



# Social enterprise in a global context

The role of higher education institutions

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

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Study approach</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Social enterprise: a global outlook</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The benefits and impacts of social enterprise activity</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Challenges in collaboration</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Good practice in developing partnerships</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	<b>37</b>

## About the British Council

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

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

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

## About Plymouth University

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

May 2016

SERIO  
Research and Innovation  
Plymouth University  
9 Research Way  
Plymouth Science Park  
Plymouth, PL6 8BT

T +44 (0)1752 588 942  
F +44 (0)1752 588 987  
[serio@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:serio@plymouth.ac.uk)  
[www.serio.ac.uk](http://www.serio.ac.uk)

# Foreword

How do we build stronger, more resilient, and socially engaged nations? How do we foster more inclusive, equitable and sustainable development?

These are some of the interconnected challenges that underpin the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which set the world's development agenda to 2030 and seek to end poverty, ensure quality education for all, advance gender equality and make significant progress in a host of other crucial areas.

If we are to make meaningful progress on the ambitious SDGs, we cannot rely on traditional philanthropy, government interventions and development aid alone. We must develop innovative and financially sustainable solutions that build economic growth and deliver the changes that our planet and its people need. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and social enterprises can play an important role in support of our ambitions.

Universities are the anchors, shapers and innovators of our communities and countries. They foster cultural, social and economic vitality. HEIs help to build an informed citizenry, more tolerant societies and more participative communities. They generate and nurture the skills, research and innovation that spur economic development and shape the future. And today as never before, they are being called upon to contribute to positive social and economic change both nationally and internationally.

Social enterprises are businesses which trade for a social purpose, re-invest surpluses into their social objective, and make themselves accountable for their actions, rather than simply maximising profits for owners and shareholders. They create jobs, generate their own revenue and deliver beneficial social impact. By harnessing the powerful benefits of trade, they provide an innovative route beyond aid and grant-giving to address entrenched problems.

This research study, conducted by SERIO (Socio-Economic Research and Information Observatory) at Plymouth University, has found that HEIs and social enterprises around the world are collaborating and engaging with each other to address social problems.

Covering over 200 HEIs across 12 countries spanning four continents, the study found that 75 per cent of the institutions surveyed are actively involved with at least one social enterprise and over half of these are also engaged in an international social enterprise partnership. Surprisingly perhaps, it discovered that only 2 per cent of HEIs had not previously worked with a social enterprise.

This engagement takes many forms, including: providing placements for students in social enterprises; creating opportunities for students and faculty to develop their own social enterprises; offering accredited courses in social entrepreneurship; providing incubation spaces, dedicated support services, or research expertise to social enterprises; and inviting social entrepreneurs to serve as student mentors.

Engaging with social enterprise gives HEIs an opportunity to interact closely with local businesses and communities to create inclusive and financially sustainable solutions to pressing local and international issues. It also allows them to provide students with experiential learning opportunities and entrepreneurship skills that enhance their employability. Furthermore, it can support academic staff to develop enterprise solutions arising from their academic research and translate the latter into tangible social impact. And it can generate reputational benefit and income for universities.

The engagement between HEIs and social enterprises also conforms with evolving social attitudes and career aspirations of young people. According to a survey of millennials conducted by Deloitte, 50 per cent of young people want to work for a business with ethical practices and 60 per cent choose their workplace based on its purpose.

This research responds to the worldwide growth in higher education and social enterprise. It is being launched at Going Global, the world's biggest open conference for leaders of international education, run annually by the British Council. Held this year for the first time in Africa, where stark inequalities and conflicts persist, the conference will seek answers to questions such as: how do you build stronger, more resilient, socially active and engaged nations?

Part of the answer, we believe, will be to foster continued engagement between HEI and social enterprise. Until very recently, our understanding of such engagement globally was limited and generally focused on individual case studies and social enterprise-related learning pathways across the academic curriculum. We hope that this research, alongside the country case studies that will follow, will help to narrow our knowledge gap and facilitate dialogue, networking and learning exchange, opening up avenues for enhanced international cooperation between HEIs and social enterprise.

Other beneficial outcomes would be that this report promotes understanding of the role and benefits of existing co-operation and provides evidence which supports and informs further research and collaboration opportunities. In addition, it is hoped that the research will contribute to a stronger global narrative on social value and to a better understanding of how engagement between HEIs and social enterprises can help achieve the SDGs.

The British Council will support this agenda through our Higher Education and Global Social Enterprise programmes which foster international partnerships, capacity building and policy reform. We will support HEIs to embrace their roles as enablers of social entrepreneurship and promote knowledge exchange and best practice. Lastly, we will lend our support and experience to new research projects that further enhance our knowledge of this field in order to support our goal of building fairer, more inclusive and more prosperous societies.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jo Beall". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Jo Beall**  
Director Education and Society  
British Council

# Executive summary

This research is set against a context of global growth in higher education, and seeks to understand and enhance the role of international cooperation between higher education institutions (HEIs) and social enterprises (SEs). Particular focus was placed on those HEIs operating in an international context, supported by a study methodology that included primary research with over two hundred HEIs, operating in twelve countries, spanning four continents:

- Asia (Hong Kong, India, Pakistan, Thailand);
- Africa (Kenya, South Africa);
- Europe (Greece, Slovenia, UK);
- Latin America (Mexico); and,
- North America (Canada, USA).

The study, led by Plymouth University for the British Council, is one of the first to attempt to identify the range of HEI activity in the social enterprise sector. Specifically, the study maps and explores existing partnerships between HEIs and SE; the benefits of existing cooperation; and the impact of such cooperation on a range of stakeholder groups, such as students, social entrepreneurs, and funders. In addition, the study also reviews the approaches used by HEIs to deliver social enterprise skills to students. The findings (which are set against a period of rapid expansion and change in the higher education sector) point toward considerable energy and openness amongst HEIs for future engagement. The report highlights that:

- Partnerships between HEIs and social enterprise are commonplace with three in every four institutions (75 per cent) engaged in some level of activity. Just 2 per cent of HEIs had not previously worked with a social enterprise.
- HEIs commonly supported their students to gain an awareness of social enterprise, and to develop as social entrepreneurs. Typical approaches included student engagement through placements with an active partnership (cited by 80 per cent), and support for student led social enterprise (78 per cent).
- Frequently cited HEI approaches to partnership working included the provision of access to facilities such as incubation space, embedding social enterprise into curriculum delivery, the provision of placement students and interns, and the direct purchase of products or services.
- There is still work to be done in strengthening interaction and partnership working, with HEIs facing a range of challenges when working collaboratively with social enterprises, or in brokering relationships of social value.
- Of those HEIs not currently working with social enterprise, the main reported barrier was a lack of knowledge and experience regarding approaches to engagement.
- In order to ensure true partnership, it is essential that HEIs take the time to understand both the issues being addressed by any given social enterprise, and the socio-economic and cultural context in which it sits.

The following recommendations (expanded upon in this report) were made to facilitate further dialogue and knowledge exchange between HEIs and SEs:

- Increased levels of knowledge exchange and experience are required to strengthen interaction, whilst also supporting and promoting new partnerships.
- Further support for impact assessment, especially at an institutional level, will provide a clearer recognition of the value of engagement for students, staff, and communities.
- Embedding social enterprise into HEI strategies and plans was identified as a key driver for institutional engagement, although further exploration and understanding of global mission statements would lend additional clarity to this approach.
- Social enterprise is a key mechanism to enhance student employability. As such, policy makers could consider methods of sharing good practice, whilst HEIs could use this approach to enhanced employability to differentiate themselves.
- HEIs increasingly embrace their role as enablers of social entrepreneurship, through introducing students to the concept of social enterprise, broadening both their awareness of the opportunities available, but also providing them with the confidence to establish their own social enterprise.
- Reviewing approaches to procurement and HEIs position as anchor institutions has the potential to increasingly utilise social enterprise as providers of services and infrastructure.
- Further research, in the context of the study findings, will enable a more granular exploration of themes such as the contribution of the HEI supply chain, and the impact of social enterprise on graduate employability.

# Study approach

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

Recognising the disparity across countries in terms of the number of HEIs (and therefore the potential for a skewed sample), the research focused on specific regions within three of the largest countries: India, Mexico and USA. This encompassed: ten states of East India (Odisha, West Bengal, Sikkim, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya); four cities in Mexico (Mexico City, Monterrey, Guadalajara and Puebla), and the state of California in the USA.

**The study comprised three core methodological stages:**

## Desk-based review of social enterprise activity

- This included academic and grey literature, as well as media sources such as HEI and news websites, blogs, and third party partner organisation websites.
- The review was supported by consultations with British Council representatives from each country and explored country-specific issues such as variations in the definition of social enterprise, legal structures for the sector, and challenges to growth.

## HEI survey

- An online survey was sent to all known HEIs in each country to map social enterprise activity, and to explore the benefits and challenges of partnership working.
- The survey was disseminated to 993 HEIs, yielding a return of 205 (a 21 per cent response rate).

## Consultation

- In-depth semi-structured interviews with up to three HEIs from each country, to capture their social enterprise activity and partnerships in more detail.
- This data was combined with analysis from the preceding two stages to formulate a series of case studies of practice.

**NB:** Where possible, the survey was targeted toward named contacts with knowledge of, or responsibility for social enterprise at their institution. Whilst this approach was felt to provide the most rounded view of cross-institutional engagement and practice, it should be noted that any views expressed may not necessarily reflect the official stance of their HEI.

# Introduction

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

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

## Defining social enterprise

One of the challenges of conducting social enterprise research on a global level is that the term is governed by different legal frameworks, terminology, and cultural approaches. For example, across the twelve countries participating in this research, the terms social innovation, social entrepreneurship, and social economy were found to be used interchangeably alongside social enterprise.

Disparity was also found regarding the type of activities that participating HEIs perceived to constitute a 'social enterprise'. This included social ventures that, while driven by a social purpose, were not sustainable without funding and which didn't trade. Whilst it is possible that these might go on to become social enterprises, as they don't currently trade they were discounted for further review under this research.

