The Trust has supported the VCSE sector through commissioned work, targeted grants and accompanying research and development activity. We have worked in a highly future-focused way, acknowledging the strengths of the sector and the challenges it faces.

The Trust has supported innovative work since its inception, and in 2013 Social Innovation became one of our 5 core themes. The Trust embraces one of the most widely used definitions:

“Social innovations are new solutions that simultaneously meet a social need and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and better use of assets and resources. In other words, social innovations are both good for society and enhance society’s capacity to act.”

Initial work during the 2013 – 2015 period laid the foundations through research and the resourcing of a series of individual interventions, such as Young Foundation’s Amplify NI programme. We were fortunate in having Robin Murray, the co-author of the Open Book of Social Innovation as the Chair of the Research Advisory Group for our initial research. Robin encouraged us to proceed with ambition for the scope and scale of the work and the potential it had. By 2015 it was clear that the key to embedding social innovation as the ‘new normal’ way of working in the VCSE sector was for the main ‘enablers’ of social innovation (funders, public agencies, network organisations, etc.) to develop a collective vision and adopt a collaborative model of working.

As a consequence, following further research and an intensive co-design process, Social Innovation NI was born in 2016. It was always envisaged that the outcomes set out for Social Innovation NI were long-term in nature and therefore would extend beyond the life of the Trust.

The Trust is grateful to all of those who took part in the review:
- Claire Ferris, Patricia Flanagan and Michelle Dolan (Work West)
- Clare McGee, Barney Toal and Connor Doherty (Innovate NI)
- Una McKernan and Sandra Bailie (NICVA)
- Maeve Monaghan (NOW)
- Joanne Morgan (Community Development and Health Network)
- Sophie Mullen (Arthritis Care NI)
- Sharon Polson (Department for Communities)
- Brian O’Neill (Enterprise NW)
- John Peto (BCT Board member)
- Katherine Rowlandson (Kippie)
- Mary Ryan (MACS)

Our hope is that the work undertaken through Social Innovation NI to date will continue to inspire and animate interest – and action – long after the Trust closes its doors.

Bill Osborne, Chair, Building Change Trust
Social Innovation is one of five strategic themes that the Building Change Trust has been supporting in Northern Ireland in its work to support change and development in the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE).

Social Innovation is an emerging area of work and investment across the world in response to a growing recognition that new approaches are required to tackle the social, economic and environmental challenges we face. In broad terms, social innovation is about finding innovative solutions to existing social problems through the development of new products, services, models of working or processes.

How Social Innovation NI developed

The Building Change Trust identified social innovation as one of its core themes in 2013 and over a three-year period carried out work which included:

- Research intended to clarify and demystify social innovation and to explore its potential in Northern Ireland including the potential for digital technology to be used for social good.1
- Study visits to enable social innovation practitioners from the VCSE sector and policy makers in a range of fields to explore best practice elsewhere and to identify ideas and approaches that could be applied in Northern Ireland;
- Grants to support projects including the Holywell Trust’s exploration of sustainable social enterprise ventures in Derry, and Fermangh Trust’s work on models of renewable energy production that maximise opportunities for community benefit and ownership;
- Supporting initiatives exploring new ways of designing solutions to social problems through: a Social Innovation Challenge; the Young Foundation’s Amplify NI initiative; bringing the Unusual Suspects Festival organised by the global learning network Social Innovation Exchange to Northern Ireland in 2016;
- Designing and commissioning a Techies in Residence programme to bring together technology experts and the community sector to design and develop new ideas to tackle social problems. Recognising that harnessing the potential uncovered by this work required a more strategic, co-ordinated, cross-sectoral approach, in 2015 the Trust took a decision to commit resources to developing a collaborative initiative aimed at enabling access to practical and financial supports for social innovation at all stages to include: the development of new ideas; prototypes needing testing or further development; or proven transformative approaches ready to be implemented on scale. The aim was to create a collaborative approach which would add value to what could be achieved by individual stakeholders.

The Melting Pot, Scotland’s Centre for Social Innovation, was commissioned to work with the Trust to facilitate a co-design process involving key stakeholders including VCSE organisations and networks, funders, government departments, public agencies and private sector companies, to develop a new social innovation initiative: Social Innovation NI.

A six-month period of workshops and meetings led to a high-level development plan for Social Innovation NI2 2016 to 2018. A Programme Board was established with delegated authority for all decision making around the approval of programme proposals and allocation of resources, within the terms of the Building Change Trust’s Trust Deed.

Introduction

Social Innovation NI Programme 2016-2018

What Social Innovation NI hoped to achieve

Social Innovation NI was designed to foster the achievement of four broad outcomes in the medium to long term.

From an early stage the Trust was aware that its aim of embedding social innovation as the way of developing and delivering solutions to social challenges in Northern Ireland would be a longer term goal well outside its lifespan. What it did hope to achieve over the course of its remaining period of operation was some progress around a range of shorter term outcomes at the level of individuals, organisations and funders which if achieved would represent a significant step forward in laying the foundations for greater awareness, capacity and knowledge of social innovation.


2 See https://socialinnovationni.org/projects/about/
Main areas of work
It was planned that Social Innovation NI would deliver a range of interventions through partnership arrangements funded by the Trust. The Trust also undertook the provision of a central co-ordination and development function.

Social Innovation NI was designed to deliver programmes funded or commissioned by the Trust, together with other supportive influencing, mapping and brokerage activities:

- **Social Innovation Decoded workshops (Social Innovation Decoded)** – delivered by NICVA to raise awareness of social innovation and provide a recruitment mechanism for the programmes;
- A **Social Innovation Skills Programme (Social Innovation Skills)** – delivered by Work West and Enterprise NW to build the capacity and knowledge of individuals and organisations using a social innovation method called human-centred design[^4] and to provide an opportunity to test these methods in an area of their work. Participants also had the opportunity to bid on a competitive basis for Seed Funding to further develop their projects;
- A **Knowledge Exchange Programme (Knowledge Exchange Programme)** – intended to support organisations working on social problems to connect with others working on these issues and with practical examples, knowledge and research;
- A **Techies in Residence Programme (Techies in Residence)** – delivered by Innovate NI to stimulate social innovation by connecting VCSE organisations exploring new solutions to social challenges with digital technology professionals to build prototype digital products that have social benefit for their end users. These participants also have the opportunity to bid for Seed Funding;
- **Seed Funding** – Building Change Trust supported by DfC and CFNI (Community Foundation NI) set aside an amount of funding in order to enable ideas which had proven viable, socially impactful and scalable through the other programmes to be further progressed.

