.

NORTHERN IRELAND'S LINKS WITH THE WIDER WORLD ARE ONE OF ITS STRENGTHS, WE NEED TO BUILD ON THESE TO ENSURE NEW KNOWLEDGE KEEPS FLOWING INTO THE REGION...

Northern Ireland has many strengths but our ability to create new solutions to the challenges we face will always be limited if we do not ensure the flow of new ideas, insights, experience and technologies from the wider world. Northern Ireland also has much knowledge to share with the wider world, so this flow can and always should be reciprocal.

“**It comes down to a lack of exposure. When you see ideas you can tweak them to fit to something else. In Northern Ireland it's a density issue, not a smart issue.** TECH SECTOR INTERVIEWEE

Many of Northern Ireland's challenges are shared with other regions. Issues like entrenched inequalities, an ageing population, rising prevalence of long-term health conditions and the need to improve outcomes for young people are a focus of social innovation in much of world.⁴⁰ The opportunities to share ideas and learning with other regions are substantial. The good news is that for a region of its size Northern Ireland has remarkable international networks, many of which have been built up through peace building, as a by-product of past emigration region and through the long history of overseas scholarship programmes. Over recent years Invest NI has led a strong focus on connecting the region's commercial sector globally and both universities have strong international networks. However, this connection with the wider world has not yet been systematically capitalised on to support social innovation.

Our work at the Young Foundation has highlighted an opportunity to build a

shared social innovation learning platform with regions that have a common commitment to using social innovation to address social inequalities. These regional connections, alongside global involvement with organisations such as Social Innovation Exchange (SIX) and TEPsIE (Theoretical, Empirical and Policy foundations for developing the field of Social Innovation in Europe) will place Northern Ireland in a dynamic position to learn and collaborate with others regions about social innovation.

As highlighted in the four provocations set out in Part 3 of this report, there is both an urgent need and real potential to develop social innovations to address inequalities in Northern Ireland. This is a mission shared with many regions around the world including Montreal, the Basque Country, the Leeds city region, Scotland and Wales. The opportunity exists for Northern Ireland to be a lead partner in this work, securing inward investment and building another aspect of the regions global presence. There are potentially significant EU funds to support this kind of initiative as well as real interest from a number of independent trusts and foundations around the world. This could include designating this platform as a 'What Works' centre for community innovation. What Works is a UK government-led initiative to enable organisations across all sectors to access independent, high quality, accessible evidence on effective ways to meet social needs.⁵¹ To date centres have been established in England, Scotland and Wales but not in Northern Ireland.

...PARTNERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND SHOULD COLLABORATE WITH OTHER CITIES AND REGIONS IN THE UK AND BEYOND TO ESTABLISH A SHARED LEARNING PLATFORM FOCUSED ON USING SOCIAL INNOVATION TO REDUCE INEQUALITY.

PART 3

FOCUSING ON NICHEs SHOWING PROMISE

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Our findings are also backed up by the MATRIX panel (Northern Ireland Science Industry Panel), which has identified sectors that are critical to growing the Northern Ireland economy (including life and health sciences; advanced engineering; advanced materials; telecoms; ICT; sustainable energy; and agri-food). These area areas are identified as potentially having an impact on improving youth outcomes and supporting health and wellbeing. See: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) (Roger Warnock) "Harnessing the Power of Social Innovation to Drive the Northern Ireland Economy" (2014)

THERE ARE ALREADY AREAS WITHIN THE NORTHERN IRELAND'S SOCIAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM WHERE NEW IDEAS ARE FLOURISHING...

Achieving the social change needed in Northern Ireland can seem overwhelming. There are many urgent social issues vying for attention and resources. It can be hard to know where to start. We believe that an initial focus on innovation within areas that are already showing promise can help build momentum across society more broadly.

Our research has highlighted a number of areas within Northern Ireland's social innovation ecosystem where there is already strong demand (both in terms of social needs and willingness to pay for new solutions) and good supply (with an increasing emergence of new innovations). By focusing on nurturing innovation within these areas, and the niches within them we can demonstrate the value innovation can bring. This will prove potential to commissioners, funders and investors and inspire many more social innovators to put new ideas into practice across a wider range of social challenges.