For this study, the researchers adopted the social enterprise.org.uk definition, which considers a social enterprise to be:

---

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

---

## The British Council's social enterprise programme

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

## The global growth of higher education

This research is set against a context of rapid global increase in student numbers. As cited in the British Council's 2012 publication 'The Shape of Things to Come'<sup>1</sup>, global tertiary enrolments increased by 160 per cent between 1990 and 2010 – an uplift of approximately 105 million. The world's 18–22 age population grew by one per cent per annum over the same period, implying a significant rise in the global gross tertiary enrolment ratio.

Forecasts of global HE enrolment by Oxford Economics, however, suggest that most growth will emerge in countries with current low to mid HE enrolment levels. Among the countries surveyed in this study, both Hong Kong and Thailand are projected to record considerable enrolment growths of 20 per cent and 15 per cent respectively to 2020.

Whilst this recent expansion in student numbers may be partly attributed to demographic growth in university-aged population levels globally, it is also aligned to the increasing levels of evidence linking economic development with graduate employment. In response governments, particularly in Latin America and Asia, have invested heavily in boosting domestic higher education enrolment numbers, and supporting internationally inbound and outbound student mobility (University of Oxford, 2015; OECD, 2009).

The body of available literature indicates that whilst some countries have expanded their existing HEIs to cope with the rise in enrolment numbers, others have embarked on a programme of new development. For example, in the twelve months following the introduction of the 2012 Universities Act in Kenya, the number of universities tripled. The Act provided measures and guidelines on how to improve the management of HEIs, and resulted in fifteen colleges being granted university status. Notwithstanding these developments, demand in Kenya still outstripped supply, with an estimated 70,000 students achieving the required entry grades not being awarded a place in one of the country's state funded institutions (ICEF, 2013)<sup>2</sup>.

The recent trend of physical HEI development may also be exemplified by growth across the other countries represented in this study. For example, the number of institutions in Pakistan rose from 110 in 2005 to 163 in 2015<sup>3</sup>; whilst in India, the number of universities increased from 256 in 2001 to 659 in 2012<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile it was reported that some 85 to 100 new public HEIs have been created annually in each of the past few years in Mexico, making the Mexican higher education system 'bigger' than any national system in the EU<sup>5</sup>.

However this trend is by no means universal and will be subject to the economic resources available to each country. In Greece, for example, there has been a recent 'consolidation' of higher education provision, in response to the economic crisis, which has included the closure of two universities and 123 higher education departments (European Commission, 2015).

## Using this report

This report is the first of a suite of similar research outputs and places a deliberate focus on the macro global landscape for engagement between HEIs and social enterprise. As such, it should be read alongside the twelve additional and related reports that serve to compare and contrast social enterprise activity in each country of study, and to explore the associated nuances in context and approach.

This report and the additional twelve country reports will be made available on the British Council social enterprise webpage:

[www.britishcouncil.org/society/social-enterprise/reports](http://www.britishcouncil.org/society/social-enterprise/reports)

Plymouth University are grateful for the input, advice, and understanding shared by the British Council teams from each of the twelve participating countries, and for the direction provided by the UK-based British Council project steering group. Moreover, we would like to share our particular thanks to all staff from the two-hundred and five Universities represented in this research who took the time to share their knowledge, experience, and approaches to social enterprise delivery with us.

<sup>1</sup> British Council (2012) 'The Shape of Things to Come: Higher Education Global Trends and Emerging Opportunities to 2020'. British Council: London

<sup>2</sup> ICEF Monitor - Market intelligence for international student recruitment. (2013). Converging Factors Fuel Growth in Kenya's Higher Education System. [online] Available at: <http://monitor.icef.com>.

<sup>3</sup> Pakistan Government (2015) Vision 2025 - Higher Education [online]. Available at: [www.pc.gov.pk](http://www.pc.gov.pk).

<sup>4</sup> Ernst & Young (2012) Higher Education in India: Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017) and beyond.

<sup>5</sup> ESMU and ECORYS (2012) Comparative Study between the EU and Mexico on the challenges brought about by the internationalisation of higher education and the transparency tools developed on both sides to facilitate mobility and academic cooperation [online] Available at: [ec.europa.eu](http://ec.europa.eu).

# Social enterprise a global outlook

## Introduction

This section firstly discusses the scale and focus of social enterprise activity, before outlining the motivations for HEI engagement and, conversely, the reasons why some HEIs choose not to engage in social enterprise partnerships. Approaches to working with and supporting social enterprises are then reviewed, alongside methods of embedding social enterprise in the curriculum.

## The scale of social enterprise activity

There is little published research relating to higher education and social enterprise partnerships outside of the UK, however there is considerable interest in social enterprise approaches. This is perhaps most aptly demonstrated by the rapid growth in student-led enterprises and ventures, and the expansion of Enactus<sup>6</sup> to 36 countries, 1,700+ universities, and 70,500+ students.

One global piece of research (Turner 2011<sup>7</sup>) identified that the number of HEIs offering a social entrepreneurship course has increased rapidly over a relatively short period of time: over 90 in the US and 122 internationally were reported in 2011 compared to only 20 a few years earlier. Turner attributes this uplift to HEIs increasingly '*responding to the importance of their role in equipping students with the skills necessary to make transformational social change*'.

Reflecting this overall trend, this research project; 'Social Enterprise in a global context; the role of HEIs' also revealed social enterprise activity, led by HEIs, to be commonplace amongst the twelve selected countries (Chart 1). Three in every four HEIs (75 per cent / 153) were found to be working with social enterprises at the time of the survey, in contrast to 25 per cent (52) that were not. Of those not currently working with social enterprises, over three quarters (77 per cent / 40) intended to do so in the future. Notably, just three institutions (2 per cent) had never worked with a social enterprise.

In terms of the number of active partnerships, the largest proportion (42 per cent) of HEIs that were working with a social enterprise at the point of survey engaged with between one and five. Conversely, the second largest proportion of HEIs (24 per cent) had seventeen or more active partnerships (Chart 2).

It is clear, however, that social enterprises do not represent one homogenous group. Evidence from this research revealed that the size of the active social enterprise partnerships were diverse, which could go some way toward accounting for the discrepancy in activity. North West University in South Africa, for example, was found to have between one and five active partnerships. However, one of these was with an umbrella organisation, Mosaic, which is home to several large scale social enterprises that could be replicated on a national scale.

Reflecting geographical differences, the highest proportional concentration of HEI/SE activity was found in Hong Kong and Kenya, where all responding HEIs worked with Social Enterprises at the point of the survey (Chart 3). This was followed by the UK and Mexico, with 89 per cent and 88 per cent of HEIs respectively.

# Social enterprise and employability

## Institution

Centurion University of Technology and Management, India.

## Overview

A multi-sector, private state university located in Odisha, Eastern State. Established in 2005, with a current student population of 15,000 to 20,000 enrolled for higher education, and 17,000 students for short-term training through its social enterprise, Gram Tarang.

## Approach to social enterprise

The University was set up to support marginalised communities in rural and remote areas, and they work with social enterprises to address local, regional, and national needs. Social enterprise is incorporated across Centurion's curriculum and extracurricular activities.

## Incubator facilities

Centurion University created a 'livelihood incubator' in 2012 – the Urban Micro Business Centre (UMBC). Rather than insulate it within the university campus, they made the unique decision to locate the centre alongside one of the largest slum clusters in Bhubaneswar. The UMBC is a place where management, engineering students and faculty within the university work together with urban poor youth and women to create social entrepreneurial based solutions to urban poverty and urban development.

## Placement opportunities

Gram Tarang has various social enterprises under its overall banner and delivers social enterprise on a large scale. One of these is the Employability Training Service which provides socio-economically disadvantaged rural youth in India with placement opportunities for skill building and vocational education. They collaborate with multiple government and industry partners to provide young people with training and work placements in order to improve their employment and life prospects. More than 70,000 young people have been trained through this service to date, with 78 per cent of these now in gainful employment that would otherwise have been unattainable for them.

## Financial inclusion

Gram Tarang Inclusive Development Services is a social enterprise promoting financial inclusion in rural areas. With the support of various banks and technology partners, the enterprise elects and trains Business Correspondent Agents (BCAs) in rural villages. They provide them with laptops, smart card readers and other banking technology, enabling them to run their own local banking system with access to loans, savings accounts and other transactions. To date, more than 6,000 BCAs have been trained, bringing local banking to more than three million rural households.

<sup>6</sup> A community of student, academic and business leaders committed to using the power of entrepreneurial action to transform lives and shape a better more sustainable world ([www.enactus.org](http://www.enactus.org)).