[^4]: Human-Centred Design or ‘Design Thinking’ draws from methods used by product designers to find desirable solutions for clients. It has been adapted for use in addressing complex social challenges and involves creative problem-solving through community-based research, insight gathering, idea generation, rapid prototyping and a ‘bias towards action’.
What was delivered?

Social Innovation Decoded Programme

One of the programme partners, NICVA, hosted two series of “Social Innovation Decoded” workshops at venues right across NI during autumn 2016 and autumn 2017. “My head is buzzing! Even in the short term it has made me rethink our [funding] application. Will discuss at regional meetings to see if we can look at common problems” – Social Innovation Decoded workshop participant.

Social Innovation Skills Programme

This intensive programme delivered by Work West and Enterprise NW was structured to take a team of staff or volunteers from an organisation through a human-centred design process that enabled them to both learn the method and develop a new idea to address a social challenge they work on. Recruitment was via an open call with organisations selecting teams based on criteria including their openness to explore new approaches and their willingness to commit the time necessary. They then received intensive training and mentoring to equip them with the problem-solving skills they needed to develop an innovative solution to a challenge they faced. The focus was on supporting the development of their initial ideas for a solution to the stage where a prototype solution could be tested in the real world. Two rounds of the programme took place incorporating:

- Workshops attended by all teams over a 6-8-week period together with regular one to one mentoring during which they were taken through and applied human-centred design thinking concepts;
- Work between sessions including one-to-one mentoring during which they were taken through and applied human-centred design thinking concepts;
- Generating as many possible solutions to their challenge as possible and then using a series of tools and criteria to refine these down to a preferred solution;
- Developing a storyboard for their project and a ‘prototype’ or basic scaled down version of their solution using inexpensive materials before testing out their ideas with end users;
- Mentor support to develop applications for Seed Funding including support for pitching their proposals.

“An explanation of the concept of social innovation; a range of geographic and sectoral areas. Following the Social Innovation Decoded workshops, interested applicants were directed towards either the Social Innovation Skills strand, or the Techies in Residence programme and other opportunities; an introduction to social innovation and design thinking and how it might be applied in the VCSE sector, covering a range of geographic and sectoral areas. Recruitment was via an open call with organisations selecting teams based on criteria including their openness to explore new approaches and their willingness to commit the time necessary. They then received intensive training and mentoring to equip them with the problem-solving skills they needed to develop an innovative solution to a challenge they faced. The focus was on supporting the development of their initial ideas for a solution to the stage where a prototype solution could be tested in the real world. Two rounds of the programme took place incorporating:

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For Kippie, access to the Social Innovation Skills programme “has really kick started our business... we have learnt how to concisely describe what we offer which has made a big difference to our funding applications”. The design thinking elements of the programme and in particular the importance of involving stakeholders at every stage of developing solutions has been a key learning point.

The benefits of participation in the programme included: access to useful contacts; having the time and space to refine what Kippie wanted to do and “confidence to go for it and trust in our idea”. The project has also demonstrated the benefits of Kippie’s approach in supporting people with additional needs. Learning from this work has informed the development of a new course for young people with autism and learning disabilities.

Kippie decided to apply to the Social Innovation Skills programme after hearing about this opportunity from Enterprise NW. A Kippie team participated in the programme and was successful in bidding for seed funding. This has been used for business development including using the prototype game developed by a group of teenagers to market Kippie’s work to schools, community and voluntary groups and to companies with a corporate social responsibility budget. It has also been helpful in enabling Kippie to develop blocks of tutorials that can be adapted as required for future projects and games for different groups and offering courses at a subsidised rate.

Kippie is a recently formed Community Interest Company set up to work with disenfranchised groups to discuss and manage issues that affect them through designing and making computer games and learning computing, artwork, entrepreneurial and programming skills along the way through bespoke courses and workshops. Its focus is on helping people to find new ways of expressing themselves and telling their stories.

Kippie is now incorporating design thinking into the workshops it delivers, it has also taken part in the Techies in Residence Programme providing technical support to Parenting NI which has own seed funding to reach as many parents as possible and make them aware of help and support through a new app.

In recognition of their work Kippie have been selected as one of Nesta and The Observer’s 50 ‘New Radicals’ for 2018.

CASE STUDY // Kippie

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CASE STUDY // MACS Supporting Children and Young People

MACS Supporting Children and Young People provides support services for young people aged 11-25 who are at risk. The problem MACS wanted to solve was how to best meet the needs of young people in the care system with more complex needs which are not being well met through current mainstream provision. MACS had been exploring developing bespoke accommodation for this group which would deal with their needs differently.

MACS attended one of NICVA’s Social Innovation Decoded awareness sessions and decided to apply to the Social Innovation Skills programme and developed a prototype for their proposed accommodation. They subsequently were successful in bidding for Seed Funding to carry out study field trips to good practice facilities in Denmark and Tipperary which contributed significantly to the development of the initial concept and resulted in changes to their preliminary thinking on how the project might be best realised. The funding also enabled them to commission a feasibility study to explore the development of the initial concept and resulted in changes to their preliminary thinking on how the project might be best realised. The funding also enabled them to commission a feasibility study to explore the feasibility of a dog grooming and walking social enterprise to improve employment opportunities for young people leaving care and young people not in education, employment or training aged 16-25.

For MACS, participation in Social Innovation Skills “has cemented the work we do already” with the focused structure of the programme seen as very helpful: “It was very structured, time bound and kept us to task. We achieved a lot.” Making a prototype for the accommodation was highlighted as particularly valuable. “Doing this together and taking pictures made it real for everyone in the group. From being sceptical we went to ‘Wow look at what we can create’. It created a can-do attitude, positivity and let’s do it approach.” The project is now at an advanced stage with a property purchased, a model of work developed and staff recruitment underway.

MACS has successfully applied again to the second round of Social Innovation Skills and Seed Funding to explore the feasibility of a dog grooming and walking social enterprise to improve employment opportunities for young people leaving care and young people not in education, employment or training aged 16-25.

