



Social  
Economy  
4Ces

## 3.1. STATE OF THE ART AND NEEDS ANALYSIS REPORT FOR UK

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### UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL



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Authors	Dr VALERIE FOURNIER Dr GEORGE KOKKINIDIS

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# Part 1: STATE OF THE ART - UK

## 1. SOCIAL ECONOMY IN THE UK

### *Institutional context of social economy in the country*

Social Economy is not a concept extensively used in the UK. Other terms such as that of inclusive economy and social sector appear more prominent and are used to broadly describe a range of social organisations and networks, (e.g. cooperatives, mutuals, charities, associations and trusts). In recent years, there is an attempt to increasingly institutionalise the sector through initiatives such as the “Civil Society Strategy: building a future that works for everyone”<sup>1</sup> policy paper published in 2018. The Civil Society Strategy set out the vision of social enterprises, a notion extensively used in the country by comparison to other national contexts. The Social Economy Alliance<sup>2</sup>, is another example of a collaborative initiative between various SE actors to promote the wider social economy sector. It is an initiative consisting of over 700 organisations (some of which are also partners in our project - COOPUK and SEUK) campaigning for the strengthening of the social economy sector, since 2017. We can also find a number of Higher Education institutions, some of which are under the Ashoka U network (e.g. Glasgow Caledonian and Northampton) committed to have a positive social, environmental, cultural and financial impact at a local, national and international level while adopting “changemaker values” in their internal practices and operations as well as in networking, research and training. Our initial mapping of the Social Economy educational provisions in the UK, however, suggests that there are no educational provisions explicitly related to social economy. The most notable example of Social Economy related project/course was funded by the YSJ-led Erasmus Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) project, lead by York St John University in partnership with University of San Antonio Abad del Cusco (Peru), the Centre for African Studies, University of Oporto (Portugal), Mondragon university (Spain) and Universidad Mayor de San Simon (Bolivia). In some Universities (e.g. University of Northampton) there is a commitment to include across their curriculum a module related to social sector; while most of the existing master-level provisions are focusing on social enterprises and social entrepreneurship (for more details on educational provisions, please see part 3). Our preliminary findings from informal conversations with various social economy actors, suggest a rather limited collaboration between social economy actors and Universities at present, but a strong interest in exploring possible collaborations and developing educational provisions aiming at the promotion of social enterprises and the expansion of the wider social economy.

### *Definition of social economy applied in the country context*

In the UK context, defining social economy is a rather difficult task. Social Sector is more commonly used to describe organisations with a social impact compass. Reference to social enterprises and entrepreneurship, particularly popular among actors and networks self-identifying as SE actors, is a rather slippery concept often used by organisations

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conventionally owned and controlled. We can nevertheless, define the Social Economy or Social Sector to consist of organisations by a set of common values and principles - social purpose, cooperation, local embeddedness, and organisational democracy - but at the same time be mindful of the variations in the degree that these principles are applied or been relevant to some of the self-identified SE actors. Our preliminary research suggests a primary focus on the ends pursued, with emphasis on their social mission; the pursuit of social utility through community, locally embedded development that is respectful of people as well as of the environment. Attention to the means deployed (e.g. democratic and participative management) is not equally unified though. This is also evident in the current educational provisions focusing primarily on social enterprises and entrepreneurship and to a much lesser extent on cooperatives or social economy. This is also evident in the recently formed Social Economy Alliance (2017, p.5) that represents “social enterprises, co-operatives, charities, investors, entrepreneurs, trusts and associations”. We therefore feel that a more open and inclusive definition will be needed in terms of the sort of organisations that can be considered as part of the social sector.

## 2. SOCIAL ECONOMY STUDY PROGRAMMES IN UK

### *Types of educational/training programmes identified*

As suggested above, there are no educational provisions explicitly focusing on social economy. Out of 16 master programmes identified as potentially linked to social economy, the great majority explicitly focuses on social enterprises and entrepreneurship (9 programmes) while some appear to focus more on social innovation (3 programmes), cooperatives (2 programmes) and sustainability (4 programmes). There are also numerous short courses, offering certificate, available in these areas yet for the purpose of this report our focus is on master level programmes, with the exception of a 10 weeks programme offered by the London School of Social Enterprise and Sustainable Economics (LSSE) due to its explicit focus on Cooperatives and Social Enterprises.

### *Focus and thematic content*

As already mentioned, existing educational provisions programmes in the UK focus primarily on social enterprises and entrepreneurship and to a lesser extent on social innovation, sustainability and cooperatives. As most of these programmes are delivered by departments/Schools of Management and/or Business, the curriculum focuses on business-related modules (e.g. Finance, management, marketing). We can perhaps also do a thematic grouping across the Universities offering a programme loosely connected to social economy. Cooperative studies are covered in Sheffield Hallam University and the LSSE. Explicit programmes on Social Innovation offered by the two Ashoka U (University of Northampton and Glasgow Caledonian University) while LSE offers a programme related to Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Sustainability related programmes are available in the University of Cambridge and University of York, while we can note that the programmes at the University of York run either exclusively by the Department of Environment and Geography or jointly with the School of Management. Finally, most of the programmes, as

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we mentioned above, are explicitly focusing on social enterprises and entrepreneurship, focusing on conventional management/business-related courses.