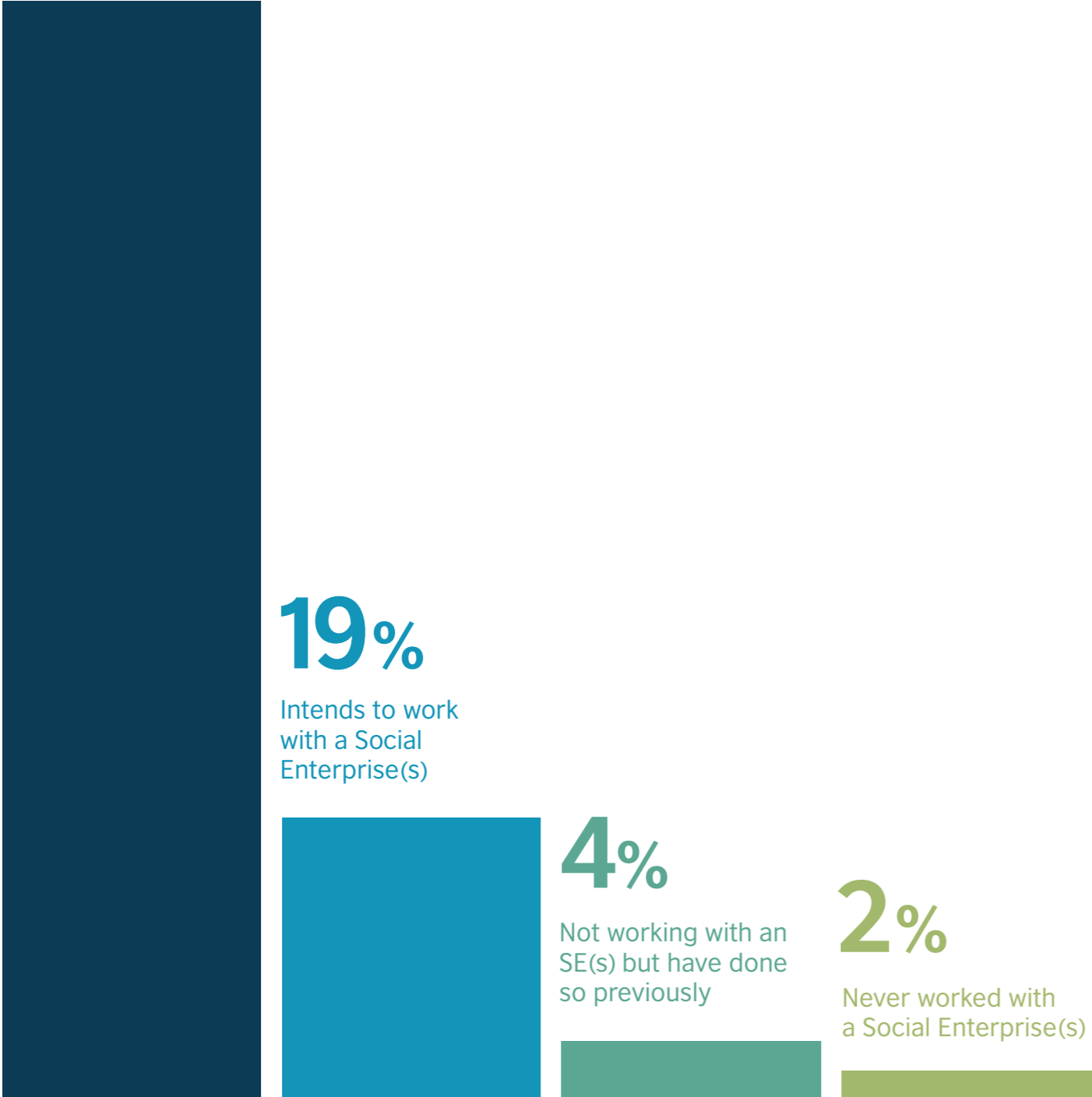
<sup>7</sup> Turner, B. (2011) Social Entrepreneurship and Higher Education. Published in: Tennessee's Business - Economics and Finance Department. - Vol. 20.2011, 1, p. 11-13

# The scale of social enterprise activity amongst HEIs

Chart 1

# 75%

Currently working with a Social Enterprise(s)

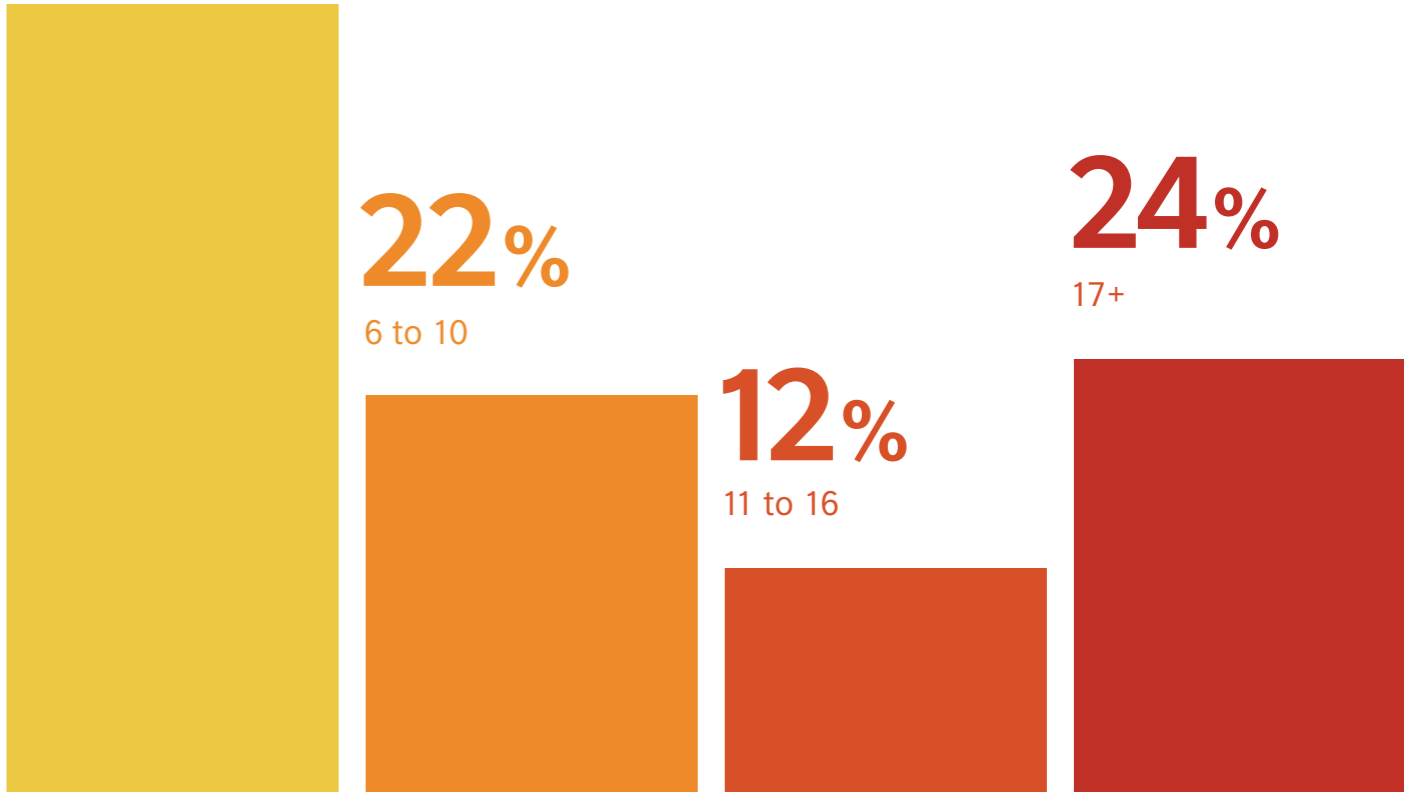


# The number of active social enterprise partnerships per institution

Chart 2

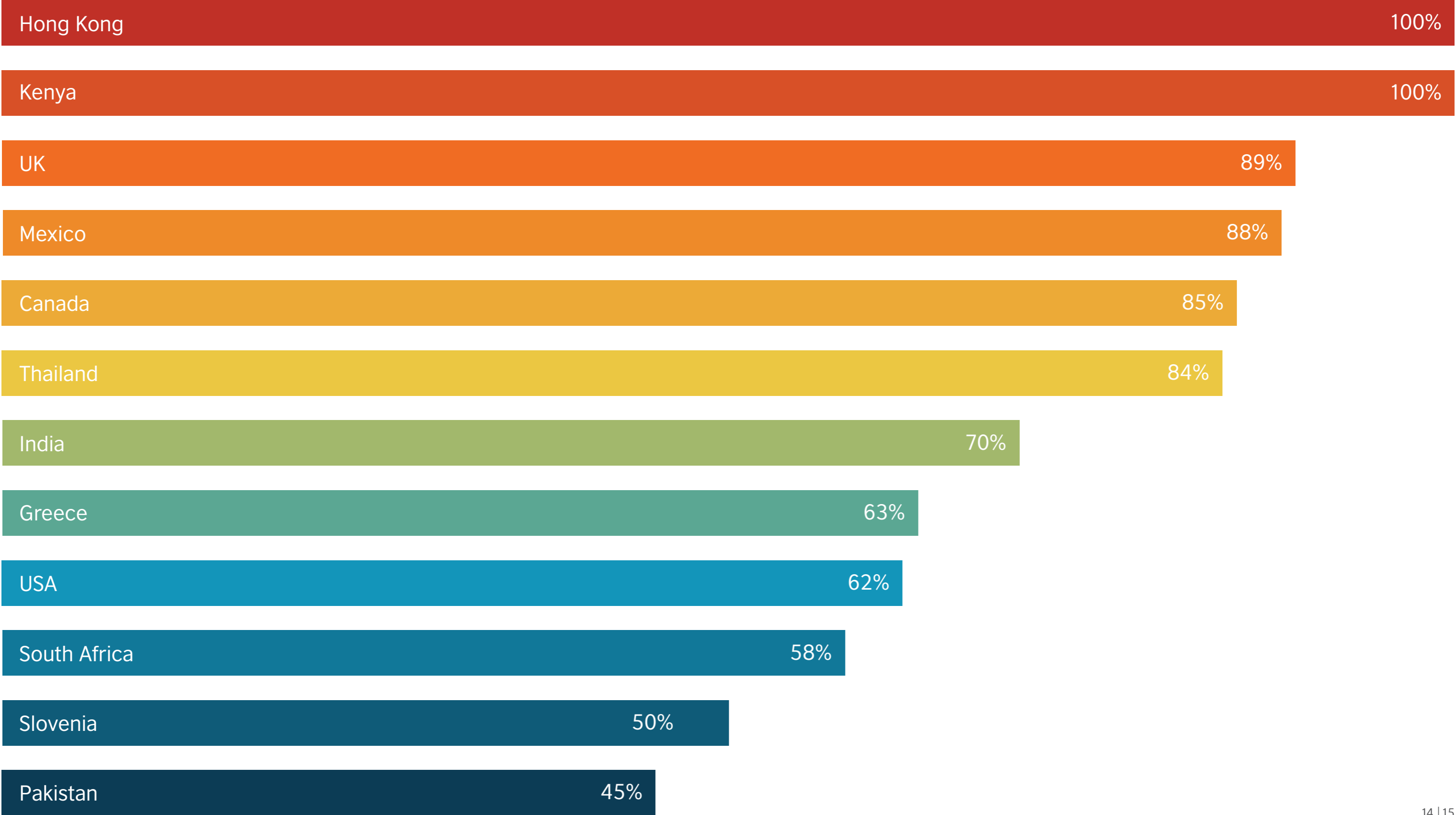
# 42%

1 to 5



# Proportion of institutions from each country currently working with social enterprises

Chart 3





# Social enterprise a global outlook

## International activity

In terms of the geographical scope of engagement, 83 per cent of HEIs that either currently work with a social enterprise(s), or had done so previously, stated that this was with a partnership based in their own country. Notably, however, 52 per cent stipulated that their partnerships also involved international activity. This encompassed a breadth of approaches, such as working with a HEI in another country or an international partner organisation; project activities taking place in another country; or the social enterprise itself being based in another country or being part of an international network.