In the next section we have highlighted four of these areas, providing a short provocation intended to inspire people to take action to develop and support new social innovations in each. The four areas we have identified are innovation to:

- **Improve outcomes for young people**
- **Tackle poverty and debt**
- **Reduce inequalities in health**
- **Increase employment of disadvantaged people**

This is not intended to be a definitive. We have seen real potential and dynamism in each of these areas but there will be others that show similar promise. In each of the areas we have highlighted there is already a tremendous amount of goodwill and positive intention, along with investment, to tackle each of these issues. There are success stories and they should be lauded and learnt from. But the fact remains that each of these areas is in need of bold, creative, imaginative and deliverable ideas that will provoke deeply transformative and sustainable outcomes.⁵⁶

We encourage people and organisations across all parts of society to actively explore how they can contribute to social innovation in each of these four areas. We also encourage funders and investors to seize the opportunities they present by targeting specific innovation funding and support in each area.

...BY NURTURING SOCIAL INNOVATION IN EACH OF THESE AREAS WE CAN DEMONSTRATE WHAT IS POSSIBLE, INSPIRING WIDER ACTION.

Northern Ireland's young people are resilient, energetic and passionate. However many also face an uncertain future. Despite strong efforts to improve outcomes, at school, in training and in accessing work too many young people are struggling to achieve the future they aspire to. This lack of opportunity is impacting profoundly on their confidence, self-esteem and perceptions of what is possible.

TOO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND FACE AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE...

HALF OF THOSE⁵²
ELIGIBLE FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS
DON'T GET FIVE GOOD GCSES

1 IN 5⁵³ ARE NOT IN
16-24 YEAR OLDS EDUCATION
EMPLOYMENT
OR TRAINING

TWO OF YOUNG⁵⁴
THIRDS PEOPLE WANT TO
BUILD THEIR FUTURE OUTSIDE
OF NORTHERN IRELAND

1 IN 10⁵⁵ FEEL THEY
YOUNG PEOPLE CAN'T COPE
WITH DAY TO DAY LIFE

...WE NEED NEW IDEAS THAT HELP MORE YOUNG PEOPLE TO SUCCEED IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

Jade's Story

Shining a light on youth outcomes

IF I HAD TO DESCRIBE MYSELF IN FIVE WORDS, I'D SAY: GIRL, NO-JOB, FUNNY, DRINK, STUPID



THE THINGS THAT STAND IN MY WAY

I need to get out of my place and get a house. Our place has no room; I share with two of my sisters Imagine! We trail the hair off each other. I need to get out or I will end up like everyone else. But every time I try to get a job they want experience.

I've done loads of those youth work courses but there's no youth work jobs. That's what everyone wants to be but I don't know what else I could do. I wish I tried harder in school but you just think you're going to be like you're family and that's it so no point in trying. But now I think I could be different, but maybe I got that too late.

WHERE I GET A HELPING HAND

My old youth worker helps but she works with loads of people too. My friends probably help the most out of everyone - we look out for each other. My family would help me if they could but they can't.

MY DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

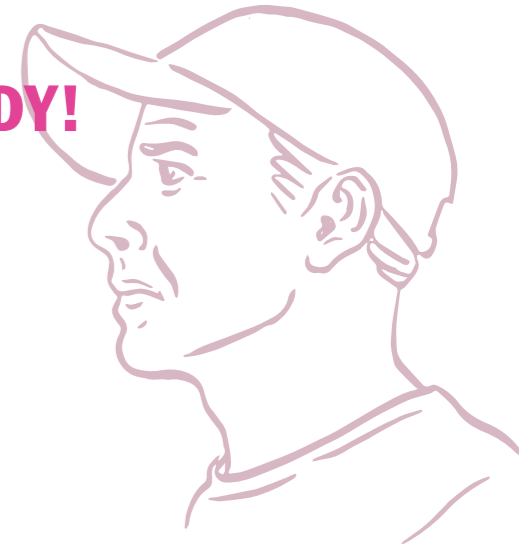
I want kids. I want to be a mummy. I'd like a nice, gorgeous husband who worked and looked after us - but I want to work too. I want to do something different. Something that people from round here don't do.

I'd like a nice house - nothing too big, it doesn't have to be in a fancy area - sure they wouldn't like me there anyway - just something that fits us so my kids don't have to share and we can have some privacy.

Ryan's Story

Shining a light on youth outcomes

I'M GONNA BE A DADDY!



THE THINGS THAT STAND IN MY WAY

I'm clean, I finally got off drugs - it was really hard and I put my family through hell - I've been arrested so many times and spent too long in jail.

I've been clean for seven months now and I never thought I would be able to say that. I have a full time job finally - it was so difficult to get one, but someone has taken a chance on me and I won't let them down.

Everyone told me I was a waste of space and I would end up like my Da - in jail, good for nothing. But I'm having a child, I really don't want to be like him - I want that child to grow up good and without drugs and mayhem like I did. I don't want the child growing up on the interface.