In terms of content, the Master programmes examined, depending on their focus, appear to combine theoretically driven foundational courses (e.g. hybrid economy, social enterprises and entrepreneurship, principles of cooperative and social economy), courses aligned more with management competencies (e.g. finance, marketing, leadership) as well as more transferable skills. Most of these courses also provide opportunities for work-related and project-based courses. For example, the Cooperative Leadership and Social Entrepreneurship course offered at Sheffield Hallam University in collaboration with the Cooperative College and the Sobey School of Business has a more explicit focus on cooperative studies and related themes, while it offers strong opportunities for networking and work-based assignments. In similar fashion, the Social Enterprise programme at Goldsmiths, University of London combines a strong sociologically informed approach to social enterprises studies with opportunities for project-based portfolio.

### *Structure of the study programmes*

All but one of the programmes identified are campus based while most offered both as FT (12 months) or PT (24 months). All programmes are available to university graduates and/or people with relevant experience. There are few programmes explicit designed for executive education (Sheffield Hallam, Cambridge and LSE) delivered as PT between a period of 9 to 36 months. The Cooperative Leadership and Social Entrepreneurship programme offered at Sheffield Hallam University appears to be the longest (36 months) while the Sustainable Business PGCertificate offered at the University of Cambridge is the shortest relevant programme identified (9 months). The Executive MSc in Social Business and Entrepreneurship offered at LSE, is available to students with minimum of 4 years full-time or relevant work experience. All programmes have a relatively conventional structure with a final dissertation or project work while some are more explicit in terms of opportunities offered for interactive and work-based projects, internships and networking.

### *Teaching / Training approach*

All the identified Master courses provide theoretical learning with some offering opportunities for a more practical learning and experience within organisations. Most programmes offer some degree of practical experience, through the development of project portfolios and opportunities for conducting research with SE organisations and/or their own organisations (if applicable). For example, the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship programme at LSE offers the opportunity for international fieldtrips working with NGOs or other SE organisations in developing countries. Hence, most programmes are designed offering opportunities to students to develop not only theoretical knowledge through the taught part of the programme, but also practical knowledge and the chance to network with other students and practitioners in the wider social economy sector. For example students in the Cooperative Leadership and Social Entrepreneurship programme offered at Sheffield Hallam University have the opportunity to connect to students at the Cooperative College and the Sobey School of Business as a result of the partnership between these institutions in the designing and delivery of the course.

### *Involvement of actors of SE*

Despite the reported collaboration in research and training between Universities and SE actors, there is very little collaboration in HE educational programmes. To date, there is very little collaboration between Universities and SE actors in the creation and/or delivery of relevant programmes. social economy in the programmes. It has been noted however that SE actors appear increasingly interesting to explore possibilities for strengthening collaboration with Universities in the designing and delivery of social economy related programmes. Most notable examples of existing educational provisions in collaboration with SE actors are the Cooperative Leadership and Social Entrepreneurship programme delivered by Sheffield Hallam University in collaboration with the Cooperative College (Manchester) and the Sobey School of Business (Halifax, Canada) and the Sustainable Business: Leadership, Innovation and Management delivered by University of York in collaboration with Maastricht University. A new educational programme that involves the collaboration of SE actors and Universities include the graduate programme on Social Enterprises currently in the designing stage by SkylarkWork.

### *Innovative Educational approaches*

Overall, it seems that the most innovative aspects in some of the programmes currently offered in the UK are their work-based and interactive research projects as well as assisting students to develop their own social enterprises. Another innovative aspect of some of these programmes is the 'alternating' mode of delivery that enables students to attend the taught part of the courses for a portion of their time (e.g. intense module delivery within 1-2 weeks and 6 weeks teaching blocks over a 12 months period) while they maintain their employment in a social economy organisation the rest of the time.

## **3. CONCLUSIONS**

On the basis of the review of provisions in the UK, the following lessons can be drawn in terms of the next stage, i.e. the design of the Needs analysis:

- As already discussed, we should have three different targets for the Needs analysis: HEI, organisations within the local economy, and students. But within the student group, it might be worth distinguishing between those who have just graduated, and more mature students who already have work experience in the social economy (and maybe continue working whilst studying)
- Strong interest in more practice-driven courses has been reported in our informal conversations with various SE actors. To present, Social Enterprise UK, Skylark Work, Power2Change and the Skoll Centre have all expressed a strong interest in our project. Other organisations that might be worth approaching for the Needs analysis include the *School for Social Entrepreneurs* and the *Institute of Community Studies*, among others.
- In terms of SE actors' involvement, there is an opportunity to collaborate in a new programme development, currently in the designing stage, by SkylarkWork. The programme is in an embryonic stage but there is an opportunity for us to be involved, if we feel it is appropriate. As the current educational provisions in the UK appear to offer little collaboration between Universities and SE actors, it would also be interesting to ask the various SE actors about the stage of the programme they would

like to be involved in (e.g. conception, delivery, practical experience or project), and in what capacity (guest speaker, co-organiser of events such workshops, provider/supervisor of internships or projects).

- In terms of definition of SE - or at least drawing boundaries around the types of organisations to consider - we could maybe use the notions of means and ends to articulate a flexible, inclusive vision of the SE, whilst holding to a set of values.