The proportion of institutions working internationally was found to vary between countries. For example, all responding institutions in Mexico that were engaged with a social enterprise cited some level of international activity. In contrast, however, no respondents from Pakistan registered international activity; whilst for Canada, Thailand, the UK, and the USA the proportion citing international activity was approximately three in every five institutions (56 per cent).

For those HEIs that had previously, or are currently engaged in an international partnership, key motivations included the opportunity to embed international collaboration in the institution's mission or strategy; a sense of responsibility in responding to international needs; and a desire to expand networks.

*We are motivated to work internationally because migration is a transnational phenomenon (Mexico)*

*Based on the university's vision to become a 'globally recognised university', we have established a research fund (to celebrate 40 years of the university) and work in collaboration with public, private sector, and international organisations from over twenty-five countries on student exchange programmes, staff, tools and knowledge (Thailand)*

*The wider region benefits from community building, economic development and global citizenship in the case of international partnerships (Hong Kong)*

*Our HEI has international linkages. On a general basis these represent ongoing partnerships, which also serve to enrich the local partnerships as well (Kenya)*

In terms of the scale of activity, two-thirds (66 per cent) of HEIs that either work (or had previously worked) with international partnerships stated that this amounted to between one and five projects. This compares with 23 per cent that worked with between six and ten projects; and 11 per cent that worked with eleven or more.

As a proportion of total work with social enterprise, the largest majority of HEIs (63 per cent) from this group stated that international partnerships accounted for between one and twenty per cent of their social enterprise engagement and activity. This compares with 10 per cent for whom international partnerships accounted for twenty-one to forty per cent; 16 per cent indicating a work contribution of between forty-one and sixty per cent; and 6 per cent with an associated workload of 61 per cent or more attributed to international partnerships.

## Priority areas

The research underlined the breadth of social, economic, and environmental drivers for social enterprise. As demonstrated in Chart 4, across all institutions, the most commonly cited social purposes that HEIs would be most likely to support were<sup>8</sup>: developing a specific community (54 per cent); creating employment opportunities (53 per cent); contributing to international development goals (46 per cent); and improving health and wellbeing (44 per cent).

## Motivations for engagement

The role of universities as 'anchor institutions' in their local communities has received renewed levels of emphasis, in line with the rapid growth of the higher education sector (see Introduction). Anchor institutions are defined as 'civic, cultural and intellectual institutions which contribute to the cultural, social and economic vitality of cities'<sup>9</sup>.

By taking on the role of an anchor institution, universities can create impact which has a social as well as economic benefit. Anchor institutions use their 'place-based economic power' along with human capital, to improve the local community in which they operate<sup>10</sup>. These concepts are increasingly reflected in the strategic mission of many HEI's, both within the UK and more widely.

This research identified a range of motivating factors that underpinned HEI engagement with social enterprise, reflecting the differences in institutional culture, mission, and demography. Across all institutions, the principal motivating factors<sup>11</sup> were:

- **The inclusion of social enterprise in the HEIs mission or strategy** - (cited by 77 per cent of HEIs). The evidence underlined the importance of institutional buy-in as a key driver for engagement, in turn mandating and encouraging staff to create opportunities for collaboration.

*Working with social enterprises helps us to achieve our strategic goal and aim – training our students to cope with the requirements of their profession, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship for economic sustainability (Pakistan)*

*Our social enterprise work has carved out our role in social enterprise development and community involvement. It is the best example of being consistent with our vision and mission (India)*

- **To address local or regional needs** - (cited by 50 per cent of HEIs). One in every two HEIs were motivated to engage with social enterprise by the opportunity to support their community and stimulate the local economy through the provision of, for example, access to expertise.

*Our work produces societal benefits such as economic and social inclusion, education and empowerment (UK)*

*Our social enterprise work creates opportunities and alternatives for economic and social development in the community (Mexico)*

- **To improve the student experience** - (cited by 45 per cent of HEIs). Respondents highlighted a breadth of ways in which social enterprise can support the student experience, such as improving employability, and through offering direct educational benefits

*Students are able to see the real life application of things they learn in the classroom and are more engaged with the world around them (Canada)*

*Students develop feelings of citizenship and an understanding of excluded communities. There are also benefits to curriculum content through experiential learning (South Africa)*

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

Other less commonly cited motivations for engagement included social enterprise being embedded in the curriculum of some course offerings (39 per cent); that it addresses national needs (34 per cent); and to generate income (33 per cent).

<sup>8</sup> HEIs nominating each variable as their first or second choice of purpose they would be most likely to support.

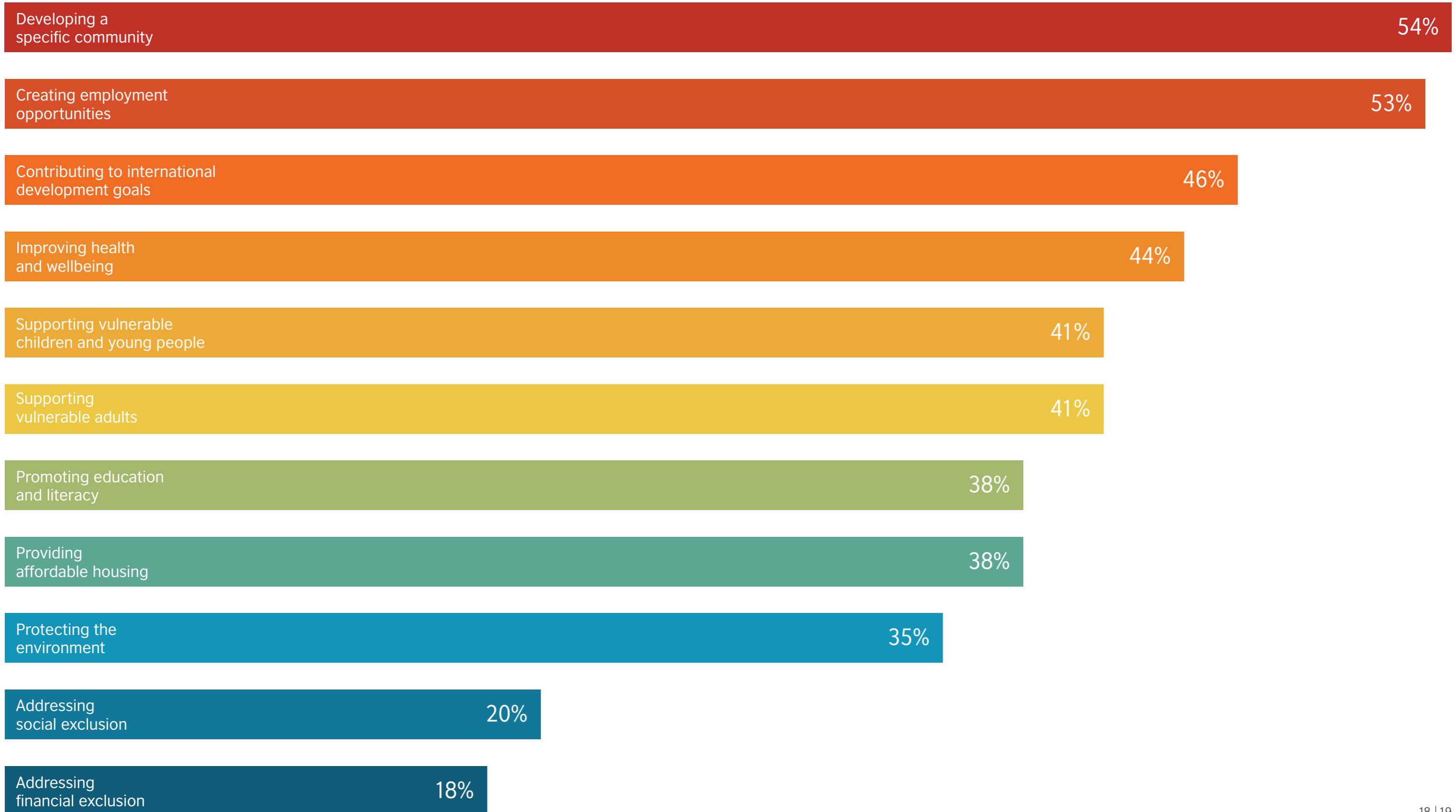
<sup>9</sup> Maurrasse, D. (2007) 'City Anchors: Leveraging Anchor Institutions for Urban Success'. Cited in: The Work Foundation. (2010). *Anchoring Growth: The Role of Anchor Institutions in the Regeneration of UK Cities*. Moving Forward: The Northern Way. Research Paper 2. London: The Work Foundation

<sup>10</sup> Barnham, J. (2016). *Anchor institutions and the social impact of economic growth*. [online] Available at: <http://www.yorkshireuniversities.ac.uk/news/articles/anchor-institutions-and-the-social-impact-of-economic-growth.html> [Accessed 6 Apr. 2016].

<sup>11</sup> HEIs nominating each variable as their first or second most motivating factor.

