

ADVANCED DIPLOMA IN SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Executive Summary

Participants on the Advanced Diploma in Social Enterprise were asked to complete an Evaluation as part of the overall governance of the programme and helped to inform the design of The TRANSFORM Programme.

These are summary findings

<p>What were your initial goals to join the ADSE</p> <p>All respondents had clear objectives for participating on the programme with the main themes being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn more about the Social Economy Sector • Explore new ideas for Social Enterprise • Find out about potential opportunities for expanding current business • Gain new knowledge and skills to help grow the business • Explore social enterprise with more academic rigour and analysis • Increase personal employability • Improve performance in current or future roles • Gain a management qualification
<p>Have your goals changed in any way since you started the ADSE – please specify</p> <p>More than half of the participants indicated that their goals / objectives / expectations had changed as a result of participating on the programme stating that they have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • become more focussed in terms of what can be achieved • ideas for expanding their social enterprise offering • more time to think through the feasibility of their ideas • considered diversification and the potential for franchising <p>Other participants indicated that their goals remained the same but that they</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are still learning and require more time and more content • are more excited about the possibilities being explored
<p>What have been the major benefits that you have experienced since you commenced the programme:</p> <p>1 The content of each module</p> <p>All respondents expressed their appreciation for the modules covered so far. The common themes were;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well structured, comprehensive and the modules flow from one to another • Interesting & informative content as well as stimulating discussions • Providing guidance across important areas of running a social enterprise • Significant learning and the acquisition of new knowledge and skills within a SE context • Opens our eyes to different models and theories and shows how these are applied in practice • The notes and books recommended have been very helpful <p>Specific highlights have been</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the Social Economy Sector and the range of social enterprise structures and associated social enterprise policies • Business Planning and strategic thinking • Marketing and Market Research • Case study materials
<p>2 Other participants on the programme</p> <p>The fact that there are some 20+ participants on these programmes is deemed to be an advantage as this provides students with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to a rich variety of individuals from both similar and other types of social enterprises

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The opportunity for cross fertilisation of ideas through the sharing of experiences and understanding what works and what hasn't in practice. • Peer support and guidance has been very high and appreciated by all participants • A great mix of people which is evidenced through great teamwork • A very enjoyable learning experience with lots of fun along the way
<h3>3 The peer learning sets or site visits</h3>
<p>All participants have expressed very positive feedback for the peer learning experiences and have highlighted the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to real social enterprises in action facing similar problems and finding innovative solutions • Better understanding of the journey from start up through to growth and expansion as well as the need at times to cease some operations and concentrate on the core purpose • Visits have been inspirational both from the people met and the types of social needs being addressed • Great insights and ideas emerging from the interaction with hosts and peers alike • Helps to build up good contacts for possible future collaboration or joint activities • Brings the theory alive • Attending the Conference was highlighted as added value and greatly appreciated
<h3>4 Informal Networking</h3>
<p>This feature of the programme is deemed to be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very important and valuable to the cohort as it provides a support network and the opportunity to share experiences • Very helpful in building team spirit and creating a great rapport across the group • Useful in taking the discussion beyond the classroom • Great added value through informal learning and building a network of contacts <p>A few people found the networking personally difficult at the start but over time have increased their self-confidence and recognise how valuable and necessary this is for their own development</p>
<h3>5 What have you found useful from the assignments</h3>
<p>Many participants have found the assignments difficult and challenging as this is a new experience at this level of academic rigor, however the overall feedback has been positive and the highlights are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A great discipline and has forced us to think strategically and structure ideas through to recommendations • The research has been challenging but has helped to build the skills and knowledge to seek out relevant information, analyse the data and present findings in a logical and cohesive way. • The ability to complete an assignment and the knowledge and skills gained in doing the assignments can be easily transferred to real life projects in the workplace • Provides the opportunity to reinforce the learning, apply the theories and reflect on what this means for us
<h3>What aspects of the programme have you been able to apply to your existing organisation</h3>
<p>All respondents were able to identify opportunities to apply the learning in terms of their personal performance and specific areas of their social enterprise activities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing ideas through better business planning and structured approach • Improved strategic understanding through a better understanding of social enterprise policies, legislation and structures • Improved marketing skills and methodologies including digital / social media strategies
<h3>Have you identified new opportunities in terms of markets, products or services in your existing organisation?</h3>
<p>The majority of participants indicated that even though this is only the midway stage the programme content has 'caused' them to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rethink and re-evaluate their existing products and services • Identify opportunities in 1) New markets 2) New business 3) New collaborations • Cease a number of non-added value or obsolete services • Focus more on existing products and services <p>The other participants indicated that it was too soon for them to see opportunities in their organisation</p>
<h3>Have you identified a new business idea as a result of participating on this programme</h3>

In addition to the points raised above,

- Half of the participants identified that they have identified a new product or service or are looking at additional premises to expand their business portfolio
- The rest of the participants had no comment to make in this section

Participants took the opportunity to make the following comments

- Great appreciation and gratitude to Flax Trust for providing the opportunity to participate on the programme
- Participation on the programme has greatly exceeded their expectations in terms of the practical value and application of the learning.
- The support from the University staff and module presenters has been greatly appreciated by all participants.
- Inputs from the external speakers have been very valuable and helpful as they have dealt with real life examples and what actually happens in practice.
- Access to other opportunities to attend relevant learning opportunities such as the Podiem / MLN masterclasses, The SSEI Social Enterprise Means Business Masterclasses and The DTNI Conference.

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