Techies in Residence Programme

The Techies in Residence programme, commissioned by the Trust and delivered by Social Innovation NI partner Innovate NI, enables a VCSE organisation which has an innovative idea with the potential for social impact to work with a dedicated digital technology professional for 10-12 weeks to develop a prototype to the point where it can be tested and be pitched for further investment.

The first cycle of the programme was delivered in 2016 by a consortium led by CultureTECH which supported six projects. The latest phase within the Social Innovation NI collaboration started in October 2016, with two cycles (2017 and 2018) now completed in addition to the pilot year. Promotional activities were via the NICVA Social Innovation Decoded workshops, as well as the two social innovation festivals that were held – the Unusual Suspects in 2016 and FusionFest in 2017.

Applications were invited with projects required to show that they address a social need in NI, that the solution is innovative, will have an impact in NI and has senior-level organisational buy-in.

Short-listed applicants refined and re-submitted their applications, and the best applications were invited to pitch to a panel for a place on the Techies in Residence programme. Once the final selection had been made, Innovate NI issued a call for Techies. The VCSE organisations and Techies were paired up after which they worked intensively together over a 10-12 week period to build a prototype digital product – whether a mobile app, a website, some new software, etc. – to address their social challenge. During this period Innovate NI provided regular one-to-one mentoring for each of the projects as well as workshops and pitch training.

The Techies in Residence programme was also made possible through Techies in Residence, has the potential to scale not only throughout Northern Ireland but also nationally and internationally, which promotes Mencap’s value of Inclusion. We want “The World Around Us” as we would never have had the resources to start up a project like this on our own. Techies in Residence united us with our Techie, C60 Ltd. It has created a true partnership with them; their involvement, collaboration and passion for wanting to make the world that we live in more accessible for individuals with a learning disability has been overwhelming. This prototype, only made possible through Techies in Residence, and the potential to scale not only throughout Northern Ireland but also nationally and internationally, which promotes Mencap’s value of Inclusion. We want “The World Around Us” to be a platform for every social experience that may be a barrier for someone with a learning disability, no matter how big or small it is, we want to break that barrier down.” (Mencap)
NOW is a social enterprise supporting people with learning difficulties and autism into employment, learning and volunteering. Since Building Change Trust’s initial support and investment through the 2015 Social Innovation Camp project and then the 2016 Techies in Residence programme, NOW’s highly successful JAM card has been funded by both Big Lottery Fund and Nominet Trust. The JAM card is a credit card sized card with a graphic on one side and the words “Just a minute”, and on the other side “Please be patient, I have a learning difficulty”. It allows users to ask for just a minute of patience in a number of situations such as shops, restaurants or public transport. The involvement of users in defining the issue and designing the solution is considered by NOW to be a huge factor in its success. NOW participated in the Trust’s Social Innovation Camp workshops in 2015 and when the Techies in Residence programme opened for applications later that year NOW were successful in securing a place. NOW was then paired with Creative Metrics and worked together to produce a first iteration of a mobile app version of the JAM Card. The app had several benefits for both the end user and the organisation, including greater portability, user data about where the app had been used and a ratings system for the quality of their experience that enabled NOW to open dialogue with businesses and public services about their training needs around accessibility. Following completion of the Techies in Residence programme, NOW were successful in securing funding from the Nominet Trust - the first project they had funded in NI. Big Lottery Fund also provided significant follow-on funding to the project to develop further. Consequently JAM is now available as an app for smartphones that allows users to select an onscreen message which they can choose from for example “I have autism / Asperger’s”, “I have a condition” or “I have a brain injury”. The app also allows users to rate their experience of the particular service, and to find local businesses nearby which are JAM card friendly. This has provided NOW with the opportunity to become sustainable through the development of a social enterprise which offers the necessary training and support to businesses to become JAM card friendly. The businesses also gain access to promotional materials which let their customers know that they are a JAM card friendly business. What is perhaps most striking about the JAM card journey is the reach that it has attained in a comparatively short space of time. Over 9000 people are now using the JAM card, and over 500 businesses in Northern Ireland recognize it. All Northern Ireland Translink buses and trains are now JAM card friendly, as well as 8 out of the 11 Local Authorities, with all new staff attending induction training on JAM. According to the NOW group: “The support from Building Change Trust’s Social Innovation Camp project helped us to take the JAM card from an idea into a project. It gave us the structure and time to put a plan around it, and kick started the Techie in Residence process. Alongside the support from Nominet, it helped us to develop technical aspects of the JAM card as well as an online training platform. The support from Social Innovation NI helped get the idea out there”. 

2017 | 2018
---|---
APPLICATIONS | APPLICATIONS
SHORTLISTED FOR NEXT STAGE | OFFERED PLACE ON PROGRAMME
SELECTED TO PITCH FOR TECHIE | COMPLETED PROGRAMME
PLACES SECURED ON PROGRAMME | APPLIED FOR SEED FUNDING
APPLICATIONS FOR SEED FUNDING | AWARDED SEED FUNDING
**Seed Funding**

In addition to these elements of the programme, Building Change Trust supported by DfC and CFNI (for the Social Innovation Skills Programme in 2018 only), made available Seed Funding, so that projects emerging from both the programmes as viable, scalable, and capable of social impact could be refined and developed further.

**CASE STUDY // Arthritis Care NI**

**Arthritis Care** was keen to explore ways to engage with young people with Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis in order to help them gain greater control of their condition, communicate symptoms more effectively, and engage with others with the same condition. According to Arthritis Care, “arthritis in young people is not just about sore joints – it’s also about fatigue, alienation, isolation and feeling different”. The organisation also identified problems in how young people were interacting with their medical care, finding that they could be inclined to downplay problems and not communicate clearly about their symptoms with medical professionals.

The organisation secured a place on the 2017 Techies in Residence programme and following its completion were awarded Seed Funding of £12,000. The aim was to create a digital, interactive tool that would be useful to young people and medical staff in terms of accurately recording symptoms and encouraging attendance at appointments, as well as communicating with young people about the service. Arthritis Care provides, and encouraging them to join the online community and attend events.

The organisation recalls a “wonderful phase of blue sky thinking which generated lots of ideas”, involving young people who would be among the end-users of the product. Support was provided around sustainability, big-picture thinking, pitching ideas, and access to funding. Arthritis Care describes going through a process of “agile development” with their tech partner whereby ideas needed to be adapted and shaped in order to find what was described as the “minimum viable product” i.e. a product which was simple enough to be developed within the financial / time constraints, but which would also be a useful app with good core functionality, with the possibility of expansion.