# Types of social enterprise HEIs would be most likely to support

## Chart 4



# Social enterprise a global outlook

## Reasons for non-engagement

The survey explored the different reasons why HEIs that stated an intention to work with social enterprise(s) in the future (40/20 per cent) had not yet done so. Analysis revealed the most commonly cited explanation to be that HEIs do not (or previously did not) know how to work with social enterprises – identified by 50 per cent of this group. Arguably, this might further underline the low levels of resources allocated to the engagement of HEIs with social enterprise, as outlined in the Foreword section of this report. This was followed by an absence of funding to work with, or set up social enterprises – identified by 48 per cent. Other less commonly cited explanatory factors included social enterprise not being part of the HEIs mission or strategy; and the lack of social enterprises in the local area – both cited by 18 per cent of respondents.

The survey also explored the factors that might encourage all respondents not currently working with a social enterprise (52/25 per cent) to become engaged with a project in the future. Again, echoing the aforementioned knowledge barrier, three-quarters of HEIs (75 per cent) would be encouraged to engage if they received support for working with a social enterprise. This might include, for example, training or mentorship programmes. Similarly, 62 per cent of HEIs stated a requirement for an increase in their knowledge and understanding of social enterprise.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, 73 per cent of HEIs not currently engaging with a social enterprise would be encouraged to do so should funding be made available. Other commonly cited factors that would support engagement included: ensuring greater clarity regarding the benefits of engagement to HEIs (58 per cent); and embedding social enterprise as part of a mission or strategy (54 per cent).

## Working with and supporting social enterprise

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

As shown in Table 1, by far the most commonly cited approach was through a project, partnership, or joint activity (96 per cent). This was followed by an institutional commitment to working with, and supporting social enterprise as articulated in the Institution's mission or strategy. This latter point outlines the requirement for 'longer term strategic planning' that transcends the duration of any given project, or cessation of individual funded activities.

Notably, approaches to working with social enterprise varied between countries. For example, all but one of the responding institutions from Pakistan provided incubation space; which compares to just one institution from Greece. Meanwhile, all responding institutions from Mexico were found to provide a dedicated social enterprise support service; however, there was no evidence of this provision amongst those responding institutions from Slovenia with active partnerships.

In addition to these positive approaches to working with social enterprise, HEIs are also uniquely positioned to provide support. Of the HEIs currently working with social enterprise, support was most commonly provided through the provision of expertise; and collaboration opportunities or the provision of research – cited by 95 per cent and 93 per cent of HEIs respectively.

As exemplified by one Canadian institution: *'Our University has provided research expertise in a mapping study of social enterprise across Canada as well as in Alberta. Our staffs are often invited to speak about social enterprise, participate on panels, deliver workshops, or provide consulting expertise to individual organisations'*.

Other commonly cited methods of support included the supply of training, such as access to courses and workshops (90 per cent); the use of facilities owned by the HEI, such as buildings or equipment (84 per cent); and the provision of placement students (80 per cent).

## Embedding social enterprise in higher education

HEIs that had active partnerships at the point of the survey were found to commonly use social enterprise to underpin their curriculum, or to enhance learning outcomes for students. For example, 86 per cent of this group indicated that social enterprises are involved in the delivery of extracurricular activities, such as being a mentor or a judge in a business competition; whilst 67 per cent stated that social enterprises are involved in the delivery of curriculum teaching. Further, 42 per cent of HEIs with an active partnership offered at least one accredited social enterprise course; whilst 30 per cent incorporated social enterprise across all their courses.

Social enterprise was most commonly offered as an accredited course across HEIs based in the USA, where it was provided by all but one institution engaged in a partnership. In contrast, this approach to embedding social enterprise was much less prevalent in India, where it was offered by just one institution.

**Table 1**

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

# Social enterprise embedded in the curriculum

## Institution

City University of Hong Kong 'CityU'

## Overview

CityU is a public research university located in Kowloon, Hong Kong. It has been an accredited university since 1994, and there are between 25,000 and 30,000 current student enrolments.

## Approach to social enterprise

CityU implements a cross-disciplinary approach in the promotion of social enterprise throughout the academic curriculum. They offer accredited social enterprise courses and involve social entrepreneurs in both the delivery of curriculum teaching and extracurricular activities.

## Embedding social enterprise across the curriculum

Modules are available across Academic Schools including the 'Social Innovation and Entrepreneurial Venture Exploration'; 'Changing Our Society: Turning Social Problems into Business Opportunities' and 'Corporate Social Responsibility: A New Paradigm for Sustainability'. Further, Computer Science students, for example, are encouraged to develop technological solutions to societal needs in their 'Designing Apps for Social Innovation' course.

## Promoting social innovation

Project Flame is CityU's interdisciplinary platform to promote social innovation and entrepreneurship among staff and students. The network consists of more than 30 members from 18 academic and administrative support units and functions as a community-centred collaborative hub for the incubation and support of social innovation and entrepreneurship. They provide incubation space, overseas scholarships and interventions, and facilitate the exchange of innovative ideas, practices and social interventions.

# Working in partnership – experience from the UK

UK universities demonstrated a number of collaborative approaches to support social enterprise. These included cooperative networks and partnerships with other HEIs, to underpin a more regional approach to social enterprise support and activity; and working with strategic partners such as local authorities, national specialists, business representatives, and funding bodies. Other examples of partnership working included seconding a member of university staff to a social enterprise partner to support and develop the initiative's growth; and opportunities for student employment over the summer months with a social enterprise partnership to solve a particular challenge or problem. Benefits of working in partnership were varied, encompassing the creation of a distinct brand; increased profile; promotion of individual engagement; and the involvement of wider networks around social enterprise.

## HEI partnerships

Oxfordshire Social Entrepreneurship Partnership (OSEP) is an initiative set up and managed jointly between Oxford Brookes University and the University of Oxford. OSEP aims to become a 'one stop shop' for the social enterprise community and helps existing and prospective social entrepreneurs plan, develop and grow their businesses through the provision of high quality support including masterclasses, mentoring, investment and access to facilities.

Both institutions receive delivery support from Student Hubs – a charity run by students for students, enabling them to engage with social and environmental challenges and empowering them to become active citizens for life. ([www.osep.org.uk](http://www.osep.org.uk))

## Social enterprise networks

Plymouth University is an active member of a social enterprise network which has created the 'Social Enterprise City'. Through working with partners such as the City Council and the Social Enterprise Network, a programme of activities was developed alongside a commitment to continue this approach into the future. The 'Social Enterprise City' has supported social enterprises through advice and support, conferences, webinars, seminars, and a bespoke training programme for high growth social enterprises.

There are approximately 150 social enterprises in Plymouth working across a range of sectors including education, health, arts, environment, food, finance, housing, business support, sport, social care and many more. These businesses employ around 7,000 people and, whilst they range in size and scale, bring in a combined income of over £500 million. ([www.plymsocent.org.uk](http://www.plymsocent.org.uk))

# The benefits and impacts of social enterprise activity

## Introduction

This section considers the benefits resulting from partnership between HEIs and social enterprise, and reviews the approaches taken to assess their impact.

## Identifying the beneficiaries

The survey asked HEIs to state the extent to which their work with social enterprise(s) had created benefits for a range of groups. As presented in Chart 5, the primary beneficiaries of partnership working were identified to be the HEIs themselves, and the creation of benefits for students – both of which were identified by 94 per cent. This was closely followed by benefits for the social enterprise partners (93 per cent). In terms of communities, most benefit was perceived to be felt at a local level (91 per cent), in contrast to those based either nationally (64 per cent), or internationally (52 per cent).

The perceived onus on the institution as a whole and its students as the primary beneficiaries of HEI/SE partnership reflects the aforementioned motivations for engagement. As articulated previously in this report, 77 per cent of respondents were motivated to engage in partnerships on account of the inclusion of social enterprise in their mission or strategy; compared to 50 per cent that were motivated to address local or regional needs (see Social enterprise: a global outlook).

The report also finds that funding is the most frequently cited challenge faced by HEIs when working collaboratively with social enterprise (see Challenges in collaboration). Given the cost of engagement to institutions in terms of staff time and resource, it is also perhaps unsurprising that partnerships will be required to demonstrate real benefit for the HEI as a whole and its students.

The following text expands upon the nature of benefit for each identified group, and has been exemplified by quotes from responding institutions.

## Benefits for HEIs

- **Enhanced reputation:** HEIs commonly reported that working with social enterprises serves to increase public awareness of their institution, and to enhance their reputation. There is evidence to suggest that this can lead to increased opportunity to attract funding and research opportunities, whilst also serving to support student recruitment and levels of collaboration with external agencies.

*Engagement with social enterprise supports the promotion and recognition of the university internationally, and improves the quality of the institution (Thailand)*

*Social enterprise contributes to brand recognition and is part of our international student recruitment strategy (Greece)*

- **Networking and knowledge mobilisation:** Partnerships with social enterprises, especially those on an international level, yielded tangible benefit for HEIs such as opportunities for more networking, new partnerships, and knowledge transfer.

*Working with social enterprises provides us with learning opportunities and we connect with a network of organisations at a local and national level through such engagements (India)*

*We now have better linkages with our international partners since they are able to see the results of their contribution through research. This information may be disseminated nationally and internationally (Kenya)*

## Benefits for students

- **Experiential learning opportunities:** One of the primary benefits of HEI/SE partnership for students was perceived to be the opportunity to undertake both experiential learning and applied learning opportunities alongside their academic study, providing a 'real-world' experience.

*Experiential learning provides a more comprehensive training that puts students in touch with the realities and needs of the locality or the country, and allows them to implement their knowledge in terms of beneficiaries (Mexico)*

*Working with social enterprises develops students' feeling of citizenship and an understanding of excluded communities; and benefits the curriculum content through experiential learning (South Africa)*

- **Diverse employment prospects for students:** Introducing students to the idea of social enterprise whilst still at university broadens their awareness of the job opportunities available (and their viability), and provides them with the confidence to establish their own social enterprise.

*Social enterprises have opened a new awareness about the social relevance and opportunities for meaningful work in this domain (India)*

*After working with social enterprises students have more knowledge, have developed soft skills, and have widened their job opportunities (Greece)*

- **Greater understanding of societal needs:** More generally, HEIs suggested that working with social enterprises increases students' awareness of social problems and provides them with an understanding of how to address societal issues.