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# Part 2: NEEDS ANALYSIS – UK

## 1. NEEDS ANALYSIS - EDUCATORS/TRAINERS/PROFESSORS

### **Executive summary:**

- Universities should promote the Social Economy (SE) by raising students' awareness of its existence and values. This means embedding the social economy in all programmes and disciplines rather than just developing specialist courses.
- The introduction of an international dimension to programmes was deemed essential to illustrate diverse economic forms and the insitutional factors facilitating or hindering the development of the SE.
- Several skills and competencies were highlighted as essential to the development of the SE, but maybe the area of competence that attracted most discussion was around democratic management, this included a range of skills from consensus decision-making to membership engagement, or managing conflict and complexity.
- It was deemed important to offer both FT and PT modes of study in order to attract a wide and diverse pool of students.
- Whilst there is already an element of interactive, action-learning in all the programmes reviewed (e.g. case studies, creation of blogs, workshops, work projects), it was felt that this should be developed through more innovative methods. One suggestion is for students and SE actors to be more involved in defining the issues and problems driving the curriculum. This could be through them writing case studies, or coming to programmes with their own set of issues as SE actors.
- The methods above would extend the role of SE actors beyond delivery to the shaping of knowledge and curriculum. Another suggestion to expand the role of SE actors is to involve them as beneficiaries of services provided by students (e.g. designing media platforms, providing legal advice).

### *General info about the programme*

#### *Interviews on study programmes:*

ID1. School of Geography, University of Liverpool, Teaches Masters level modules on Political Economy, Building Better Wolds (Social Movement and Social economy), and Climate Change and Transition.

ID2. Taught and designed Masters programmes on Cooperative and Social Enterprise at Sheffield Hallam University Business School

ID3. Teaches Masters module on Ethics, and Social and Environmental Sustainability, Southampton Business School

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ID4. Teaches Masters modules on Social Enterprise, Business Ethics at Manchester Met Business School

ID5. Designed a programme on Social and Solidarity Economy at York St John's University in collaboration with international partners.

ID6. Taught across a range of social innovation and social entrepreneurship modules across different levels and is currently working at the University of Northampton.

ID7. Taught and engaged in activities related to social entrepreneurship at Manchester Metropolitan University.

ID8 and ID9. Work at a charity educational provider offering a range of workshops, short courses and yearly courses related to social entrepreneurship, supporting people using entrepreneurial approaches to tackle complex social problems.

ID10. Programme Manager for Social Ventures at the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at the University of Oxford

The majority of our participants (particularly those specialising in social entrepreneurship and social economy education) stressed that their approach to the Social Economy was grounded in the tradition of democratic organisations and solidarity economy, a tradition which they tended to contrast to more neoliberal conceptualisations of social enterprise. So, they approached the Social Economy from a political perspective, or as a political project designed to 'build better worlds'. This approach was often influenced by their experience, involvement or interest in particular aspects of the social economy (e.g. labour movement, cooperative movement, social movement, recuperated factory movement in Argentina and Greece, more recent Transition and Environmental movement), and was reflected in their teaching which tended to be oriented towards promoting the values of the social economy, and in particular democratic and participatory practices, and social justice. Others were seeking to reconcile a general orientation towards a more just society (with reference to sustainability, inclusivity and tackling inequalities) with more conventional entrepreneurial language.

Another common thread that emerged from all the interviewees (and this whether they taught in School of Management / Business, or in other social sciences faculty-e.g. geography) was that they felt that social economy related material should be embedded in all programmes and all disciplines rather than just taught to a niche of students already involved in the social economy, or training to work in it. Thus, there was a common emphasis on the need for HEIs not just to train people to work in the social economy, but more broadly, to develop the visibility and attractiveness of the social economy among the student population. So rather than develop a specialist course in the social economy (MBA or other), several felt it would be more productive to embed material about the social economy in every course: 'Social economy should be in the DNA of all modules in all disciplines, teachers should be thinking what students could be able to offer to society when they graduate, how they could contribute and embed this in their module'.

The cohorts attending the programmes our participants were involved in were quite diverse with students coming from a range of educational disciplines, age groups and nationalities. In terms of educational backgrounds, one of our participants stressed that students coming from humanities and arts were more interested in social impact and often undermined the business element of their proposed initiatives in contrast to business students who placed greater emphasis on the entrepreneurial aspects. This was not, however, the case in more specialised programmes (e.g. executive MBA) where prior work experience was a requirement. Even in such cases, it was reported that students attending these programmes were coming from diverse sectors and industries. In terms of gender, participation seems to be balanced overall although some programmes appeared to be enrolled predominantly by either male or female students. The issue of inclusivity was however raised by two of our participants (an educator and a student) who reported limited participation from ethnic minority groups.

Finally, several participants referred to the importance of funding for these programmes, the limited available resources and the Universities economic-centric approach to education. Reflecting on their educational provisions, one of our participants repeatedly referred to students as 'customers', and 'what pays the bills'. In another case, explicit reference to the University's aim to generate funds was made to reflect on the reasons behind the evident marginalisation of social economy educational provisions (as but a 'subset' of entrepreneurship) across UK higher education. To this end, concerns were also raised about the fit of these programmes in the curriculum and whether a masters in social entrepreneurship and social economy best fits in a Business School or other departments (e.g. sociology).

## What knowledge (knowing things) should be taught on a social economy Master programme?

The following areas of knowledge were deemed essential for a programme on the SE:

- ***Political Economy***

In terms of knowledge, all talked about the importance of grounding the Social Economy within broader historical, political, institutional contexts and suggested having some module around Political Economy that would offer a critique of neoliberalism, talk about the diverse economy, offer a history of the social economy and some mapping of its different forms. To this end, relevant modules included Concepts and Principles of Social Economy and foundations of Political Economy. For some, an important element of this mapping of political economy was to introduce and further develop international comparisons to illustrate the diverse economic forms and the institutional factors facilitating or hindering particular economic forms.