Throughout the Techies in Residence process, the idea was refined and developed into a prototype app that allows young people to track their condition and produce reports about symptoms / side effects of their medication, sleep, activity, school, mood and more. The app provides basic hints and tips that can empower the young person / user to take control of their arthritis and improve it. Seed Funding enabled the organisation to further develop the prototype to link users with a community of young people who also have arthritis – both to the online community and to real events that take place throughout the year.

The process has produced substantial learning which according to Arthritis Care “led to a culture shift in our team” in that there was now a greater understanding of the potential of digital technology and the importance of collaboration and co-creation, as well as the challenges of working across different sectoral cultures and models of working.

The app is being launched in September 2018 and being made available to a wider audience in January 2019. The organisation is committed to investing further after that to add to the app. Future versions will enable them to collect data with consent, providing a reliable body of data on arthritis, impact of medication, side effects, behaviours around medication etc. The organisation has already identified two research groups with whom they may potentially collaborate on future projects. As Arthritis Care commented: “This has been a rollercoaster for us. It’s the type of thing, having joined the programme as a small charity, that we could never have dreamt of doing with our young people – to be able to involve young people in developing this app has been so cool! We never envisaged how big this could be”.

Knowledge Exchange Programme

The Knowledge Exchange Programme was designed to provide a wide range of organizations working on complex multifaceted social problems the time, space and process to come together to look at issues in a more holistic way and develop new solutions collaboratively to bring about systemic change. The rationale underpinning the approach was based on the view that addressing complex social problems requires simultaneous innovations across multiple organisations and sectors working to address different elements of the same complex challenges. In the Trust’s research into social innovation ecosystems this was referred to as the need to support both vertical and horizontal partnerships.

**Above:** “Vertical (left) and ‘horizontal’ (right) approaches to social innovation support are both necessary meaning Social Innovation NI’s ambition is to both support individual innovations through their life cycle and also support multiple, collaborative innovations simultaneously to address different elements of complex problems.

It was decided to apply this approach to four social challenges identified in research by the Young Foundation around which social innovation is starting to flourish in Northern Ireland:

- outcomes for young people; poverty and debt; inequalities in health; and employment of disadvantaged people.

It was envisaged that a Knowledge Exchange Programme in each of these areas would be supported over 2016/17. In the event, identifying and commissioning four separate streams of work proved overly ambitious though two initiatives have been supported. This report focuses on learning from a completed Knowledge Exchange Programme project on improving employment opportunities for young people not in employment, education or training (commonly referred to using the acronym of NEETS).

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1 Arthritis Care NI has since merged with Arthritis UK, to become Versus Arthritis.
The story so far...

Social Innovation Seed Fund
- 2 cycles // 22 projects
- Investment:
  - BCT*: £168,576
  - CFNI*: £47,294
  - DfC*: £62,789

Social Innovation Skills
- 2 cycles // 19 teams // 19 challenges
- Investment:
  - BCT: £60,780

Knowledge Exchange Programmes
- 1 completed on Youth Unemployment // 42 participants
- 6 new concepts // 1 ongoing on Health Inequalities
- Investment: BCT: £68,566

Social Innovation Festivals
- Unusual Suspects 2016, delivered by Social Innovation eXchange: 2 cities // 19 sessions // 300+ participants
- FusionFest 2017 delivered by Innovate NI: 2 cities // 26 sessions // 135 participants. Investment:
  - BCT: £35,000, DfC: £20,000

Techies in Residence
- 3 cycles // 19 VCSE orgs // 19 Tech partners
- Delivered by: CultureTECH & Innovate NI
- Investment:
  - BCT*: £433,571
  - Comic Relief: £51,959

Social Innovation Decoded Workshops
- 2 cycles // 19 workshops across NI // 153 participants
- Delivered by: NICVA
- Investment: BCT: £39,306

Social Innovation Skills
- 2 cycles // 19 teams // 19 challenges
- Delivered by: WorkWest & ENW*
- Investment: BCT: £60,780

* BCT: Building Change Trust, DfC: Department for Communities, CFNI: Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, ENW: Enterprise North-West
Work West and Enterprise North West designed and delivered a Knowledge Exchange Programme to look at the complex problem of youth unemployment. The aim was to bring together a wide range of organisations working on different elements of this issue to explore the problem holistically and then to develop new solutions that cross organisational and sector boundaries.

The main elements of the approach were:

- Stakeholder mapping, research and consultation with 42 organisations working in the area of youth unemployment. This enabled the team to gain a more in-depth understanding of the problem and focus on the 16-18 age group.
- Identifying local and international best practice approaches to the issue where social innovators have delivered tangible outcomes on this issue.
- A Knowledge Exchange Programme - 6 half day design thinking workshops with 37 participants divided into two groups meeting in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Participants were supported to reimagine the ways in which they support 16-18 year olds into employment. Through this process, six concepts were developed and shared in a final workshop attended by both groups. These were:
  - ‘The Middle Man’ or ‘The Connector’ App to simplify the pathway for young people through all providers of services sharing information centrally and building this information into an easy to navigate app;
  - The Hub the creation of a virtual and physical hub to create a welcoming atmosphere for young people dedicated to improving their lives and opportunities;
  - Innovation Centre in School the establishment of a physical space in schools for creating innovation activities to support children to experiment and develop their own creative thinking;
  - The term ‘NEETS’ to be abolished and replaced with ‘Innoventeurs’ to destigmatise young people and help providers to see them as individuals with their own training needs and not as a single problem group;
  - A tailored support system for each individual which would involve all providers sharing their information with each other to help young people identify clear pathways and eliminate duplication of provision;
  - Campus of Dreams a school and multifunctional after-hours space which will bring together local stakeholders who are committed to using new methods and approaches to raising the aspirations of young people.

In addition to the value of the specific ideas developed the approach and design process has been demonstrated as having the potential for use across a range of sectors and contexts as a means to develop solutions to complex social challenges.

Other supporting activities

The Social Innovation NI programme has also sought to connect participants into a wider discourse around innovation, and in so doing to influence funders and decision makers around support for social innovation, for example by organising events such as the Unusual Suspects Festival (2016) and FuSionFest (2017).