WHERE I GET A HELPING HAND

I got help from Tell it in Colour and Yeha project - they counselled me through my drug issues and Tell it in Colour sat with me in court and in the jail. Who else would do that? I knew I wasn't alone and someone believed in me. Even when I kept making mistakes they were there.

MY DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

Nothing really stands in my way now - just the police constantly stopping me and things! My future dream is being a brilliant daddy.

A NEW WAVE OF SOCIALLY INNOVATIVE IDEAS ARE ALREADY STARTING TO EMERGE ...

Resurgence Academy

The Resurgence Academy aims to equip young people to lead new enterprises. It is a partnership between Holywell Trust, Boom Hall, the Eden Project (Cornwall) and the Nerve Centre.

Building on work in Finland and Spain, they are establishing a new model of training in Derry/ Londonderry.

This model/methodology was born in 1993 in a small town in central Finland. At its heart is a qualification with no classrooms, no lectures, and no exams. Teams of students are formed and given the task of developing real businesses which will generate income. The students learn finance, marketing, leadership and strategy.

NEET Youth Forum

The NEET Strategy Forum gives young people a leading role in ensuring all young people in NI can access employment, education or training.

The Forum is a collective of over 80 third sector organisations and affiliated statutory member organisations. They are seeking to scale their impact by providing leading expertise in the improvement of services for NEET young people to all parts of the public sector in NI (including the NI Executive and councils) as well as employers.

They are exploring how young people can become experts in service design so they can sell their expertise back to public, voluntary organisations and private sector employers.

R City

R City is a project between Hammer and Ardoyne Youth Clubs, seeking to enhance the growth and development of the YP who become part of the programme.

They enhance community relations by getting young people to be the driving force behind breaking the trend. They deliver a community café, leadership programme, accredited courses and cross-community activities. They deliver mentoring and progression opportunities and deliver R City news, focusing on year 1 and 2 to develop intergenerational workshops.

...A FOCUS ON SUPPORTING AND INVESTING IN INNOVATION OF THIS KIND CAN MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE TO THE LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

WE NEED NEW SOLUTIONS THAT IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Northern Ireland has a long tradition of influential youth work that has helped secure peace across the region. But despite strong efforts there are still many deep-rooted challenges in addressing the needs of young people. High levels of youth unemployment and low levels of wellbeing are particularly challenging.

“ There’s a major lack of opportunity for the young, particularly in larger estates on the edge of the city. There’s also a lack of creativity in education to build confidence and self-esteem – is it about stones or acorns? **DERRY/LONDONDERRY, PEACE AND RECONCILIATION FACILITATOR**

Social innovation to improve youth outcomes needs focus and investment. The examples above have benefited from accelerator programmes that provide guidance and support. In addition, we need to create an environment that is open and conducive to other potential innovations in this space. Notably, there is recognition from funders that this needs to go beyond the current model to embrace more imaginative approaches. There is also a particular need for more collaboration, with providers joining up to combine their strengths.

“ We need to encourage more creative thinking. I’d like there to be more acknowledgment that sustainable employment and youth shouldn’t just be about become fixated with community cafes and catering.

No disrespect – the people who are doing this are doing it well. But it’s become a bit of a norm. We need to look up and out. That niche is already popular. **UK FUNDER**

“ Businesses find it frustrating because they are getting multiple requests for involvement in similar work. They see some young people churning through training programme. Nobody wants to share. **BUSINESS SECTOR REPRESENTATIVE**

Our research uncovered the following areas where new innovations could have the potential to enthuse young people, generating jobs and a greater sense of purpose:

- A focus on digital communications, technology, computing and engineering (as demonstrated by Interactive Ink, above)
- Investment in social entrepreneurship programmes with no entry barriers (such as Team Academy).

“ There could be more innovations around digital technology, given the skill sets we have here and at the Science Park. I’m pleased with the concept that they will concentrate more on computing and engineering in Derry. We need a critical mass here – we spend a fortune educating children to the end of secondary school and then expect them to leave.

BUSINESS LEADER

TACKLING POVERTY AND DEBT

Northern Ireland is united by deep resilience, overflowing spirit and true grit. Yet for many people and families, there are uphill struggles to juggle finances and manage debt. Too often people are making choices between the essentials of life: keeping the cupboards stocked, the house warm and the children clothed. Despite intensive investment, deprivation gaps have not closed over recent years.

TOO MANY PEOPLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND ARE STRUGGLING TO GET BY...

1 IN 5 ARE LIVING IN ⁵⁶
PEOPLE POVERTY

300,000 LESS THAN ⁵⁷
PEOPLE HAVE £100
INCOMES OF PER WEEK

42% OF HOUSEHOLDS ARE ⁵⁸
IN FUEL POVERTY

20% HIGHER ⁵⁹
LEVELS OF PERSONAL DEBT
IN NORTHERN IRELAND THAN REST OF THE UK

...WE NEED TO FIND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS THAT HELP PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY AND DEBT.