- ***Social Value***

Another aspect of core knowledge that was deemed important was related to the concept of social value (e.g. Building Value in Social Enterprise); this involves understanding and reflecting on what constitutes value or success; it includes consideration of social accounting, social and environmental responsibility, ethical finance, capital, and banking. One important element stressed here was the concept of capital, the various forms it takes (economic, social, ethical, human, intellectual, natural), and its contribution to the process of social value creation.

A related area centred around impact management and evaluation. Here it was suggested that students should familiarise themselves with the process of developing and presenting impact to relevant stakeholders and potential funders. This is something that could potentially be developed in collaboration with organisations and partners involved in the process of building impact cases and funding bids.

- ***Democratic governance***

A third core element mentioned centred around governance and ownership, democratic management, stakeholder democracy (e.g. The Practice of Social Enterprise, Social Democracy). This for example included stakeholder analysis and analysis of democratic forms of organisation, consideration of management and leadership styles, and different forms of employee ownership.

- ***People in Organisation***

Although this could be seen as part of the previous element on democratic governance, there was also a sense that developing a different perspective on people in organisations could be the focus of a special module. For example, one interviewee taught a module on 'People in Organisations' whose main objectives was to explore 'how to manage people without treating them as resources'. In another case, there was a related module focusing

on 'Ways of working'; this included consideration of 'the factors, internal and external to the organisations, that influence ways of working in the Social Economy? How do their ways of working reflect and put into practice the values and principles of the social and solidarity economy and what are the challenges of this?'

- ***Epistemology***

Although this was not often the focus of a special module, many talked about including some epistemological element to encourage students to think about the origins, value and process of knowledge formation. For example, in the material developed by York St John's University, there is a module dedicated to this:

'Ways of knowing (epistemology) and values: how is knowledge generated and validated which constructs a particular economic paradigm? What are the theoretical assumptions, beliefs, and values of the social and solidarity economy?'

- ***Climate Change / Environmental Sustainability***

Finally, although less common, there were suggestions to include courses on Climate Change and the Transition movement.

**What competences (knowing how to do things, skills, abilities, attitudes, motivations) are / should be taught on a social economy Master s programme?**

In terms of more practical skills or competencies, the following suggestions were made:

- ***Democratic Management***

A first area of competency that was highlighted by all was around democratic management. More specifically, consensus building and decision-making, horizontal decision-making, running assemblies, conflict resolution, democratic participation, were mentioned. One argued that for teaching these skills, 'we could take inspiration from peace studies and the Transition movement which has also been very good at trying to develop citizens' skills in democratic management and participation'. It was also suggested that students should be taught how to recognise and address the challenges of remaining democratic in the face of possible degeneration. A related aspect was around facilitation: how to manage complexity, ambiguity, conflict when there are no clear answer or consensus

- ***Marketing as a 'reading of social needs'***

To identify, analyse, and understand the (future) social needs, by listening, interpreting, and anticipating the demands expressed by consumers, beneficiaries, the state.

- ***Critical mindset***

Here it was suggested that students should be trained to 'Problematise rather than simplify, to identify, define, address problems that defy easy solutions'. So an important skill is being able to define and identify problems in context rather than have teachers or other agents such as the state 'come with solutions for already defined problems'.

- ***Business Planning and Setting up new social ventures***

The importance of helping students to acquire the necessary skills to develop business plans and create their own social ventures was raised by several participants and on some

occasions, this was in reference to an existing provision in their programmes, particularly by those involved in the 'changemakers' initiative.

- *Financial literacy and management*

- *Communication and Social media*

Here it was suggested that it was important for SE organisations to develop 'Effective practices in the use of social media and community radio to achieve the objectives of the social and solidarity economy'.

### *Evaluation of processes/methods*

Most programmes are offered on both a Part-time and Full-Time basis and it was suggested that it was essential to be able to offer both modes of study in order to attract a wide and diverse pool of students, PT study tends to attract local working students whilst FT study may be more attractive to international students.

PT programmes tend to run through blocks of intensive teaching (normally in presence, but online this last year because of the pandemic); for example on one programme each of the 4 modules is taught through 4 day blocks that involve a wide mix of teaching activities, including a strong element of action learning ( e.g. working on real life case studies and projects, involving local organisations to present to the students, networking with other students, seminars).

Most programmes, other than the material created at York St John's University, tend to rely on quite a traditional mix of academic study (i.e. classes in presence or increasingly, with the pandemic, online) and more practical elements (e.g. interactive seminars, guest lectures, case studies, work placements, networking with social economy actors). One felt it was particularly effective to use case studies from Social economy organisations familiar to students, either through having a strong presence in the local area or being renowned organisations more widely: 'it is important to get students to connect with that sector and realise there are organisations they know of but they don't know they are of different sector. So when I talk about organisations like John Lewis, as part of the Social Solidarity Economy, Patagonia, and so they know those organisations, but don't realise that they're sort of part of this sector. Or I also use community enterprises, like a city farm, or a local pub that was saved by locals.' Another interesting element that was used by one participant was the creation of a blog that students used and developed collaboratively to discuss their learning (reading, case studies).