FuSionFest was held in Belfast and Derry / Londonderry in October 2017 and was described as ‘a get together for Communities, Entrepreneurs and Innovators to be part of the solution to build a better Northern Ireland for everyone’. The event was a unique showcase of international best practice featuring innovative solutions to social challenges facing Northern Ireland and its communities.

The Trust has also commissioned Ashoka Ireland, a branch of the global movement of social entrepreneurs, to map social innovators in Northern Ireland as part of a broader project identifying ‘change makers’ across Ireland.

While it had been envisaged that a brokerage and signposting service would be developed to enable social innovators to connect with the right funding through the provision of information and brokering collaborative partnerships, this work has not proceeded due to resource constraints. Some signposting is available on the Social Innovation NI website and Innovate NI and WorkWest advised Techies in Residence participants on possible sources of next-stage funding.
What difference has Social Innovation NI made?

The long-term goal of Social Innovation NI was to "embed social innovation (i.e. finding new and innovative solutions to existing social problems) as the 'new normal' way of developing solutions to social challenges in NI".

It was intended that the early phase of Social Innovation NI would lay the foundations for this long-term change: achieving outcomes at the level of the individual, organisations, funders and the broader VCSE sector in terms of increased knowledge and awareness of social innovation, skills development, connections to other social innovation groups and learning around the provision of support to the VCSE sector.

The Social Innovation NI Development Plan also outlines longer term high level indicators that the goal is being reached, but this section focuses on the shorter-term outcomes more achievable within the timeframe under consideration.

As Social Innovation NI nears the end of this phase of its work at the end of 2018, what is clear is that there is evidence of increased awareness and knowledge of social innovation and skills development at the level of individuals and organisations who participated in the programme. There has also been substantial learning around the specific supports needed to foster social innovation in the VCSE sector and how this might be structured.

### Difference made to individuals

At the individual level, a number of outcomes were envisaged as follows:

- Skills in how to use design-thinking to find new solutions to social problems.
- Understanding the utility of cross-sectoral skills exchanges.
- Skills in applying for innovation funding.

#### Increased knowledge of social innovation approaches, skills in design thinking and awareness of benefits of social innovation approaches

- The Social Innovation Decoded workshops were very much the introductory stage of the Social Innovation NI programme, but even at that stage, evaluation feedback gives a strong indication of learning, particularly in terms of knowledge of innovation approaches and how they might apply to social problems, and understanding of potential benefits. Participants said that they would share the learning both within their own organisation and with their team, some with a view to raising awareness, others with a view to developing specific ideas to progress through the Social Innovation NI programme.

“I have learned such a lot and it has made me think of my own practice, excellent training and facilitators – thank-you” (Social Innovation Decoded workshop participant).

- Social Innovation Skills participants reported gaining knowledge into how to apply the design thinking process to develop new solutions to the real-world challenges they face. They gained practical experience in engaging in meaningful user-centred research and developed prototypes of their solutions which significantly informed their approach to problem definition and solutions enabling them to identify the benefits of the design thinking approach.

- Techies in Residence participants reported a wide range of practical learning. Reports and case studies suggest that projects gained much more in-depth knowledge about social innovation approaches, but also considerable process learning around how to go about developing social innovation solutions, in particular the benefits of user-involvement from the outset, the use of Agile Development4 and design thinking.

- Linked to this was the learning that emerged for organisations on how technical projects in particular are developed and delivered – many mentioned the challenges and opportunities presented by working with others from different sectors. Organisations had had to learn how to negotiate and balance the priorities and interests of an individual (the Techie) whose interest is in pushing what is possible with technology, against the priorities of the charity, whose interest is in finding solutions that are the most useful to their beneficiaries.

- Knowledge Exchange Programme participants reported that their participation in the programme had enabled them to see the benefits of design thinking and all reported an increased level of knowledge of innovation and innovation approaches.

- "It enabled us to narrow down the idea to a workable prototype." "We learned that we needed to invest time in understanding the problem first before moving to solutions” (Social Innovation Skills participants).

#### Awareness of support available for social innovation and skills development in applying for innovation funding

- These areas were less of a focus for the Social Innovation Decoded stage of the programme or for the Knowledge Exchange Programme, but it was evident that both Social Innovation Skills and Techies in Residence participants gained both knowledge and skills through both of those programmes.

- Working with programme mentors, Social Innovation Skills participants gained an awareness of sources of support for social innovation and skills in applying for innovation funding. All of the 2018 cohort and the majority of the 2017 cohort gained experience in applying for support through the competitive Seed Funding process. Work West understands that those whose applications were not successful in 2017 are still pursuing the ideas which were developed within the programme.

- Innovate NI provided support to Techies in Residence participants in attracting further funding/investment. They provided intensive preparatory support and training to Techies in Residence participants planning to pitch for Seed Funding support, as well as guidance and support on alternative sources of funding. The process of ‘pitching for investment’ was revealed by feedback to have been a significant learning point for participant organisations, all of whom are more used to the traditional funding approach of filling in an application form and hoping to be successful. The pitch process was more ‘live’ as it required a pitch presentation, (in 2017 and 2018 this was conducted at a public event – the Digital DNA conference), it was highly competitive, and decisions were made very quickly on the basis of the pitch. Whilst not all organisations welcomed this, it was widely recognised that this was a new skill that had been learned.

#### Awareness of benefits of cross sectoral exchange

- Social Innovation Decoded workshops highlighted case studies showing the benefits of cross sectoral exchange in social innovation, which gave some participants the appetite to register interest for either Social Innovation Skills

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4 Agile Development is an umbrella term for several iterative and incremental software development methodologies, such as Extreme Programming (XP), Scrum, Crystal, Dynamic Systems Development Method (DSDM), Lean Development, and Feature-Driven Development (FDD). See: https://www.versionone.com/agile-icu/
While those taking part in the Social Innovation Skills participants had the opportunity to meet and gain an understanding of how organisations in different sectors can work on the same issue, it did not result in new solutions in place having tangible evidence of their benefits for those they seek to support.

At a collaborative level, a number of outcomes were envisaged as follows:

- **Capacity to apply and sustain innovation.**
- **Experience of applying for innovation funding.**
- **Connections to other social innovation groups (towards clusters).**
- **Learning in providing social innovation support to the VCSE sector.**

It is evident from reports and case studies that Social Innovation NI has made a difference at an organisational level for many participant organisations, particularly in the first two of these outcomes.

