

## Workshop 2 Notes

### Developing A Quality Mark & A Social Firm Brand

**Facilitators:** Kathy Baker (Social Firms UK), Ruth Lowbridge (SFEDI), Arlette Needham (SFEDI), Jenny Sims (Pembrokeshire Frame Ltd)

\*NB notes to be read in conjunction with handouts given out in the session.

The quality mark has been developed to gain:

- recognition (leading edge)
- confidence for customers
- illustrate sustainability
- provide inspiration
- raise profile

It has been a development process and will adapt to the sector over time. There is a professionalism in this approach.

The pilot started 18 months ago with focus groups of good Social Firms. This group developed a criteria, invited applications to take part in the pilot, 7 firms were selected and at the end of it we have 5 Star Social Firms.

Pembrokeshire Frame is one of the Star Social Firms. It is a mental health charity and a Social Firm. It provides work and training opportunities for people with mental health problems. The business is furniture recycling which makes up 75% of the total income. Feedback on the pilot Star Social Firm process included:

- they found it hard at first to choose what evidence needed to be presented;
- there was some confusion around what a 'contract' is, and whether or not it included Service Level Agreements;
- they ended up amending their mem & arts to reflect their Social Firm ambitions/status and including 'employment';
- they thought they may have to identify staff employed from the client base, but actually didn't have to so that was okay;
- they had liP already and lots of evidence that was asked for could have been taken from the liP process to save time;
- re. assessments, they think that smaller organisation shouldn't have to pay full amounts so suggest payments should be graded;
- they felt that the standard is very black & white, you either are or aren't a Social Firm, yet felt there should be acknowledgement if you are working towards it;
- they think it's a fantastic idea!

Refer to handouts for information on the criteria.

A question was asked about whether Star Social Firm would apply in Scotland as well. The answer is 'yes'; it is a UK-wide initiative by Social Firms UK. One of the first Star Social Firms is Haven Products in Renfrewshire.

#### SFEDI

SFEDI is a standard setting body and leading agency in the SME sector. It is 11 years old and began as an initiative.

Lots of Social Firms are small firms; it is good therefore to look at an organisational standard.

There are two ways of approaching:

- 1) accrediting good practice (allows to benchmark against other Social Firms);
- 2) good development tool to help individual Social Firms to grow in size.

There has been considerable consultation time built into the development. The template can be used by other parts of the social enterprise sector – there appears to be lots of interest there.

Jenny stated that having Star Social Firm would help her to describe her organisation, e.g. to local authorities. Ruth added that it could potentially help with opening up procurement opportunities.

Kathy said that the stage from here is to take Star Social Firms out to the 'wider world'. Social Firms UK has appointed a PR agency to lead the campaign to bring Star Social Firms to key audiences such as local authority and corporate procurement officers.

The key messages to get across in the marketing are that Social Firms are:

- viable businesses
- quality driven
- good employers
- high values and purpose
- positive impact
- supporting the CSR of others

Having Star Social Firm status will be used to market Frame, for example, to procurement officers to prove the value of Social Firms.

CSR is also potentially big business for Star Social Firms, we want big chains to use Social Firms (could be part of their branding?).

In the future, all the information relating to Star Social Firm will be on the website:

- application form
- guidance documents
- flowchart etc.

Trained assessors will also be advisers. There is a panel making the final decision:

- Ruth (SFEDI)
- 2 assessors
- 1 assessor who carried out the process
- Social Firms UK employee as an observer

Ruth explained that Social Firms need 2 years of accounts to show that trading is at least 50%, but those not there yet could use it as an objective and tell customers you're working towards it.

All assessors are from the Social Firm sector and actually working within it. So far 7 people have been trained as assessors, 2 of which are based in Scotland.

Star Social Firm status will be re-evaluated after every 2 years.

Social Firms UK is currently working on the costing of the scheme. It will depend on the scale of the organisation (number of staff/sites). Plus, for example, one of the pilot Star Social Firms, has >500 staff over 5 different sites, and the process for them took much longer than Pembrokeshire Frame, for example.

The question was put as to why there were no environmental criteria, when it's so relevant these days in the procurement tendering process. Kathy responded that this was being looked at and it's not being ruled out but that we also didn't want to stray too far from the original purpose of this quality mark.

All agreed that the marketing of the Star Social Firm was absolutely crucial and the feeling was that having 'Star Social Firms' would bring up the rest of the sector.