Michelle's story

Shining a light on fuel poverty

I'M 39. I AM A MOTHER OF 5 CHILDREN. I'M FROM A PROTESTANT BACKGROUND.

I'm married but my husband doesn't live with me – he suffers from a severe bipolar mental health condition.

THE THINGS THAT STAND IN MY WAY

It's a constant struggle. I could never be able to afford to buy a tank of oil. All we have is an open fire and coal is really the only thing I can afford. We struggle to manage with one bag of coal a day. A bag of coal is £7.50 and that would not last a day if I lit it in the morning. I can't afford £50 a week for coal so a bag has to do me at least two days. The house is cold all day until around 4 when it heats up. I keep my dressing gown on all the time when I'm here on my own.

My oven blew up on Christmas Eve and I can't afford to replace it even though I budget well with the rest. What do you do with these unexpected bills? I had to take the wee turkey to my sister's house to get it cooked. I can budget to survive every day but I cannot budget when anything like this goes wrong.

My husband is mostly in hospital or away from us. Bipolar is a terrible illness.

It's emotionally hard on me, and the wee ones, but he has nobody except us. Just before Christmas he wanted to die. I'm not bitter though. My heart still loves him.

WHERE I GET A HELPING HAND

My friends and family help me out. My friend got us some coal for Christmas and it was the best thing ever. My sister who hasn't much either got me a haircut; I can't afford it normally.

MY DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

The children are doing well despite it all but if they weren't there I couldn't go on. I want to make a life for them. You have to get up in the morning and smile for them. They are good wee ones – I'm so lucky to have them. But they do without a lot. I'm trying to keep up and get on with it for the children and trying to get into work. I did a course on caring and I'd love to work part-time.

Fiona's story

Shining a light on poverty and debt

I'M A SINGLE MOTHER OF THREE YOUNG CHILDREN. MY HUSBAND GOT US INTO A MOUNTAIN OF DEBT.

I was summoned and then evicted from the marital home after a High Court Order.

THE THINGS THAT STAND IN MY WAY

Being in debt has affected my whole family. My parents have tried to help me out but they suffered trauma when they tried to rescue the situation and my father ended up having a heart attack. The second property where I operate my own business is also under threat of re-possession from the bank. This will all take time to resolve.

I was coming from a different world with money to one where I had to ask for help. This was a huge step to take. It's taken time to understand how the children were under stress and I've had to gain a broader knowledge of how to deal with the children as they're estranged from their father during the week.

WHERE I GET A HELPING HAND:

The Devenish project has helped by providing additional days for the children in the homework club. The homework

club leaders have been like social workers. It's been a lifeline. It's meant that I wasn't doing it on my own. They sourced counselling for the children at school and they found me a parenting course through Women's Aid through their 'helping hands for victims of domestic abuse' – in my case it was financial abuse. But it's been more than just a homework club – it's their understanding, their endearment, it's all their interventions.

MY DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

I want the children to be able to open up. They can do that through football and the lessons at the club. I know I've got somewhere to go now which will source help where we need it. I know that support will be there with me in the struggles ahead.



A NEW WAVE OF SOCIALLY INNOVATIVE IDEAS ARE ALREADY STARTING TO EMERGE ...

EnerGenius

EnerGenius is a revolutionary new Energy Management System aimed at driving down full poverty for low-income families. It actively interprets the energy data generated in a household, making it easier to reduce costs as well as charting progress over time and giving comparison to similar homes. They provide tenants with actionable insights into their energy costs, and simple and efficient control of their central heating/domestic hot water systems. They are now looking to work with social landlords to embed their technology into affordable housing.

ReStore

ReStore is the low cost DIY store that sells donated new and used building supplies and home improvement materials at 50-75% of the normal retail price, as well as donated and onsite up-scaled furniture. It is the first of its kind in Europe and aims to:

- Serve the local community by helping families to improve their homes for less.
- Divert tons of re-useable material from landfill, helping to build a more sustainable Northern Ireland.
- Provide training and mentoring opportunities to increase employability, enhance skills and alleviate isolation.
- The first store in Lisburn is going well and they are seeking to extend the model across NI with several viable locations already in the pipeline.

Social Supermarkets

The Bryson Group is looking to establish a network of social supermarkets/community shops that sell food and other household goods at reduced prices to low income/vulnerable individuals, and redistribute waste and surplus food.

As well, they provide a range of other services such as income management/debt advice, budgeting, cooking and training/employment skills.