So, whilst there is already an important interactive, practice-oriented element in the courses taught by the participants, this tends to be in quite traditional forms; and there is a sense that the interactive, action-learning element of the course should be developed, and that students should be encouraged to spend more of their studies working with or on social economy organisations, so that virtually every module involves some engagement with a real organisation. On some rare occasions, students had the opportunity to develop their own social ventures as part of the curriculum and were assigned a member of staff to act as mentor, provide support and coaching throughout the process. Possible ideas suggested to increase the action learning element include:

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- students creating their own cooperative / social business at the start of the programme and run with it throughout the course; at the end of the programme, they can chose to carry on running the organisation, or fold it. This is an idea that one participant suggested was already put in practice at Mondragon Universty.
- students to bring their own ideas and problems concerning their organisations at the beginning the course; part of the modules would then be articulated around these concerns, to help students understand them, address them and share experiences. So the curriculum would be partly shaped by students' needs and concerns and make space for reflexive and interactive learning between students and staff.
- Students working in partnership with local communities to address community-related challenges. This can be in a form of a live project module where groups of students go through different phases of learning, first by covering relevant theoretical material, then by being introduced to different methodologies, and to the community groups they are to collaborate with, and finally by working in partnership with their assigned community group to address set challenges.

It should be noted that some of these innovative practices have been central to the development of the material for the 8 modules on Social and Solidarity Economy offered at York St John's University (<https://www.yorks.ac.uk/social-economy/>). Here the material was developed in collaboration and interactively with students and members of SSE in a iterative process. Students and organisations got involved in the definition and problematisation of key issues and concepts driving the curriculum and shaping the learning, for example:

- Students researched and wrote the case studies that became part of the material for the various modules; so the process of researching, identifying problems and key issues on and with the case organisations is as important to students' learning as the content of these cases.
- Students from different disciplines got sent out to actors of the social economy to contribute their skills and help out on projects. The idea promoted by the coordinator of the programme is that universities should create connections between students and social economy actors, and encourage students to reach out to social enterprises as a eye opener exercise, but one in which they can also contribute their skills and time to organisation who could otherwise not afford it. The participant explained the mutually beneficial relationships that can be forgd from these connections as follows:

'As a student you do something where you gain because you get sort of access to a world you perhaps didn't know about. And then the organisation also gains in some way, whether it's the increased publicity or, or support with, you know, accountancy or communication they get help with doing their books or something. So for many students, they had no idea that this sector existed in their local area, and it opened their eyes about what they could then do, what they wanted. One or two took it further and ended up f volunteering or working with those organisations but, you know, I think that's the role of higher education to open students' eyes to the various realities that are out there'



Several participants however also raised concerns about the possibility of introducing more innovative Social Economy programmes within the context of UK universities and stressed that there would be many institutional barriers to overcome: market and financial pressures might not make such courses attractive to UK universities; and the bureaucratic hurdles of getting programmes approved could also act a significant obstacle. Another concern raised by some educators, and in line with responses we received from students, relates to the importance of understanding cultural differences and the challenges faced by people coming from more deprived communities. Hence, any reference to inclusivity should take into consideration the structural and cultural conditions that exclude certain groups from engaging in social economy education (to this end some educators and students have done direct reference to the composition of the cohort in some programmes been predominantly white middle class) as well as social economy initiatives more generally.

Furthermore, and despite the very positive responses in terms of strengthening collaboration between universities and SE organisations, as we can see in the following section, none of our participants reported any collaboration between students and educators in the designing of educational materials, while some appeared to be rather skeptical to the possibility of collaborative approaches, with particular reference to the importance of preserving a continuity in the quality of the programmes.

Finally, peer to peer learning (through projects, group works, networking) was evident in several programmes and considered to strengthen students' learning experience. Blended learning approaches although inevitable during covid, do not seem to get enough traction amongst educators, with face to face teaching to be still considered as a preferred method. Yet, our participants often recognised the potential value of online methods and blended learning approaches, particularly around student recruitment and widening potential audience for social economy programmes.

### *Evaluation of cooperation/relationship with se organisations*

#### *In which ways are the social economy organizations involved in the course? How often are the social economy organizations involved in the course?*

The majority of our participants reported some degree of collaboration with SE organisations. As indicated above, there are many ways in which SE organisations are involved in programmes; most commonly, this takes the form of the delivery of guest lectures, participation in workshops, provision of work placement or projects. There is also some degree of collaboration between universities and other educational providers where courses can be tailored to address pre-set objectives and that can also impact the modes of delivery and content (e.g. as some participants responded, components on their programmes might vary depending on set objectives).

#### *What could be improved?*

However, the ideas for stronger interactive action-learning elements reviewed in the section above suggest a need to strengthen the involvement of SE organisations and go beyond delivery to shaping the curriculum and designing the material. In particular, it is suggested

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that SE organisations could contribute to the definition and articulation of the key issues, problems they experience and that could shape the curriculum. Concretely, and as suggested above, this could be done through:

- At the beginning of the course, students from the SE sector bringing in their own ideas about the challenges and issues they face, and the various modules of the course to help them understand and address these issues.
- Students to write case studies in collaboration with SE organisations, and both parties jointly defining the key issues and problems.
- SE organisations to be involved as beneficiaries by getting services from students from various disciplines they could otherwise not afford (e.g. development of a website, market research, legal advice...)

Several participants noted that the development of closer collaboration between universities and SE organisations would be easier and work better for programmes specialising in a particular aspect, domain of the social economy. One of our participants cited the example of St Mary's in Canada which targets its programme specifically at the Credit Unions sector and has built strong ties with organisations in that sector who play an important role in shaping the curriculum as well as participating in its delivery. He argued that developing this sort of collaboration is more difficult for more generic programmes.

