

Dear Jamie

I am writing on behalf of Social Enterprise Network Scotland (SEN Scot) and in particular, the Employability Social Enterprise Network (SEN), to welcome the publication – and the intent and ambition – of the No One Left Behind Delivery Plan. We are also pleased to have you as a supporter of our sector, more recently through the working group on the Disability Employment Action Plan, via the Supported Business Advisory Group and the Review of Supported Employment in Scotland – all of which SEN Scot contributes to.

The Employability SEN is a network of around 300 Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) – including Supported Businesses - that deliver a wide variety of flexible, person-centred employability services across Scotland, with a particular focus and specialism on supporting people furthest from the labour market.

The Employability SEN is one of a number of thematic SENs managed by SEN Scot, the national intermediary that represents a membership of around 1500 social enterprises across Scotland.

In addition to the direct support we provide to members, the Employability SEN exists to:

- increase awareness and understanding of WISEs and their contribution to Scotland's employability landscape
- highlight the role WISEs play in tackling inequalities and delivering a wellbeing economy
- ensure the knowledge and expertise of WISEs in supporting people furthest from the labour market is recognised and valued

As such, we are keen to work with Government (national and local) and other partners to ensure that WISEs have increased recognition in the No One Left Behind ambitions and an enhanced role in its implementation.

### **WISEs: The Evidence**

WISEs epitomise the person-centred support which lies at the heart of No One Left Behind - support that is flexible and can adapt to meet the needs of the individual and labour market fluctuations. They focus on empowering people to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, contributing to society and being valued for their work. WISEs also provide pre/early stage pipeline support – support that is key to building a person's confidence, reducing stigma and barriers – all of which aids progression.

Every 2 years a Social Enterprise Census is undertaken which evidences the scale, reach, and contribution of social enterprises in Scotland. The latest SE Census in 2019 states there are 6,025 SEs in Scotland with over 88,000 FTE employees and of their total income of £4.4bn – £3.1bn is generated through trade.

This provides compelling evidence of the sector's contribution to addressing economic and social exclusion and reveals the extent to which social enterprises actively work with and create opportunities for people often considered furthest from the labour market. For example:

- 55% employ someone with a disability or long-term health condition
- 69% employ previously unemployed people
- 56% employ young people aged under 25 years
- 69% provide training or support intended to improve employability
- 79% employ more than half of their labour workforce from their own locality
- 75% pay at least the living wage to all employees

As we look to address the far-reaching consequences of the Covid pandemic, we believe WISEs can play a significant and meaningful role in tackling the increasing levels of unemployment/ underemployment to ensure that individuals with barriers to work are not left further behind.

### **A Local Approach**

WISEs are more likely to engage people who do not usually engage with mainstream provision. They work at a grassroots level, building relationships and trust with harder to reach individuals. They also know their local landscape, and open up, otherwise unrealisable, employment opportunities with employers; expertise and intelligence that is often undervalued in current employability service provision and which could make a significant difference to Covid's impact.

WISEs embody the Community Wealth Building ethos – they reinvest all profits back into their enterprise to deliver more community benefit, they employ local people, they purchase locally – a vital multiplier effect ensuring the public pound works harder and reaches further. As a driver of recovery, it is imperative that money reaches, is retained by and recycled in local communities to enable them to respond to local needs.

### **Employability & Employment**

Crucially in addition to delivering improved employability outcomes for people furthest from the labour market, WISEs – as the census shows – also create jobs. And jobs will be needed more than ever as we enter the next stage of recovery.

### **Employment & Mental Health**

We also believe that WISEs have a critical role to play in tackling the imminent surge in mental health issues. In addition to providing wrap-around support to improve the mental wellbeing of people engaged in their employability services, WISE offer an inclusive and fair work environment (for staff, volunteers and beneficiaries) and high quality jobs which we know are conducive to supporting good mental health.

## **Harnessing WISE**

Social enterprises work across Government's employability pipeline and across all beneficiary groups but in spite of the vital services and support WISE provide, a significant proportion of WISEs operate outside of and are not currently recognised or supported through the employability 'system'. They are often locked out by the scale and complexity of employability contracts.

We wholeheartedly welcome the Government's commitment to a strengthened partnership approach in the design, delivery, implementation and improvement of employability services, embracing a mixed economy of provision. We also recognise the need for this collaborative commitment and contribution across all sectors to truly deliver the best employability support for Scotland's people.

We welcome the opportunity to work with Scottish Government and other stakeholders to harness the ability and ambition of WISEs to play a leading role in tackling the very likely upsurge in unemployment – supporting people into work, helping people sustain work and creating jobs within a supportive environment for people who are at risk of being left behind.

WISEs stand ready to be part of a strong, inclusive, agile local employability landscape and to deliver better outcomes for the people who most need it. In this context, we would welcome the support of your division, including a small financial contribution to support our work with the Employability Social Enterprise Network going forward.

Kindest Regards  
Pauline

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