...A FOCUS ON SUPPORTING AND INVESTING IN SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN THIS AREA CAN HELP LIFT PEOPLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND OUT OF POVERTY

WE NEED NEW SOLUTIONS THAT HELP PEOPLE LIFT THEMSELVES OUT OF POVERTY

People in Northern Ireland have always found ingenious ways to get by. We need to harness this ingenuity to generate and grow social innovations that allow people to lift themselves out of poverty and debt. Northern Ireland has a strong history of innovation in this field, including world leading work in developing credit unions.

“The people on wages are struggling too. Everyone is budgeting. It's oil stamps, electric stamps, phone stamps – people are doing all this before they even buy food. They are budgeting for their bills first.” **POST OFFICE WORKER, ENNISKILLEN**

Many people feel powerless to change their circumstances. Despite the hardships and tough times people in our communities are rallying together to ensure that those most in need get help. There are promising examples of innovations that are leading the way in this area. They will need sustained investment, support and political buy in to increase their impact. We know that there is no ‘quick fix’ and that poverty is also inextricably linked to countless other social challenges. But that makes it no less important to endeavour to seek out innovations in this area.

“Tackling fuel poverty is tricky because it's more about the individual and less about community. Although energy efficiency through group power is interesting – there may be an area within that. It needs more co-ordination.” **UK FUNDER**

In addition, strategies are needed to encourage cross-pollination of ideas and greater collaboration across and between sectors (particularly between the private and third sectors).

“We need more cross mentoring – i.e. engaging the private sector and a diverse

set of people. At the moment we have a pretty standard group of people who get involved.

UK FUNDER

Our research uncovered the following additional area areas where new innovations could have the potential to redress high levels of poverty.

- **Sharing:** Globally the sharing economy is taking off with digital technology allowing people to easily share their homes, cars and computers. There are many assets within poor communities that could be shared to bring more value to everyone.
- **Energy:** Energy costs are a primary driver of poverty in Northern Ireland, yet we also have a rich resource of wind power. Co-operative energy models and initiatives to tackle fuel poverty, collective purchasing and energy sharing all offer possibilities to bring down costs.
- **Regeneration:** Place-based regeneration and refurbishment is already underway in some areas, but there are many opportunities to extend this.
- **Innovative financial products:** new models of lending and savings schemes could build on the current success of community credit unions.
- **Lower cost retail:** All efforts that reduce costs for low income households can make a huge difference. Yet many low cost options also come with high stigma or are of low quality. There is a need for options that maintain quality, are non-stigmatised and yet also low cost, from groceries, to household goods, to clothing, to dining out.

Recent decades have seen major advances in health in Northern Ireland. People are living longer than ever before and deaths from most major diseases have reduced markedly. Yet despite these advances, the stark inequalities in health and wellbeing that exist have not reduced. People from Northern Ireland's less affluent communities are still more likely to become ill, to die young and to live more of their life in ill health, both physically and mentally. The cost on the public purse is high – estimated at £175 million each year. The cost in lost human potential may be even higher.

THERE ARE STARK INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN NORTHERN IRELAND...

PEOPLE IN THE MOST DEPRIVED AREAS HAVE POORER HEALTH THAN THOSE IN THE LEAST DEPRIVED AREAS:⁶⁰

3 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO COMMIT SUICIDE

2 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO HAVE A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION

4 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DIE FROM AN ALCOHOL RELATED CONDITION

13 YEARS LESS OF HEALTHY LIFE EXPECTANCY

...WE NEED TO DEVELOP NEW SOLUTIONS THAT CAN HELP CLOSE THIS GAP.

Sean's story

Shining a light on mental wellbeing

I'M 47 AND SINGLE. I'M FROM A ROMAN CATHOLIC BACKGROUND.

I'm unemployed but I do a lot of unpaid work caring for my mother who has a serious neurological disease.

THE THINGS THAT STAND IN MY WAY

My mum's eyesight is very poor and she has severe peripheral neuropathy so can fall easily. She fell two years ago and shattered her femur. She suffered from depression for most of her life. She doesn't sleep well at night and has frequent nightmares. I get little sleep and this plays on me in physical and psychological ways. It's not easy.

WHERE I GET A HELPING HAND

My sisters are good and help but it's me who has to be there all the time. The only thing I get is a one-off carer's grant of £150 per year usually around October or November not to be used for alcohol or clothes. I could get a full carers allowance but it would affect her benefits. I'm caught in the middle as my mum owns the house

and has a reasonable pension and tax credits. The house will pass to me someday but if I go for any benefit we would lose the house and it was the family home, modest as it is. I have a roof over my head and I get some peace of mind that my mother is being taken care of properly.

