

Launch of a University Social Innovation Network

12-1pm February 22nd 2023

CONSOLIDATED NOTES FROM LAUNCH OF UNIVERSITY SOCIAL INNOVATION NETWORK

PURPOSE OF NETWORK

- To demonstrate the importance of social innovation to funders
 - Not just define Social Innovation but also to articulate why it is important
 - To demonstrate relevance of social innovation to industry-led programmes and help the communities we work with embrace new technologies
 - To take a less siloed approach and to be more demand-led and task-focussed (like industry)
 - To create channels looking at what social innovation means to different sectors and regions
 - To help projects achieve sustainability after explicit funding has dried up
- To raise awareness about social innovation among academics:
 - To help academics flex beyond their own area of expertise, getting them to understand a more holistic and broader approach, especially around the impact challenges.
 - To help researchers think more about why they are doing the work they are doing, applying models like theory of change to their work
 - To generate the cultural shift needed to encourage researchers to think about how their work can be beneficial beyond the purposes of REF.
 - To explicitly recognise and value the relevance of social innovation in the work we do
 - To impress upon academics the importance of KE in sharing new knowledge
- To support KE professionals in harnessing social innovation
 - To demonstrate and articulate our contribution and counter the feeling of being under-appreciated, as well as under-estimating our own contribution
 - To link into other networks like Aspect but not re-invent or replicate initiatives that already exist
 - To share training opportunities and recommend speakers
 - To develop and promote resources such as open hardware or software that can be used to deliver social innovation and impact.
- To support social entrepreneurs and social enterprises
 - To create more sustainable model of social entrepreneurship support that extends beyond the formation of social enterprises as teaching or learning vehicles where cohorts of students come and go
 - To help social enterprises to promote their business and impact
 - To communicate and collaborate with both social enterprises and more widely to businesses with a purpose

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BENEFITS

Strength in numbers

- There is currently no obvious place for examining and applying social innovation even though it is high in the policy agenda; it will create a critical mass for mutual support; it will lend us a collective ability to de-mystify social innovation; there is no real network for practical conversations – seeing what other people are doing in other organisations working under Chatham House rules, to create mutual openness

Complementarity

- It will help to link up expertise in research-focussed social innovation and support for social entrepreneurship and form a bridge between our student engagement and education agenda especially within local communities

Lobbying

- Engagement with decision-makers and policymakers will be far more effective if we are part of a large group; it will help us to influence policy and strategy, with drivers such as the Place-based Impact and Acceleration accounts; it will highlight different approaches and opportunities in different regions

Impact

- It will create a heterogeneous group which reflects the need to support impact across different disciplines and will integrate and synthesise different disciplines without diluting the specialist qualities of our areas, sharing best practice; it will help drive our efforts to make impact relevant even when it's not part of REF; it will support our role as knowledge mobilisers in order to cut across a range of impact areas

Institutional Change

- It will be a good way of understanding how our different institutions are applying social innovation, where they are creating either new structures or thinking about new processes and systems that might be needed; it will help interrogate that inflexible “oil tanker” culture within universities vs. a more agile “speedboat” approach whereby universities become more open to external engagement; it will help bring aspects such as EDI and social outcomes to the forefront to our approaches; it will help us co-create with civic partners

Professional Development

- It will offer support at a personal level; learning from the network will help KE professionals especially for those at the early stages of classifying their work in terms of social innovation; It will help to define and share best practice on how we manage social innovation internally as well as externally – in aspects such as work allocation; it will help raise awareness about other relevant support organisations; it will serve as a central repository of resources and case studies

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FORMAT

- The use of the themes used in the breakout rooms is a starting point
- Meetings every 2-3 months
- Really useful to have some specific themes and sub-groups with small group discussions, rather than having the larger network altogether
- It would be interesting to involve a non-university partners where relevant - working with different stakeholders
- It would be good to have face to face events occasionally but inevitably it will also have a virtual component especially for those with limited time and resources
- Some instant messaging component might be good (discord, slack etc.)
- It would be good to have training sessions

Thematic considerations

- Links between the different areas (commercialisation, research impact etc.)
- Best practice sharing and guidance on replication
- Specific strategies for impact acceleration
- Building partnerships with industry and how social innovation can play an important part
- Highlighting social innovation case studies

Next steps:

- To organise a face-to-face / hybrid event (May 18th, 2023)
- To share draft terms of reference based on feedback, preliminary actions and proposed thematic agenda (June 1st 2023)
- Distribute agreed upon programme of Network meetings (September 2023)