**Development of capacity to apply and sustain skills.**

Although the Social Innovation Decoded workshops took place at the earliest stage of the programme, participants indicated that they would share the learning within their own organisation and with their team, some with a view to raising awareness, and others with a view to developing specific ideas to progress through the Social Innovation NI programme.

“**I made good contacts and have a better understanding of social innovation. It’s good to be connected into a broader network of people.**”

KEP participant

There is anecdotal evidence of the skills gained as a result of the Social Innovation Skills programme being applied by organisations to other areas of their work. This has been made more likely by the high level of commitment shown from participating organisations in developing an action plan to embed at all levels in participating organisations.

“**We learned the term “agile development” – the need to test out of many priorities and change accordingly throughout the process.**”

(Arthritis Care)

**Experience of applying for innovation funding.**

There is evidence that organisations participating in Social Innovation Skills and Techies in Residence programmes have learned new skills in applying for innovation funding. Even organisations who were subsequently unsuccessful in applying for Seed Funding from the NOW project have received training on pitching for investment in innovation, and many have received guidance on other sources of support. Some have had significant success in applying for and obtaining innovation funding, for example through Comic Relief, Big Lottery Fund, Nominet Trust and others, enabling them to refine their product and scale up its application and use considerably.

**Funders and sector gain knowledge based on evidence about what happens when funding incentivises risk and focuses on outcomes.**

There is now a small but significant cohort of organisations who have experience in developing social innovation solutions and in applying for appropriate innovation funding, and there is now evidence (in the form of a strong set of Social Innovation NI case studies) about what happens when funding incentivises risk and focuses on outcomes. In addition, some funders have taken an active interest in and supported the programme. DfC has supported Social Innovation NI both financially, and by involving members of the Social Innovation NI Programme Board in its cross-departmental Social Innovation Working Group. CFNI ran a Community Innovators programme within the Social Innovation Skills programme in 2018 which has enabled it to increase its capacity to support social innovation in the community sector. The Trust has secured £52,000 from Comic Relief in 2018, and a further £150,000 for 2019 via CFNI. However, it is less clear to what extent this important evidence has transferred to other relevant funders of the VCSE, or to funders who are not already obvious social innovation funders.

What difference did the collaborative approach make?

Building Change Trust made the decision early on to develop Social Innovation NI as a collaborative partnership of social innovation “enablers” as opposed to opting for a tendering process. This was in order to achieve enhanced impact, and to better enable it to develop and deliver new supports for social innovation to address gaps in Northern Ireland’s social innovation support ecosystem. This approach underpinned the development of the programme with a wide range of organisations including, for example, DfC, Social Enterprise NI, Young Foundation, the Department of Finance Innovation Lab among others, involved in the initial co-

or Techies in Residence which would give them the opportunity to develop such relationships further.

- **Social Innovation Skills participants valued the opportunity to engage in collaborative activity with other teams taking part in the programme and to share insights and ideas on challenges and prototypes. There was considered to be value in bringing people together from different sectors. Participants made links with others and developed good relationships. It is too early to tell whether these will develop into collaborative working relationships.**

- For many, although not all, Techies in Residents participants, their engagement on the programme has been their first opportunity to develop a close working relationship aimed at achieving specific goals with an individual working for a private sector organisation. It is evident from evaluation reports and case studies that the learning from this process has exceeded expectations. There was strong evidence of reciprocal learning between organisations and their Techies. Organisations which now have successful social innovation solutions in place have tangible evidence of the benefits of this cross-sectoral collaboration, with different sectoral skills and knowledge complementing each other to achieve an outcome with real benefits for those they seek to support. Others have found the process a steep learning curve in negotiating ideas and progress with someone not from a VCSE background, and in some cases it has taken time to appreciate the different strengths, skills and knowledge each partner brings.

- While those taking part in the Knowledge Exchange Programme worked on the same issue, it did provide participants who would not have had a chance to meet otherwise the opportunity to meet and gain an understanding of the services being delivered by others and to learn about each other’s work. Participants gained an appreciation of the value of collaborative working approaches to developing new innovative solutions to the challenges they face albeit that currently there is no clear structure or mechanism to take such collaborative work forward.

“**I will return to work and take a fresh look at the services we deliver and assess if there is a better way of doing these by focusing on the users and stakeholders.**” (Social Innovation Decoded Participant)
design process. Thereafter this wider level of engagement appears to have reduced significantly as the initiative moved to delivery mode and a formal partnership was formed comprising:

- Building Change Trust
- NICVA
- Work West
- Enterprise North West
- Innovate NI

Evidence from a Partnership Review carried out in August 201751, as well as interviews with a number of stakeholders, suggest that the collaborative approach added value to the programme in the following ways:

- It tested at a programme level the kind of cross-sectoral collaboration which was being asked of participants e.g. in the Techies in Residence programme;
- It supported a creative dynamic in the design of Social Innovation NI’s Theory of Change - the co-design process which led to the development of Social Innovation NI generated significant enthusiasm and engagement from VCSE organisations, policy makers and decision makers;
- It widened access to networks, e.g. NICVA’s extensive reach in the VCSE was complemented by the reach of Work West, Enterprise North West and Innovate NI in the private sector; and
- It brought together different approaches and skills sets suited to the different aspects of the programme in a way which one delivery agent would undoubtedly have found difficult.

Not surprisingly given the innovative nature both of the collaborative structure and the programme it was overseeing, there were challenges and significant learning from the collaborative process, and this is dealt with in the next sections.