MY DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

Being a carer takes its toll on my private life or independence and any thoughts of a future or a social life. It's hard but that's my life. Anyway I'm not too sure that if I wasn't looking after mum, I'd be doing anything otherwise. There doesn't seem to be much work here. Most of my age-range are unemployed or if they are employed – they are away out of here. At least I know mum is safe.

Lauren's story

Shining a light on mental wellbeing

MUM, SISTER, WORRIED, TIRED, NOTHING SPECIAL.

THE THINGS THAT STAND IN MY WAY

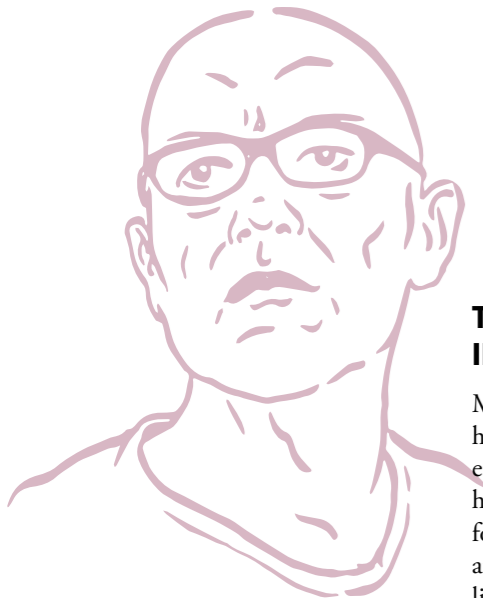
Even if I want to do something to help myself, or others, I can't because you can't do anything in this community without someone having a problem with it. They all know I have mental issues, so if I want to do something they laugh it off as being crazy. I'm sure no one thought that man that invented Facebook was crazy but if I thought that up they would. I don't know where to start. One day I feel like things are getting better and the next they aren't, I can't keep track of my own thoughts.

WHERE I GET A HELPING HAND

My family are all I have, my daughters and my sisters. Women stick together. I couldn't leave the house without them; I wouldn't eat without them. Actually I'd die without them.

MY DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

I hope that I can feel normal, that leaving the house won't seem so hard. That I'll feel more confident and able to live life. I want to give back to my family, maybe get a job and buy them some nice presents. To prove to people that I'm good.



A NEW WAVE OF SOCIALLY INNOVATIVE IDEAS ARE ALREADY STARTING TO EMERGE ...

CLARE CIC

CLARE is a community led project that enables vulnerable adults to maximize their independence and lead socially connected lives by working together to develop creative solutions that will change lives for the better.

They connect older people to services and resources that will improve their quality of life.

Employers for Childcare

Employers for Childcare aim, through the provision of childcare, to reduce the inequality for parents of children with additional needs.

The service is specifically matched according to the circumstances of the family, and would take place within the familiar surroundings of the family home.

They provide early intervention support to parents alongside the childcare, which relates to their mental wellbeing and enables them to improve their personal and family development.

The NI Assisted Living Centre

The vision for the Assisted Living Centre is a Derry/Londonderry based innovation, research and training hub that will lead the way in developing new models of service for people with health and disability issues across NI and beyond.

The centre will research and incubate new models of care/independent living technologies and act as a centre of excellence for training for independent living. They are also exploring an alternative pathway of support for end of life care.

...A FOCUS ON SUPPORTING AND INVESTING IN INNOVATIONS OF THIS KIND CAN HELP ENSURE GOOD HEALTH AND WELLBEING FOR ALL IMPROVE.

WE NEED NEW SOLUTIONS THAT TACKLE INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH AND MENTAL WELLBEING

Northern Ireland has an innovative health and wellbeing sector with many strengths. This includes the network of Healthy Living Centres, the Connected Health Innovation Centre, the integrated nature of our Health and Social Care Trusts and Belfast's long standing membership of the World Health Organisation Healthy Cities Network. We need to harness these assets to tackle the deep rooted inequalities in health and wellbeing across the region.

“The health sector is an area ripe for innovation - it has huge untapped potential, particularly for early intervention. It could be technology or other innovation which could have huge ripple effects. **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE EXPERT**

This is a field that many people in Northern Ireland care deeply about. Successful innovations that speak to an area that resonates with so many citizens are likely to receive widespread support and financial backing. But early stage innovations need continued support and investment if they are to reach their true potential. The innovation examples above are just some of the projects that are already developing new solutions in this space.

The NI Executive is currently consulting on a new Health and Social Care Innovation Fund to be launched in summer 2016.

This presents a unique opportunity to accelerate innovation in the sector.