*Students learn how to be a socially responsible and responsive citizen, and a community member (Pakistan)*

*Engagement with social enterprise improves students' understanding of business and how it can have positive impacts on social justice and human well-being issues (USA)*

*Students are better prepared to be global change makers (Canada)*

## Benefits for social enterprise partners

- **Access to expertise, resources and facilities:** As previously cited, HEIs are uniquely positioned to support SEs through the resources at their disposal, encompassing academic expertise, physical facilities and, in some cases, financial resource. This is most successful when there is strong alignment and complementarity between the societal need or challenge the social enterprise is addressing, and the universities' own aspirations.

*Social enterprises are able to access at low, or no cost, resources, business mentorship and sustainability models (Canada)*

*Partners have better access to funding, more credibility through our reputation, and better access to research, mentoring and training (South Africa)*

- **Increased visibility and enhanced networking opportunities:** In addition to accessing expertise and resources, social enterprises were also felt to benefit from an enhanced profile as a result of their partnership with a HEI. For example, this could result from exposure to a wider network of potential collaborators and contacts, or through introducing students to the idea of social enterprise.

*Social enterprises, through collaboration with HEIs, receive a platform for exposure and facilitation to reach the general public (Pakistan)*

*Partnership with universities enables social enterprises to access a collaborative network (Thailand)*

## Benefits for communities

- **Better economic and social development:** In addition to the direct community impact derived from a social enterprise, HEIs outlined an indirect benefit for communities resulting from their engagement. This encompassed a multitude of factors such as supporting the calculation of social impact; increased exposure, and enhancing levels of partnership working.

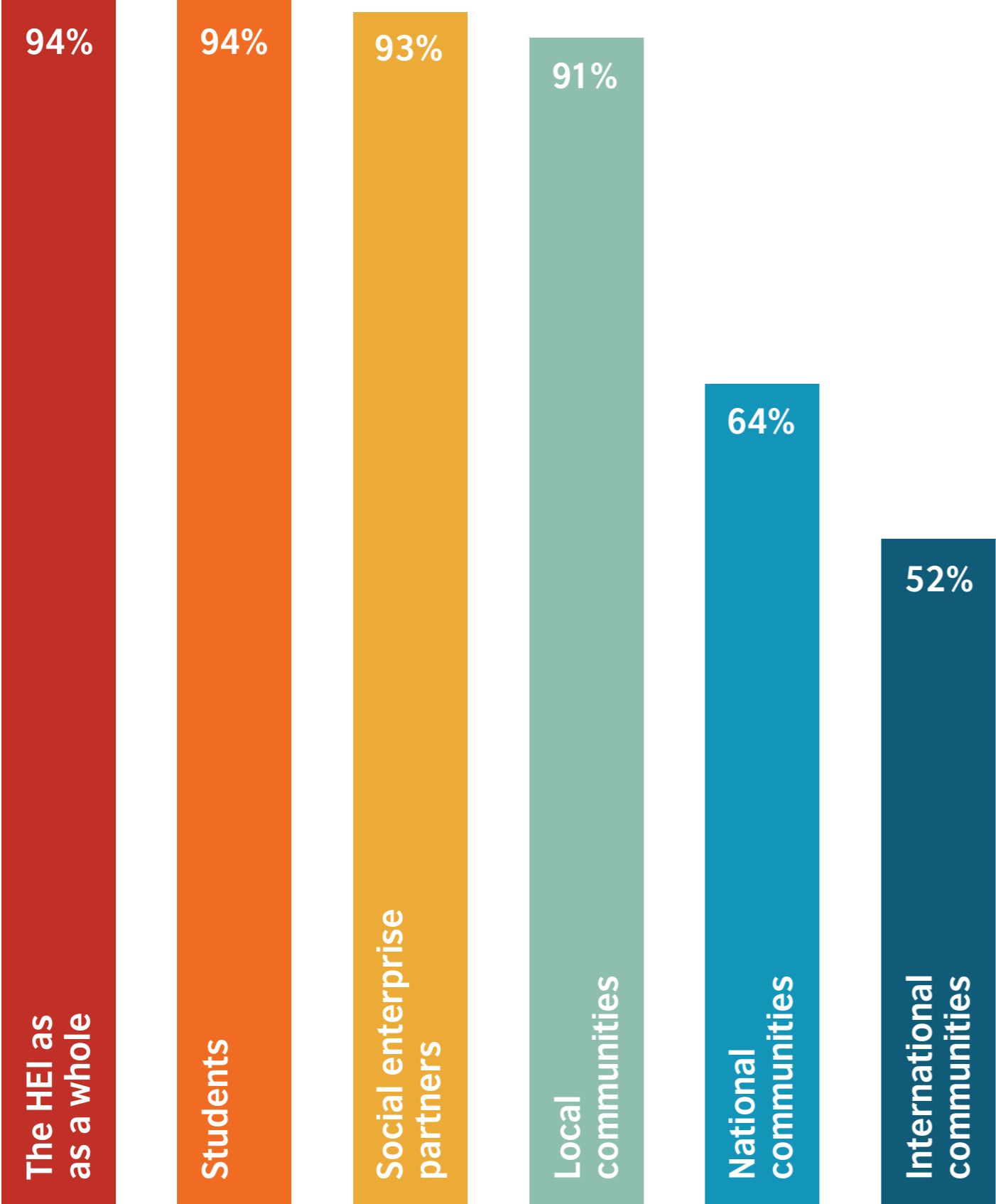
*Our social enterprise work provides communities with economic, social and human well-being impact, while also impacting social justice in positive ways (USA)*

- **Empowering local communities:** Lastly, survey feedback suggests that the engagement of HEIs in a social enterprise model serves to support a collaborative approach, empowering local communities through partnership.

*Communities, as a result of their engagement with social enterprise, are able to become self-reliant (India)*

*Community activities are viewed with ownership, especially youth projects (Kenya)*

**Views regarding the key beneficiaries of HEI/SE partnership**  
Chart 5



# Social enterprise through collaboration

**Institution**

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

**Overview**

Founded in 1919, the University of Ljubljana is the oldest and largest university in Slovenia, with a current enrolment of 30,000 students.

**Approach to social enterprise**

The University is a member of a social enterprise network and they support student-led social enterprises, and projects/ partnerships with existing social enterprises. Ljubljana offers an accredited social enterprise course and involves social entrepreneurs in the delivery of both curriculum teaching and extracurricular activities.

**Collaboration**

The University has built a network of social enterprises that support each other, and new start-up enterprises once they have made it past their own start-up phase. Their approach centres on strong collaboration, drawing in partners at all stages, to benefit the University and the social enterprise. The University also has an incubation space, the 'Ljubljana University Incubator' where new social enterprises can develop. Benefits for these enterprises include the provision of expertise, training, placement students, research, and goods and services promotion.

**The benefits**

Working with social enterprises has benefitted the university in a number of different ways. These include contribution to research activities; ensuring links with the local economy; supporting an increased link between the University and their community; enriching the curriculum for students; providing students with practical experiences; and through attracting new students who want to expand their future opportunities.

# Social enterprise to address community needs

## Institution

North-West University (NWU), South Africa.

## Overview

Founded in 2004, NWU has become one of the largest universities in South Africa with more than 50,000 students.

## Approach to social enterprise

Social enterprise is used as a vehicle by NWU to address the needs of their local communities, and to develop new research knowledge. It is also a key strategy for enhancing the university's reputation and generating income for communities.

## Supporting communities

NWU supports Mosaic SA, an organisation implementing South Africa's first self-sustainable orphan care model. NWU provides mentoring to Mosaic's CEO and supports training, access to expertise, research and evidence-based impact assessments.

NWU also engage student volunteers from institutions overseas to support the enterprise's schooling and building work, whilst locally they involve student volunteers and run service learning courses through training activities.

Mosaic provides housing, education and employment opportunities for families caring for orphans. This is funded through a number of income-generating social enterprises, such as: 'Made by Mosaic' – a manufacturing enterprise creating handmade goods and products that are exported and sold internationally; and 'Mosaic Builders' – a building contractor that coordinates all of Mosaic's infrastructure developments.

# The benefits and impacts of social enterprise activity

## Assessing the impact of social enterprise

Measuring the impact of social enterprise will enable its associated social value to be managed and communicated in a clear and consistent manner. However, as indicated by Universities UK (2012)<sup>12</sup>, continued HEI support for social enterprise will need to be underpinned by a clear recognition of the value for students, staff, local businesses, and the local community.

Survey respondents that were either working (or had worked) with a social enterprise were asked to provide at least one example of partnership, and to summarise their approach to impact assessment. Of the 122 HEIs that provided an example of HEI/SE partnership, 88 per cent stated that the impact of their work with at least one social enterprise had been measured or evaluated.

Impact assessment was most commonly undertaken by the HEI, cited by 78 per cent of respondents. In addition, a further 69 per cent indicated that some level of impact assessment was also undertaken by the social enterprise partner(s). Notably, just 11 per cent stated that they had not, or did not intend to measure or evaluate the impact of their work, underlining the importance of this process. Where assessment had occurred, this was reported to have revealed tangible social, economic, environmental, and health and wellbeing impacts.

<sup>12</sup> Universities UK (2012) *Universities Enabling Social Enterprise: Delivering Benefits for All*. Universities UK: London

# Challenges in collaboration

## Introduction

This report has so far outlined the clear benefits and associated impacts derived from HEI engagement with social enterprise. However, reflecting the relative recency and growth of these partnerships, the higher education sector is arguably yet to fully capitalise on the potential for social innovation. Similarly, evidence from the survey indicates that there is also work to be done in strengthening interaction and partnership working between HEIs and social enterprises, exemplified by a range of challenges faced when working collaboratively.

## Outlining the challenges

The analysis revealed six broad types of challenge experienced by HEIs. These were found to transcend partnership working across local, national, and international boundaries, with just a small number of unique international challenges raised relating to cultural understanding (including religion, values, and beliefs) and logistics. The six challenges, discussed in turn below, were categorised as: funding; resources and time; limited understanding and cultural attitudes; governance and structures; definition and understanding; and partnership working and communications.