The most significant of these are:

- The existence of a bank of practical case studies of innovative approaches to social issues within and relevant to Northern Ireland. At the most fundamental level, this means that social innovation is now an easier concept for those promoting social innovation to explain, and for VCSE organisations and their partners to grasp – the successful Social Innovation NI projects answer the question, “what is social innovation?” This is an invaluable platform from which to launch further support for social innovation.
- The existence of a group of partner organisations and other stakeholders who are now “warmed up” to the idea of social innovation and its benefits and who can be encouraged to promote, support and champion it into the future.
- Social Innovation NI has created a model for how to encourage and facilitate innovation in the VCSE sector which can be adapted and taken forward.
- There are also deeper layers of achievement, some of which were envisaged at the outset, and others which emerged as the programme developed:
  - The establishment of a series of innovation support programmes that are unique in NI and beyond, helping organisations at the earliest stage of the innovation journey.
  - The programme has showcased the value of beneficiary involvement and design thinking. It has produced tangible products which organisations see benefiting their beneficiaries many of whom face real challenges for example in terms of health and wellbeing, exclusion and marginalisation. This makes the concept more appealing to VCSE organisations, for whom the beneficiary is at the centre of what they do.
  - Social Innovation NI has demonstrated the value of cross-sectoral collaboration both at a programmatic and project level. Through its structures, events and projects, stakeholders from the VCSE, public sector and private sector have been brought together and have contributed to the success of what has been a unique programme in Northern Ireland. In bringing together these stakeholders, the initiative has placed the VCSE’s appetite for and potential contribution to social innovation on the agenda. Its ongoing involvement on DC’s Social Innovation Working Group continues to ensure this voice is heard.
  - The programme has significantly influenced policy-makers (and some funders) around the role and definition of social innovation. Social Innovation is included in the Innovation Strategy for NI 2014-202552.
- Social Innovation NI has demonstrated what is possible when funders are prepared to invest in to invest in risk. Naturally, no funder wants to invest in unbounded risk. The programme has shown that this is not what social innovation requires. It has demonstrated that social innovation is at its best when ideas considered “risky” or “untested” are supported by a strong, goal-oriented process, where the opportunity is maximised, and the risk is managed well and ultimately dissipated. The programme’s staged approach has meant that investment has gone to projects where the opportunities and risks have been weighed and considered, with clear milestones along the way ensuring that ideas which are not ready are filtered out or redirected to further developmental support.
- Social Innovation NI has galvanised interest in the VCSE sector: 137 participants attended NICVA’s Social Innovation Decoded workshops across both years. The Social Innovation Skills programme was oversubscribed in both years of its operation, with 14 organisations applying for five places in Year 1 and 27 applying for 15 places in Year 2. Techies in Residence saw an increase in applications, from 20 in 2017, to 42 applying in 2018. 37 organisations have participated in the one Knowledge Exchange Programme that has been completed to date.

### Key Achievements

A number of significant achievements have emerged from the Social Innovation NI programme even within its comparatively short lifetime.

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In line with the programme outcomes, Social Innovation NI has had a significant impact on individuals and organisations participating. Individual learning is evident from the feedback and organisational learning at a deep level is evident especially from participants on the Social Innovation Skills and Techies in Residence programmes. The learning from putting their innovation into practice and making it real has unearthed valuable and sometimes unexpected practice and making it real has unearthed from putting their innovation into Residence programmes. The learning is evident from the feedback and participating. Individual learning for organisations which has led to a discernible confidence for some to progress their social innovation, refining and perfecting it, and planning to scale it to a wider audience, with a wider range of funders than envisaged at the outset.

Social Innovation NI has engendered in participants a culture change which has led to an increased likelihood of looking for the innovative solutions rather than the “same old” solutions by involving their beneficiaries and engaging in design thinking.

There is now an increased awareness of possible avenues for innovation funding and how to approach it.

Learning

There has been considerable progress towards the shorter-term outcomes for those directly engaged in the various strands of the Social Innovation NI programme.

The first programme of its kind in Northern Ireland, Social Innovation NI has been innovative in structure, content, and delivery, and as such has yielded rich learning about how the programme could be adapted and re-focused into the future. Key learning insights at an operational, collaborative and strategic level are highlighted below.

Operational level

Programme planning and co-ordination

In terms of programme planning, many participants felt that time was an important factor in order to:

- build relationships between organisations and individuals from different sectors or indeed the same sector who may be working together for the first time;
- to reach clarity about roles, communication, and the milestones or desired outcomes which could be expected for each stage of the process; and
- put in place contractual arrangements for example between Techies and organisations around Intellectual Property.

The programme was supported by the Building Change Trust Programme Leader, half of whose time was spent working on Social Innovation NI, supported by other Trust staff. Given the scope and ambition of the programme, this posed a challenge in time. A fuller service to partners and participants (e.g. more regular and targeted communication, provision of a brokerage or referral service; and an improved website and resources) would require more time.

Social Innovation Decoded

One of the challenges for the initial cycle of Social Innovation Decoded workshops was the fact that many of the available case studies were international and therefore not immediately relatable to Northern Ireland organisations. This was eased considerably by the second cycle, as Social Innovation NI had then produced some local examples of social innovation which could be shared.

Social Innovation Skills and Knowledge Exchange Programme

The Social Innovation Skills partners have gained practical experience and learning around how best to provide support to foster the development of social innovation by VCSE organisations. Feedback from participants on the Social Innovation Skills programme suggests the value of factoring in sufficient time to bring groups together to grapple with problems and generate solutions. The need to structure in sufficient time to enable meaningful cross team engagement has been a major learning point.

There was significant learning from the completed Knowledge Exchange Programme around the challenges of bringing groups together from the same sector to solve a social problem in the context of a difficult funding environment and competition for resources. In particular, there was a need to build in time for participants to share information about their work and organisations and to build trust before moving to structured training.

While the IDEO toolkit initially provided a useful framework for the Social Innovation Skills and Knowledge Exchange Programme, a key learning has been around the need for more practical and accessible tools delivered directly in training and developed by programme partners.

Techies in Residence

socially innovative projects do not always revolve around digital technology, although this is clearly a current area of opportunity. It was suggested that there needed to continue to be space for organisations to be supported to implement non-technological solutions and that the Techies in Residence programme might be better named Innovators in Residence. This idea had been previously considered but could perhaps be revisited.

It was noted that communication could be challenging between techies and organisations, in terms of:

- Sharing and understanding of values.
- Managing expectations about where the ‘Techie’ might be based (“in-house” or not),
- What is achievable within a short timeline when working on digital solutions.
- Managing the distinction between a Techie’s interest (what is possible with digital solutions) and that the Techies in Residence might be better named Innovators in Residence. This idea had been previously considered but could perhaps be revisited.

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Balancing different expectations and understandings around Intellectual Property (IP). The Trust adopted an open approach to IP believing that more impact and greater collaboration could be achieved through an “open innovation” approach. Some organisations however felt that this could inhibit the potential to raise revenue from the products.