“Health Innovation fund needs to not take the safe route; it could take a risk with some smaller organisations. **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE EXPERT**

Collaborations in this area are also particularly important, between geographical areas and across similar organisations.

“You can have impact by matching up with likeminded organisations - it adds to sustainability and growth. **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE HUB REPRESENTATIVE**

Our research has also uncovered the following areas where new innovations could have the potential to enhance health and wellbeing for a greater number of people:

- **End of life care:** is becoming increasingly pressing as our population ages;
- **Healthy living:** Diabetes, obesity, poor diet, physical inactivity and alcohol are becoming the major killers and causes of poor health.
- **Digital technology:** (including commercial opportunities, digital health and home care)

The number of people excluded from work in Northern Ireland is causing serious harm to the society and economy. This burden is felt most strongly by some of the most vulnerable in society. The Northern Ireland Executive has an economic strategy with priorities for sustainable growth and prosperity. But it is an uphill road to climb when figures on unemployment remain high and earnings are stagnating. Few issues have such a profound need for innovation.

EMPLOYMENT RATES IN NORTHERN IRELAND ARE BELOW THE REST OF THE UK...

EMPLOYMENT RATES IN NORTHERN IRELAND⁶¹ ARE WELL BELOW THE REST OF THE UK:

5% LOWER OVERALL

12% **LOWER FOR** **16-25**
YEAR OLDS

15% **LOWER FOR** **DISABLED**
PEOPLE

12% **LOWER FOR** **LONE**
PARENTS

...WE NEED TO CREATE INNOVATIVE WAYS TO HELP DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE INTO WORK.

Terry's story

Shining a light on being out of work

I'M 49 YEARS OLD, I'M FROM A PROTESTANT BACKGROUND AND I'M UNEMPLOYED. IT'S A HORRIBLE FEELING BEING UNEMPLOYED.

I can't put it more simply than that. During the early 80s when I left school I had steady employment in one of the factories but then I ended up in prison from 1989 to 1991 for political offences. When I came out of jail I was unemployed but I was anxious to get back to the educational system so in 1992 I went back to college. I got a grant for three years to go to university so I didn't have to sign on. I came out in 1998 with a First in History and English from Coleraine. I loved the study. But by 1999 I was back 'on the brew' [receiving unemployment benefits].

THE THINGS THAT STAND IN MY WAY

I came down in 2013 with severe trauma and I know myself and from talking to others that it was the long-term unemployment that brought it on. Because I want to work, I hate being on the brew. My family told me to go on the sick but I didn't want to do this as I want to work and I didn't want to give in to it but it did cripple me mentally. I spent a lot of my day in bed looking at the ceiling, applying for jobs and not even getting an interview, thinking about my age and would I ever get work again. Unemployment is soul destroying, you feel like you're a burden, a sponge.

WHERE I GET A HELPING HAND

I live a very frugal life, which helps, and I can really cut back to survival mode. But you know, for me, being unemployed isn't really about the money, its having nothing to get up for in the morning. It's in our family to work very hard. It might be a Protestant work ethic. Any job I had I gave it 100% - it doesn't matter whether I'm lifting big bales of cloth or writing an article, I will give it my all.

MY DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

I just want to give back and get out of this horrible feeling.



The O'Shea family's story

Shining a light on being unemployed

WE HAVE LIVED IN KILMACORMICK, ENNISKILLEN FOR 40 YEARS. I'VE WORKED IN THE BUILDING TRADE.

The last job I had was building the new acute hospital three years ago. My wife helps out with the grandchildren.

THE THINGS THAT STAND IN MY WAY

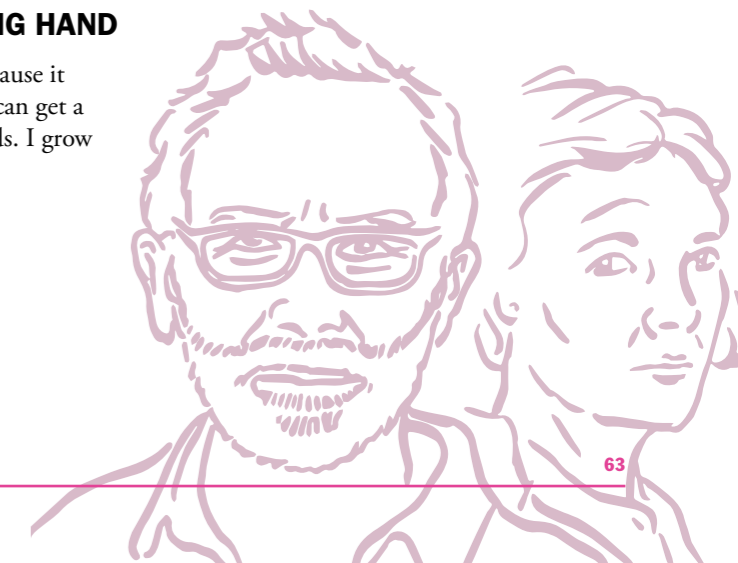
Since the hospital build there has been nothing. Many of the construction and tradespeople have 'pulled the pin' and headed off as there's little here. Most young people are heading away. Any cub (young man) that has a good trade behind him will leave to find work as there is none here.