## 2. NEEDS ANALYSIS - STUDENTS

### **Executive summary:**

- Volunteering in a Social Economy organization is a strong incentive to enrol to a social economy study programme and motivation to work in the social economy, although our participants also reported that their fellow colleagues were coming from diverse sectors and disciplines, often enrolling in such programmes to enable them to shift career.
- In most cases (except ID3), the students enrolled were mature and had extensive work experience.
- Competences and skills listed varied depending on the programme attended. Overall, participants reported gaining relevant competencies and skills to work in the social economy sector although impact case preparation and evaluation was one of the competencies our participants (except ID1) reported as particularly valuable but lacking.
- Students expressed the need for balancing theory and practice and the provision of theoretical modules that could raise awareness of the social economy sector. Cultural awareness and modules more attuned to address the constraints faced by those coming from ethnic minority groups was also

raised as something completely neglected in the existing literature and the programmes attended. In terms of practical provisions, modules that would help them build the skills to develop impact cases and funding applications were considered of particular value.

- Peer education and networking were perceived to be of great value both in terms of the overall educational process and students' experience.
- The role of universities, as intermediaries, to connect students with key stakeholders in the social economy sector was also considered crucial.

### *Personal/professional information*

#### *Interviews on study programmes:*

ID1. Master of Science in Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship - London school of economics (graduated student)

ID2. BA Social and Community Development - University of Northampton (graduated student)

ID3. MA Social Innovation - University of Northampton (final year student)

#### *Bachelor programmes students followed before the master study in Social Economy:*

ID1. BA in Sociology and Anthropology

ID2. None

ID3. BSc (Hons) Social Work/Applied Social Studies; Diploma in Business Communication and Certificate in Leadership in Voluntary Sector and Community Organizing

#### *Other study programmes students followed before or after the master study in Social Economy:*

ID1. None

ID2. None

ID3. MSc in Global Cooperation and Security

#### *Did you have a job in the social economy before, during and after the course of study? If so, in which organization and what was your role?*

All three were working prior and during their studies. Two of them (ID2 and ID3) were involved in community based initiatives and have started their own organisations while the third (ID1) ran a microfinance bank in Italy. She is also collaborating with the cooperative movement and has a strong interest in alternative business models, and particularly alternative finance. ID3 has a long experience as a community organiser and is a co-founder of a community based organisation supporting ethnic minority groups through a range of social and economic events to develop employability skills, find employment, provide training and raise funds. In a similar fashion, ID2 is a community worker who has started a community-based organisation during the first year of her study as part of the changemakers programme. It is a storytelling community aiming to give voice to people, promote social

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inclusion and remove discrimination through storytelling, connect people from diverse communities and backgrounds and form networks with people sharing common interests.

***Are/Were you a volunteer in the social economy before, during and after the course of study? If so, in which organization and what was your role?***

ID1 was involved in various NGOs and international organisations.

ID2 and ID3 were involved in various community-based initiatives.

### ***Motivation/aspirations***

***Why did you enrol in the study programme? Were there any particular aspects of the course of study that interested you? How did you find out about the programme? What are/were your occupational aspirations during the study programme?***

All participants reported a strong interest in the social economy in general, as well as interest in the wellbeing of communities and doing business differently with reference to sustainability, caring for the environment, ethical practices and supporting ethnic minorities. Providing support to their deprived communities, helping young people to start their own businesses or find employment, was repeatedly reported by ID2 and ID3. ID1 reported a strong interest in alternative business models, sustainability and microfinance as she was motivated by her desire to have some corporate culture impact through her work in terms of 'how people work and produce value' and to 'change the way that the economy works', help alternative businesses to solve a range of problems they face while operating in a market economy.

### ***Expectations/wishes***

***What were/are your expectations regarding knowledge and competences offered by the study programme? What were/are your wishes regarding knowledge and competences offered by the study programme?***

All three participants reported that the programmes they attended met their expectations. To the relevant questions, all reported that they were very pleased about the programmes they enrolled in and appeared to be particularly positive about the available networking opportunities and the opportunities to do practical projects. There was also an evident blurring between 'businesses' and 'social enterprises', with our participants (particularly ID2 and ID3) using the two terms interchangeably. For example, reference to the idea of 'giving back to the community' was followed by 'it's all about business' and 'it is a business, it's got to be run like a business', without any questioning of the managerial and business-oriented language used or further problematisation of the potential tensions (as often experienced in alternative organisations) between balancing social and economic objectives. ID1 appeared more cautious in terms of the language used during the interview and the distinction between conventional and alternative businesses.

Furthermore, there was clear room for improvement in the programmes to meet our participants' expectations particularly around areas that are ignored or undermined in the relevant literature (e.g. cultural differences and understanding of the structural difficulties in starting social enterprises when coming from an ethnic minority group or a deprived

community more generally) as well as the methods of delivery and assessment, most notably for post-experience students or those who work while studying (e.g. need for more flexible deadlines and more tailored assessments). For example, the participants made the following suggestions:

- Reference to decolonisation of the curriculum and the need to include more discussion around ethnic minority groups, cover topics related to identity and culture as well as the practical challenges they face in starting up businesses;
- Better representation of ethnic minorities in the teaching staff;
- Coordination and collaboration with social economy organizations and other key stakeholders and policymakers could be improved;
- Some topics, particularly around a theorisation of social economy were not sufficiently covered. As for more practice-oriented modules that could be given more attention, these included modules related to impact cases and funding application, and project management.