## Challenge 1: Funding

The most frequently cited challenge by HEIs was a lack of funding to cover the time and resources required to work with social enterprise(s). For many institutions, the absence of central university funding, or other viable funding streams such as government finance, means that HEIs are often uncertain of the future of their activities. As cited by one UK university; *'Partnership working has many challenges but the most significant is ensuring an income source/stream to ensure that we can continue to develop this work.'*

The availability of funding was also found to vary according to the extent to which social enterprise was mandated at an institutional level through, for example, formal strategies for social entrepreneurship. Where this was less evident, the on-going success of the collaboration was often viewed with more uncertainty: *'Making the initiative 'stick' depends upon how embedded the strategy is in the university. Some initiatives are pushed forwards by individuals which is not ideal for sustainability.'* As cited earlier in this report, over three-quarters of all institutions emphasised the importance of institutional buy-in as a key driver for engagement.

The issue of funding also relates to the sustainability of the social enterprise itself. A lack of viable funding streams targeted at supporting social enterprises to start-up and grow has been found to contribute toward a higher failure rate. Meaningful partnerships and the availability of ongoing support are largely predicated on assumed enterprise survival. As such, the risk of failure presents a potential challenge to HEI engagement.

Ensuring the financial longevity of social enterprise activity is exemplified by the views of one HEI based in the USA who cited their main challenge to be *'developing sustainable programmes that have the long-term funding they need.'* In countries where no clear legal structures for social enterprise exist such as Mexico, financial sustainability can be harder to achieve due to lower levels of tax benefits or routes to funding, rendering HEI support for social enterprise more challenging: *'The main challenge is the legal form of social enterprises in Mexico, as there is no one single legal structure for these businesses.'*

## Challenge 2: Resources and time

After funding, resources and time were the two most frequently cited challenges faced by HEIs in partnering with social enterprise. From a HEI perspective, partnership may often be set against a context of challenging workloads, particularly in HEIs where social enterprise does not form part of a mission or strategy. As cited previously, HEIs also held low-levels of knowledge and experience in working with social enterprise, meaning that finding the right individuals to establish and develop partnerships may be problematic.

## Challenge 3: Limited understanding and cultural attitudes

Some HEIs indicated that their students can lack understanding around the concept of social enterprise making them difficult to mobilise and limiting levels of buy-in. In some countries this issue is a cultural one, borne out of a perception that the sector is inferior to traditional career options, such as those offered through the public sector. Evidence suggests a level of reticence or even objection from some parents regarding their child's engagement with social entrepreneurial activities, over a more traditional curriculum-based approach to study.

## Challenge 4: Governance and structures

HEIs tend to be large and complex organisations with policies and procedures that are not always aligned to new ways of working or innovation. These governance and structural barriers were exemplified by one Canadian institution which identified *'university bureaucracy, obsolete infrastructure, policy and institutional barriers'* to be among the key challenges they faced in establishing partnerships with social enterprise. External bureaucracy, in the form of local politics and regulations was also highlighted. For example, in Hong Kong, despite broad government support and funding for social enterprise, securing government approval to run social enterprise activities on a university campus was cited by one institution as a particular challenge.

## Challenge 5: Definition and understanding

Further challenges were found to exist around the fluidity of social enterprise as a concept. As cited in the Introduction to this report, the term is governed by different legal frameworks, terminology, and cultural approaches. HEIs in the UK, California, India and Pakistan in particular all suggested that a lack of understanding regarding how social enterprise differs from enterprise or charitable organisations has been challenging. For example, one institution based in Pakistan identified *'understanding and creating awareness regarding the difference between entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship'* to represent a key challenge, whilst another institution based in the USA stated that *'educating the business and faith community about the social enterprise sector'* required significant time and effort.

## Challenge 6: Partnership working and communications

Lastly, a lack of communication between partners and a variable level of commitment has meant that some HEIs have struggled to establish good working relationships with social enterprises. Establishing the best approach to partnership working and communication can take time, with the best solution not always evident from the outset. For example, staff from one institution based in the USA indicated that it *'took several years for the collaboration to establish trust and to figure out how to work together.'* As previously cited, international partnerships in particular may also be characterised by logistical considerations such as language, communicating across different time zones, and the cost of travel.



# Challenges of international social enterprise activity

## Institution

Maejo University, Thailand.

## Overview

Founded in 1934 as the Northern Agricultural Teachers Training School, and located in Chiang Mai province, Maejo University is the oldest agricultural institution in Thailand. As of April 2016, there were 18,252 undergraduates and postgraduates enrolled.

## Approach to social enterprise

Maejo University specialises in social enterprises which protect the environment and focus on improving health and wellbeing. The social enterprises all have a broad aim to address international development goals.

Maejo University has a comprehensive approach to working in collaboration with social enterprises. It is a member of a social enterprise network, have an incubation space, and support students and staff led social enterprises.

The University's approach is to incorporate social enterprise across all courses. For the enterprises themselves, Maejo University provides funding, expertise, access to their facilities, training, student placements, and collaboration on research. Lastly, Maejo University uses its own purchasing power to buy and promote products or services derived from the social enterprises they support.

## Challenges of international activity

Maejo University has been keen to develop international partnerships to expand its social enterprise activity as it provides opportunities to both establish new connections with industry partners, and collaborate with business owners.

However the University has encountered a number of challenges when engaging in international social enterprise activity, including difficulties in the areas of finance and access to funding; differences in religion, cultural beliefs and traditions; and language barriers, which have led to misunderstanding and miscommunication.

# Good practice in developing partnerships

## Introduction

As articulated in the Foreword section of this report, the research sought, in part, to facilitate dialogue and knowledge exchange, and to support and inform further collaboration opportunities. In support of these objectives, the survey asked HEIs to share examples of good practice stemming from their experience of developing partnerships with social enterprises.

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

## Developing cooperative networks

One of the most common examples of good practice cited by respondents involved the development of cooperative networks to support social enterprise. Respondents suggested that through engaging a breadth of organisations via a collaborative approach, social enterprises can receive more cohesive support and are increasingly able to interact and leverage networks. Where possible, these organisations should have a grounding in, or be knowledgeable of social enterprise, in order that they can provide additional advice (where required), and engender further credibility with other partners.

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

*Our recommendation is that HEIs focus on developing their own network so that they can tap into it when needed for the ventures they're working with (Canada)*

*We operate a partnership of students, staff and the community to understand and recognise the activities carried out (Thailand)*

## Involving communities

The involvement of local communities in social enterprise partnerships was highlighted as being a key measure of success. In particular, respondents identified the importance of HEIs working with communities in order to maximise the social value of the intervention through, for example, support for delivery, and in designing and shaping the approach. The involvement of communities from an early stage will also support partnerships to overcome barriers, and to enhance levels of trust.

*Get into the field, learn to dirty your hands, and bring sincerity and immersive commitment for any fruitful result (India)*

*Partnerships in a community can be created more easily if that particular social activity involves the benefits and well-being of people in the community (Thailand)*

*HEIs need to empower community leaders to initiate and support local development initiatives (Kenya)*

## Focus on impact and sustainability

As noted previously in this report, measuring the impact of social enterprise is important in communicating its social value, but also in articulating the value of HEI involvement for students, staff, local businesses, and the community. To this end, HEIs noted the importance of implementing clear action plans, and establishing monitoring and evaluation frameworks to underpin their social enterprise partnerships.

This approach promotes progress against aims and objectives. It also makes it easier to track key performance indicators and measure impact both during and after the period of funding. Lastly, HEIs also noted the importance of developing a well-defined framework of joint working, and ensuring that the social enterprises they support are self-sustainable.

*Ensure that your HEI's role in a project is clear from the start. Have a project monitoring structure – including timeframe, milestones and expected outcomes – in place (Canada)*

*A social enterprise is an enterprise – they need to be treated as a business even if they are not making an income at the start. Elements that do not contribute to sustainability must be avoided or you must find solutions to such challenges. Have a triple bottom line approach considering profit, people and planet (South Africa)*

*An important element of good practice is that social enterprises must always be a viable and sustainable business. Ensure the business is sustainable first, then the social impact will be realised over a longer term (Hong Kong)*

# Good practice in developing partnerships

## Communication and knowledge exchange

Communication between social enterprise partners and openness in sharing knowledge were also highlighted as good practice approaches. In order to ensure true partnership, it is essential that HEIs take the time to understand both the issues being addressed by any given social enterprise, and the socio-economic and cultural context in which it sits. From an external perspective, clear communication will also serve to build awareness and understanding of a social enterprise with key audiences, especially during the start-up phase.

*Seek honest interaction and feedback to make the relationship as mutually useful as possible (UK)*

*Listen and learn. Take the time to clearly understand social enterprise's ecosystems and the problems they are facing before attempting to determine how you can help (Canada)*

*Try to think about what they need and listen to them rather than projecting your aspirations onto them (Slovenia)*

## Student involvement

HEIs highlighted the importance of involving students in partnerships and underlined the associated mutual benefits for both students, and the individual social enterprise(s). Evidence from the survey indicates that four in every five institutions (80 per cent) with an active partnership supported social enterprise through the provision of placement students, whilst a similar proportion (78 per cent) supported student-led social enterprises. A further 70 per cent had institutional membership of a social enterprise network.

Students are increasingly becoming involved with social enterprise both at a curriculum level, and in working directly with organisations. For example, a number of HEIs were found to run social enterprise business challenges or competitions. Typically, students would be supported to draft an initial business proposal with support from a mentor, before pitching their idea to a panel of experts and potential investors. Whilst the prize for winning proposals varied across institutions, examples included further mentoring and financial support, and access to physical facilities such as incubation units.

*We have an innovation competition in which students submit social enterprise ideas and products. Social entrepreneurs from the community judge their submissions (USA)*

*Through practical projects the students are more passionate about working in a social enterprise and it has ignited interest their interest in running a social enterprise (United Kingdom)*

From a university perspective, student involvement in social enterprise demonstrates a commitment to social responsibility and promotes interaction with partnerships; for students, involvement supports the development of enterprise skills with wide application across a range of sectors; whilst for the enterprises themselves, students bring valuable skills and innovative approaches.