WHERE I GET A HELPING HAND

I go down to the allotments because it gives me something to do. You can get a wee allotment from £30 onwards. I grow all sorts of vegetables in there.

OUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

The grandchildren keep us going. We are always running here and there with the children. Money is tight, but we would love the chance to go on a holiday. The nuns used to help parents with a savings scheme for holidays. We went up to Butlins or took out a self-catering place in Donegal. The savings scheme helped for that.



NEW IDEAS ARE ALREADY HELPING MORE PEOPLE INTO WORK IN NORTHERN IRELAND...

Now Group

The NOW Group is a social enterprise that supports people with barriers to employment and learning into jobs with a future. They provide a range of services that support people with learning difficulties to realise their full potential and change their lives for the better.

Their new social venture is a new social enterprise pottery, providing a range of pottery classes to the public and sale of high end products with a small cafe. NOW Group will offer 24 weekly work placements to adults with barriers to learning, helping them improve their social and employability skills.

The Thinking Cup

The Book Reserve and Thinking Cup are two interlinked social enterprises that specifically employ young parents who have had contact with the justice system, helping them build positive lives for themselves and their family. The model combines a café and retail business (selling second hand books).

They have received seed investment by a range of government departments under the Delivering Social Change initiative and Atlantic Philanthropies. They are now looking to grow the model by establishing outlets across the UK and Ireland. The project is led by Social Indigo.

Specialisterne NI

Specialisterne is an innovative social business concept recognized as the first and foremost example of how people with autism (Autism Spectrum Disorder) can become effectively included in society, and provide valuable, high quality services to their employers.

They work to enable jobs for people with autism and similar challenges through social entrepreneurship, innovative employment models, and a national change in mindset.

The centre will research and incubate new models of care/independent living technologies and act as a centre of excellence for training for independent living. They are also exploring an alternative pathway of support for end of life care.

...BUT MANY MORE ARE NEEDED IF WE ARE TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES WE FACE.

WE NEED NEW SOLUTIONS THAT HELP MORE PEOPLE ACCESS AND SUSTAIN WORK

The number of people excluded from work in Northern Ireland is causing serious harm to our society. One in five homes in Northern Ireland have no one in work.⁶² It is a burden felt most strongly by some of the most vulnerable in society, including young people, people with physical or learning disabilities, single parents, offenders, travelers and people with poor mental or physical health. Few issues have such a profound need for innovation.⁶³

Good quality work is beneficial for most people. It can bring financial independence, higher living standards, improved self-esteem and better health.⁶⁴ It is also good for society. By working, people generate new value. They also spend more (creating demand in the local economy), pay more taxes and cost the state less (in welfare costs, savings in healthcare and social care etc).⁶⁵

More systematic innovation is needed to break down barriers to accessing and sustaining employment, particularly for disadvantaged groups. Job readiness is crucial, but equally important is the establishment of growth sectors and openings in the labour market that provide sustainable employment opportunities.⁶⁶ Achieving these goals requires collective effort across the public, third, private and learning sectors, including with employers and people who are out of work. The projects profiled above are some of the many already leading the way but further innovations are needed.⁶⁷

New solutions are needed that combine one or more of the following aspects:⁶⁸

- **Outreach:** To engage people who are being missed by current approaches
- **Brokerage:** Matching people with opportunities (including specialist services such as Specialisterne)
- **Training and development:** To help people build the skills they need, including 'soft' interpersonal skills as well as support to build the confidence of the most excluded
- **Work placements:** To help people gain experience and overcome past negative histories
- **Health and well-being:** Helping people stay healthy at work or recover and return to work when they do become ill
- **Employer engagement:** Engage directly with employers to understand their skills requirements, broker suitable people with job opportunities and change employer attitudes
- **Retention and progression:** Preventing people from cycling in and out of work
- **Caring:** Helping those with childcare and caring responsibilities to work in the time they do have and afford the support they need to go to work
- **Address financial disincentives:** Ensuring people are better off in work
- **Creating new employment markets:** With strong opportunities existing in Northern Ireland in digital technology, distributed manufacturing, heritage industries, health and social care (including smart technologies), diversification of food production and tourism.

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