#### *Evaluation of the experience*

***Evaluation of preparation to work in the social economy field:*** Overall, our participants reported that the programmes they enrolled on prepared them relatively well for working in the social economy field but also for engaging in entrepreneurial activities more generally. ID1 was particularly pleased and enjoyed modules related to impact evaluation and behavioural economics, the reference to political science for helping her to understand the wider socio-economic context (mainly in Europe and the United States) and provide a more thorough view of the social economy movement. She also praised some staff in the programme for their engaging methods of teaching delivery (with reference to extensive group works and case study activities). What could be done more extensively though was awareness towards the challenges that ethnic minority groups face (ID3) when running organisations in the field, develop impact cases and apply for funding (ID2 and ID3).

***Evaluation of knowledge and competences:*** Our participants reported gaining knowledge and awareness about social aspects of doing business, community impact, sustainability, social awareness and anti-discriminatory practices. They reported gaining competencies related to running a business, preparing funding applications and doing business planning, mapping and modelling. Presentational skills, time-organisation, punctuality, resilience and versatility can also be added to gained competencies. We should also note that competencies gained vary; ID1 did modules that helped her to develop the necessary skills and competencies for impact evaluation, while this appears to be missing in the case of ID2 and ID3. This is in line with the reports we received from organisations (see next section) on the need of developing skills and competencies related to building impact cases and funding applications. They (ID2 and ID3) also reported the need to incorporate modules related to project management as well as theoretical modules on social economy and community organisation. On the theoretical aspect, ID2 for example, reported that while she had a module related to social economy and community organisation, it was not as

prominent as it should be and suggested that this is something that should be embedded across the course.

***Evaluation of training and teaching methods:*** In terms of teaching methods, all our participants reported a general satisfaction. Standard methods for teaching (lectures and seminars) and assessment (group works, individual assignments and reports, presentations, projects and dissertations) were used in all three programmes, yet a more project-based and practiced oriented approach was also evident, with emphasis on business project reports. What was perhaps more distinctive than other conventional programmes was the emphasis on networking, opportunities to work for and with organisations during the period of their studies and support to help students start their own businesses, that in the case of ID2 and ID3 was part of the curriculum. Overall, our participants reported a relative balance between theory and practice-based assessments, with a slight weighting towards more practice-oriented assessments. Yet, they also reported (ID2 and ID3) that more emphasis on assessments tailored to their own businesses, would have been positive.

Furthermore, the composition of the students involved across the three programmes our participants attended also varied significantly. In the case of ID2, students appeared to be more mature, while ID3 reported that he was the only student from an ethnic minority group. In the case of ID1, people attended her course were post-experienced with conventional corporate careers, coming from a range of sectors outside the social economy but with a strong desire for a career shift. She further emphasized the importance of peer education, in line with our objectives to co-create knowledge through the strengthening of collaboration between the various stakeholders (educators, students and SE organisations).

***Evaluation of the involvement of social economy organizations:*** Our participants appeared to be particularly pleased with the networking opportunities they had during their studies and their engagement with existing organisations in and beyond the social economy sector. More opportunities to connect with various key stakeholders, and how the universities could work as intermediaries to support these connections, was one of the issues raised as a potential initiative to sustain and further strengthen collaboration between people and organisations involved and/or interested in social economy. It should be noted that the role of education in changing corporate culture and mentality in terms of how we do business was also raised during these interviews with our participants emphasizing the need for a different education.

### 3. NEEDS ANALYSIS - SOCIAL ECONOMY UMBRELLA ORGANISATIONS

#### Executive summary:

- Social economy actors appeared to be motivated by the social aspect of the business. They come from a range of educational backgrounds and often have experience working across various sectors of the economy.
- SE organisations are facing a range of challenges both at micro and macro level.
- SE organisations have a strong interest in social economy educational programmes that are theoretically rigorous but also more practice oriented (this is in line with our reports from educators and students).
- SE organisations have ongoing collaborations with universities, independent research centres and other organisations. There is also strong desire to extend collaborations, yet existing scarcity of resources appears to be a deterrent factor.

#### *Introduction - social economy actors represented by the people interviewed*

ID1. Social Enterprise UK - Is the leading global authority on social enterprise and the biggest network of social enterprises in the UK, having strategic partnerships with various government departments and strong relations to some of the biggest companies in the UK supporting social enterprises through their supply chains, people and networks. They also led public policy on social enterprise for over 15 years.

ID2. Skylark Work - Is a purpose-led consultancy offering philanthropy and social impact advice for businesses and HNWIs. Their services range from managing philanthropic funds, strategic planning, delivery support and coaching for charities and social ventures.

ID3. Power2Change - Is an independent charitable trust that supports and develops community businesses in England.

ID4. FEBEA - The European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks and Financiers

ID5. COOPEU - The European region of the International Co-operative Alliance

Our participants' seniority and educational background varied, while they had extensive work experience across the private and social economy sector. They all reported being driven by a desire to support local communities, raise awareness on the importance of doing socially impactful businesses and assist in promoting social economy sector through a range of business support initiatives, from bespoke support to education and research, policy making and networking.