However, despite this broad support for student involvement, just 12 per cent of HEIs stated that 'student led ventures' best described their approach to working with social enterprises. In contrast, the largest proportion (46 per cent) stated that 'projects, partnerships, or other activities with social enterprises external to the HEI's most accurately defined their approach. This indicates that there is still work to be done to promote the role and positive contribution of students when supporting social enterprise partnerships.

As cited previously, 68 per cent of HEIs with an active partnership offered incubation space, characterised by the provision of an office to support early growth, and access to coaching, mentoring, and opportunities for networking. However, it was not clear what proportion of the incubation space offered was targeted toward students and recent graduates. Accordingly, the closing section of this report recommends that further research is required to establish the prevalence of student-led enterprise, and the role of HEIs in supporting this through, for example, incubation units or seed funding.

*Think creatively how social enterprise can be woven into the curriculum (UK)*

*Students are the good practice for us. We allow them to do lots of work and have responsibility in activities (Thailand)*

*We no longer talk to enterprises about our students helping them but rather ask that they consider helping our students learn in a way that will also provide benefit to them (USA)*

## Awareness of cultural differences

Feedback to the survey outlined the need for HEIs to be cognisant of cultural differences, particularly when developing international partnerships. The majority of comments regarding best practice related to ensuring that staff and students were fully prepared and briefed; that they possessed the requisite levels of cultural awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge to thrive in international environments; and that they treated all partners as equals. Lastly, and reflecting the different legal frameworks, terminology, and cultural approaches to social enterprise as articulated in the Introduction to this report, HEIs also need to possess an awareness of the social enterprise landscape in the partner country.

*It's not about going there as saviours, it's about treating all as equals and promoting a culture of mutual respect and learning (UK)*

*Do your homework and learn a lot about the culture of the international partner, both social and business wise (Greece)*

*First get familiar with the social enterprise system in a particular county (Slovenia)*

*Have patience when working in local communities and a huge investment in finding out how you can add value, rather than showing up with your own Master Plan (Canada)*

## Capacity building approach

Lastly, a number of HEIs identified the importance of a supportive, capacity building approach when engaging in international partnerships. More specifically, it was recommended that HEIs, when partnering with social enterprise, let organisations make their own decisions and that they work alongside them, rather than force approaches which might not be appropriate upon them. In this regard, international partnerships should be viewed as a long-term institutional commitment, and therefore, capacity should be planned for accordingly.

*Avoid disrupting a society's way of life, appreciate and work alongside them to enhance, build on and add more efficient and effective techniques of actualising their common good (Kenya)*

*Focus on bottom-up capacity building and sustainability. Organisations can only become masters of their own destiny if they make their own decisions, as opposed to having funders make the decisions for them (Canada)*

*Understand the financial implications of the work and consider how to sustain it (UK)*

# Sustainable business planning and social enterprise

## Institution

Riara University, Kenya.

## Overview

Riara was founded in 2012 and is a private institution located in Nairobi, Kenya. There are over 1,100 students currently enrolled.

## Approach to social enterprise

The University recognises social enterprises as businesses, requiring business planning and support at each critical stage. They embed social enterprise throughout the academic curriculum and have recently introduced a Higher Diploma in Social Entrepreneurship. Riara also partners in joint projects with existing social enterprises such as Stawi Foods and Fruits.

Stawi Foods and Fruits was the Winner of the Responsible Entrepreneurship award for East Africa, sponsored by the Bata Shoe Foundation and run in conjunction with the Global Business Schools Network. The organisation provides high quality processed banana flour through sustainable and equitable farmer relations. As part of their prize, the enterprise won mentoring support from Riara University, which included assistance to reorient their business plan towards being an all-inclusive supply chain model and socially responsible enterprise.

The university is also part of the UNCTAD 'Business Schools for Impact Project', in which they collaborate with other business schools in Europe, Asia and Latin America in order to address and promote sustainable development goals. Aside from the provision of content, this project facilitates internship programmes, whilst also fostering collaborative learning with other HEIs. It also allows Riara to showcase the African approach to social entrepreneurship.

## Summary

Partnerships between HEIs and social enterprise were found to be commonplace across the twelve countries of study, with three in every four institutions (75 per cent) engaged in activity at the point of survey. Notably, just three HEIs (2 per cent) stated that they had never worked with a social enterprise, thus underlining the continued importance of the British Council's work in this area.

Activity encompassed a breadth of approaches such as a dedicated social enterprise support service, the provision of access to facilities such as incubation space, embedding social enterprise into curriculum delivery, the provision of placement students and interns, and the direct purchase of products or services. Whilst activity predominantly took place in the HEI's country of domicile, over half of those with an active partnership stated that this also involved an international element. However, this tended to represent a smaller proportion of overall activity and commonly involved partnership with another HEI or organisation.

Despite this prevalence of activity, evidence from the survey indicates that there is still work to be done in strengthening interaction and partnership working between HEIs and social enterprises. To this end, HEIs cited a range of challenges faced when working collaboratively, or in brokering relationships of social value. Despite the differing legal frameworks, terminology, and cultural approaches across the sample, there was commonality in the barriers experienced.

The most commonly cited challenge to HEI engagement with social enterprise was the lack of funding, predominantly related to the cost of staff time and resource. This may suggest that the institutional benefits of social enterprise partnerships are not fully understood. As cited in this report, these can be numerous encompassing enhanced reputation and profile, and the provision of applied learning opportunities and increased levels of employability for students. To this end, it was revealing that over three-quarters of HEIs underlined the importance of institutional buy-in as a key driver for engagement.

Of those HEIs not currently working with social enterprise, the main reported barrier was a lack of knowledge and experience regarding approaches to engagement. However, three quarters of HEIs from this group would be encouraged to engage if they received support such as training or mentorship programmes, whilst a similar proportion would be encouraged to do so should funding be made available. Importantly, this underlines an openness to future engagement, and an awareness of how social enterprise may benefit their mission or strategy.

HEIs provided a range of good practice approaches to develop and sustain social enterprise partnerships that could be shared more widely. These centred around themes such as engaging local communities, creating multidisciplinary networks, implementing clear action plans and monitoring the impact of partnerships. Respondents also highlighted the importance of communication between partners, openness in sharing knowledge, the engagement of students, and consideration regarding the long-term sustainability of both the HEI's input and the social enterprise itself.

# Recommendations

The research identified the wide ranging benefits that can be derived from HEI engagement with social enterprise, as well as some of the main barriers to activity. Based on the survey findings and consultations undertaken as part of the study, the authors make the following recommendations to facilitate further dialogue and knowledge exchange:

## Increased sharing of knowledge and experience

Whilst not all models of social enterprise partnership are transferable, the underlining approaches and principles may be shared more widely, and adapted to differing cultural contexts. An increased level of knowledge exchange could serve to strengthen interaction, whilst also supporting and promoting new partnerships. Initial areas of focus could include skills for partnership working, focusing on curriculum based delivery, employability, and impact measurement.

## Support for impact assessment

HEI support for social enterprise needs to be underpinned by a clear recognition of the value for students, staff, and communities. Whilst the majority of HEIs stated that they had assessed impact at an individual project level, there was little evidence of this activity taking place at an institutional level. Evidencing benefits in a more systematic way could lead to increased levels of sustainability of, and engagement with social enterprise activity across HEIs. To this end, institutions would benefit from accessible and flexible resources such as an evaluation toolkit and examples of outcome measures which could be adapted to the local context.

## Embedding social enterprise in strategies and plans

The evidence from this research underlined the importance of institutional buy-in as a key driver for engagement. Senior and faculty level 'social enterprise champions' could bring further credibility to staff working in this area, and encourage HEIs to have social enterprise as a clearly stated part of their mission or strategy. Further exploration and understanding of global HEI mission statements would lend additional clarity to this approach.

## Social enterprise as a mechanism to enhance employability

With the rapid expansion of HE globally, evidenced in Africa and Asia in particular, graduate employability is likely to become a key global issue in the near future. In the UK, for example, there has been a renewed focus on this metric since the recent introduction of student loans. Social enterprise is widely viewed as a mechanism to both develop student employability skills, and to enhance their opportunities in the labour market. As such, policy makers could consider methods of sharing good practice in this area, whilst HEIs could use this approach to enhanced employability to differentiate themselves from competitors.

## HEIs increasingly embrace their role as enablers of social entrepreneurship

Aligned to the previous recommendation, the study found that HEIs play a key role in introducing students to the concept of social enterprise, broadening both their awareness of the opportunities available, but also providing them with the confidence to establish their own social enterprise. The recommendation is further underlined by recent global research, which concluded that those with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in social entrepreneurial activity attributed to both increased exposure to social entrepreneurship activity, and the positive effect of education on values and the motivation of individuals to help others<sup>13</sup>.

## Procurement and HEIs as anchor institutions

The research found a wide range of social enterprise activity but little discussion relating to HEIs and their supply chain. Where instances of supply-chain activity were cited, this tended to relate to developing or supporting social enterprises for students, such as catering initiatives, or a campus shop. As key anchor institutions in their community, HEIs have the potential to use their resources and purchasing power to increasingly engage social enterprises as providers of services and infrastructure. However, this approach would need to be reflected in institutional procurement policies to ensure that available contracts are segmented and advertised to small businesses and social enterprises.

## Future research

This study was one of the first to attempt to identify the range of HEI activity in the social enterprise sector. The findings, which are set against a period of rapid expansion and change in the higher education sector, point toward considerable energy and openness to future engagement. Consequently, this presents an opportunity for further research to monitor levels of engagement, but also to explore additional themes in more detail such as the contribution of the HEI supply chain to social enterprise development, approaches to incubation and student-led social enterprise, best practice in procurement, as well as the impact of social enterprise on graduate employability.

<sup>13</sup> GEM (2011) Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: 2009 Report on Social Entrepreneurship [online]. Available at: [www.gemconsortium.org](http://www.gemconsortium.org)



The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.

ISBN: 978-0-86355-809-2