### *Main challenges for the social economy organisations and the role of educational programmes in dealing with them*

Our participants reported social economy enterprises struggling particularly due to covid-19 pandemic, yet also appeared to be optimistic of the future and potentialities of SE organisations, in some cases arguing that the community-based and cooperative approach of SE businesses is a key factor to their survival and thriving, under unforeseen crisis and difficult economic conditions. For example, one of our participants, reflecting on the economic impact of covid, suggested that while ‘high streets are on the decline, [there is a wave of] community business, social enterprise [that begin to have] a real prominent place within the new High Street. [This is due to their character and commercial approaches] not being solely based on retail, [but] bringing people in and being the place for people to come and get out of holistic experience’. Furthermore, a range of common ongoing challenges at micro and macro level was reported by all our participants. In terms of inter-organisational practical issues, procurement, understanding and building competencies to develop funding bids, financing and managing resources effectively, preparing business plans, balance sheets and developing strategies of growth were among the key challenges reported by our participants. There was also a range of challenges related to networking, lobbying and wider communication approaches with reference to seeking out ways to effectively promote social economy to policy makers and governmental bodies (particularly central government), as well as communicate with other businesses outside the social economy sector about the character, objectives and operations of SE businesses. To this end, the tensions between the social character and the economic objectives of businesses was raised as an ongoing concern when seeking collaborations beyond the social economy sector. In one of our participant’s response, ‘they prefer to talk about them being a business, and not really talking about the social side, because you know, people don't take them seriously if they don't talk about that. So, when you're doing commerce, you know, you've got to put the business, front and centre. I think, I think that's one of the issues.’

In similar fashion to gaining wider support across commercial businesses, our participants also reflected on challenges SE organisations face in terms of governmental support. They reported a relatively strong support at local level particularly when there can be demonstratable evidence of job creation; yet that is not necessarily shared at central government and even when it does, there is a range of challenges that SE organisations face in translating this support into policy agenda for a particular political party and/or eventually a supportive legislative framework. As one of our participants explained,

‘there is an appreciation and an understanding of social enterprise and the social economy, there seems to be [though] a disconnect between theoretically understanding the power and the potential of the social economy and then of seeing any action to actually support or enable the social enterprise or the social economy. Because quite often, ministers will really engage with the idea, you know, you can see them understanding what, you know, we all understand and feel fully committed to that, you know, if you combine the power of a mission with the power of a business model, you know, it's an incredibly productive relationship. But how you then translate that into actual policy agenda for a particular party? And then you legislate for that, you know, there is a disconnect there. [...] how they managed to engage with their lawmakers, and actually see results through legislation, and then actual support in the economy, I suspect is sort of, you know, a challenge for everybody. Yeah.’

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Elaborating, further, on the role of government in creating a favourable environment for social economy businesses to flourish, some of our participants also referred to the case of Scotland as an example to be followed. They focused both on the direct support that SE organisations and the wider sector received as well as a range of initiatives to raise community awareness of the significance of the social economy sector by promoting social economy across all levels of education from primary to tertiary level.

Finally, 2 of our participants echoed a point made by several university educators on the importance of bringing the social economy to visibility within the wider (student) population so that the sector could recruit from a broader pool of talent. In particular, one suggested that beside developing specialist programmes targeted at people already working within the sector, it would be beneficial to attract talented managers to the sector, for example, by bringing the social economy sector to visibility on MBA programmes: ‘what is lacking are programmes designed to bring new people inside the cooperative sector, to get talented managers in the sector. [...] Instead of just nurturing our own talent we could train those who do MBA on social economy’.

### *Main topics for the future educational programmes*

Our participants reported a strong interest, and need for, educational programmes focusing explicitly on social economy education and offering something distinctive from conventional entrepreneurial programmes. They also stressed that this is not something that should only target social economy actors or people interested in social economy but rather consider developing a programme that could have applicability across all sectors spreading the importance of running the economy with a more ethical and socially-impactful compass. It should also be noted that they repeatedly pointed to the need to go beyond the development of a specialist programme in social economy and explore opportunities to shape the structure and governance of a university more widely, as a socially-driven organisation.

They all focused on the need to provide education that would be theoretically rigorous and practice-oriented. Some also distinguished the needs of individuals and organisations within the social economy sector in relation to life-cycle stage of the business, suggesting the need to appreciate that the needs for start-ups and those at a growth stage might vary. They also recognised a third category of businesses that are either at a mature stage or growth stage but have no intention or interest in further growth, rather wish to remain and serve their identified niche market.

Going back to educational provisions, we should appreciate that needs vary at and across individual and business level. For example, seniority might affect an individual’s interest to join a more theoretically or practically intense programme, with our participants suggesting that more senior individuals and those involved for years in social economy sector are more likely to show an interest for a more practice-oriented programme. What they all agreed on, however, is that some balance between theory and practice is needed and that developing modules that could provide a toolkit for practitioners to run their organisations would add value to the programme. All our participants reported the need to design modules that would help people involved in social economy sector to develop the skills and competencies to run their businesses from basic day to day operations and understanding balance sheets to the

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effective management of resources, setting their mission statement, building strategies of growth and scaling up their businesses, networking and collaboration strategies, evaluating and managing impact, and strategies to finance their business, social financing and develop funding bids. One participant insisted that there was a strong need to sensitise students within the social economy to innovative financial tools and impact evaluation. Others felt it would be of great value to consider the particularities of leadership and management within a social economy organisation. As for delivery and assessment methods, SE organisation actors appear to share views with the other two groups we interviewed (educators and students).

### *Relationships and collaboration in education field*

In terms of relationships and collaborations all our participants reported a strong interest to work with universities, independent research institutes and other organisations in providing education and research in the field of social economy as well as raising awareness and influencing public policies. They were, however, mindful about their resource constraints that has limited their opportunities to establish and extend collaborations with higher education institutions. Having said that, all our participants reported ongoing, but limited, collaboration with various higher education institutions in the UK. Some have initiated collaborations with research institutes and outsourced their research-related activities, while others are in early stages of developing educational provisions with well-established research centres and universities like the Said School of Business at the University of Oxford.