26 Social Innovation NI Programme 2016-2018

Social Innovation NI Programme 2016-2018 27
Coherence and communication: whilst there was synergy in planning and design, the collaboration did at times feel to some participants like different organisations each doing their own programme, rather than a collaborative approach the whole way through. Linked to this was the suggestion that communication did not always work well between partners, and that more communication and sharing of good case studies would have been helpful. There was need for a greater understanding that sectors who do not naturally work together do not automatically connect.

Collaborative Level

As well as the added value that the collaborative approach brought, there are a number of areas which could be improved upon as the programme moves forward.

Levels of partnership: A wide stakeholder group had been in place initially during the design of Social Innovation NI, however when the programme got underway, these wider stakeholder meetings fell away. Whilst there was a view that the group may simply have served its purpose, there were also suggestions that its wider input on a more regular basis would have been useful, particularly on issues such as sustainability. It was noted that FusionFest brought together private sector, councils and VCSE, but that it was very much a one-off.

Membership of the partnership: it was noted that rural organisations were not represented in the partnership and that this meant that an important voice was missing. This linked to a suggestion that it remained Belfast-centric, albeit that partners were from across Northern Ireland.

Strategic Level

Language: there was significant agreement that for social innovation to embed and sustain support at a strategic level, the language around it needed to be simplified. It was suggested that it needed to be described and explained using existing relatable case studies, rather than in “concepts” or “models”. It was noted that even at a high level, there was evident confusion between the terms “social innovation” and “social enterprise”.

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Structures and roles: it emerged that there were differing expectations about the precise roles of and relationship between the DIC-convened Social Innovation Working Group, the Social Innovation NI Programme Board, the Innovation Lab (Department of Finance) and other structures. For some, the connection into DIC’s cross-departmental Social Innovation Working Group should have been the avenue through which departmental funders could take up the opportunity to invest further in successful propositions emerging from the Social Innovation NI programmes and there was some disappointment that this had not transpired. A key challenge was identifying suitable entry points within government to explore collaboration and scaling for new ideas, particularly as many of the individual projects have relevance to the public sector and public services. However, it remains unclear how existing relationships can turn this into a viable pathway that leads to the best ideas being commissioned or adopted by government.

A number of factors were considered to play a part in this dynamic:

- The procurement environment neither stimulates nor rewards innovation. The sole focus on value for money means that there was no appetite for risk in the public sector, and that it promotes competition on the basis of the lowest price as opposed to collaboration aimed at producing the best solution. It was suggested that a culture change was required which allowed funders to recognise that well-managed, contained risks can lead to excellent outcomes and greater efficiency.
- Lack of parity between social innovation and ‘mainstream’ innovation i.e. that aims at expanding the economy and creating jobs.
- Conflation of social innovation with social enterprise and the efficiency drive...
- Lack of strategic leadership at Stormont.

Lack of suitable funding and investment instruments for social innovation ideas.

It was suggested that funders need to be influenced to support innovative projects. Many state that they wish to fund innovative projects, but it is unclear what this means and to what extent genuinely novel ideas are welcomed by funders. It was noted that asking for innovative ideas without investing in development processes and support does not constitute funding innovation.

Cross-sectoral engagement: there is a sense that cross-sectoral engagement was wider and more dynamic in the earlier stages. However, it was suggested that this level of cross-sectoral engagement needed to be retained and extended, with more proactive engagement with councils and the public and private sector with a view to influencing their interventions and attitudes to social innovation. There is further learning to be gleaned from how innovation funding / investment and support works in the private and in particular the SME sector.

Prevailing sectoral cultures: It was suggested that all sectors, and not only the public sector, have cultural barriers to innovation. It was suggested that the VCSE sector culture is just as stifling as public sector in terms of willingness to take risks and that the sector is “dominated by managerialism which is focused on bringing in resources to deliver activities and ensuring all the boxes are ticked with no risk to organisational reputation”. This was exacerbated by the fact that innovation processes take time, described as the “scarcest resource in VCSE sector”. It was also suggested that VCSE were resistant, even at the highest levels, to the language of “investment” as opposed to “funding” and that this was a necessary culture change.

As regards the private sector, it was considered difficult to engage the private sector beyond a traditional Corporate Social Responsibility approach. It was suggested that Northern Ireland still has very few companies prepared to invest time and resources in collaborating with VCSE organisations for common, mutually beneficial objectives, preferring to “trickle money down to selected charities principally for PR benefit”.

Seed Funding

The Seed Funding element has added value by providing a progression path for organisations to take their prototype solution to the next stage. In 2017 the fund was open to both Social Innovation Skills and Techies in Residence applications judged by the same panel. A decision to establish separate funds for the Social Innovation Skills and Techies in Residence programmes in 2018 with different panels to reflect the different focus of the projects has been more successful.

The pathway through the programme

Whilst the flexibility to enter the programme at the most suitable point was welcomed, there was some lack of clarity about the pathway through the various strands, and for some, a lack of clarity about the end point. It was recognised that Social Innovation NI provided support to kick start innovative ideas – but there was also a view that larger scale investment from the Trust, or more highly focused support for progression to alternative sources of funding for proven ideas would have been helpful. That said, the Trust invested a total of £1.7m in Social Innovation.
What Next?

As Social Innovation NI moves to its next phase, there are a number of next steps which Building Change Trust and future supporters, especially the CFNI which has committed to take on the Trust’s leadership and coordination role, should consider in deepening progress in around the key objectives for the work: Learning, Collaboration, Influence and Funding.

The Trust should now build on the tangible, practical and relational capital that has been gathered to date in order to retain momentum so that the benefits of social innovation to VCSE beneficiaries continue to grow. This means the Trust should:

1. Publicise successes to all significant stakeholders. This means putting simple, successful case studies front and centre of all PR material, the Social Innovation NI website, and in any pitching for further support.

2. Utilise the knowledge, networks and support of partners and other stakeholders to ensure that momentum around social innovation is kept alive by building it into their own programmes and practice.

There are a number of further next steps at the operational, collaborative and strategic level which will support these two overarching strategies.

Operational

- Build the valuable operational learning into any future iterations of the programme in particular around: time needed; communications and relationship-building; management of expectations; pathways through the programme and routes to further funding and investment.
- Offer participants and past participants the opportunity to form a network (or programme based networks or online forums) to share insights, experiences and ideas.
- The involvement of CFNI has supported the reach of Social Innovation NI to the community sector. This needs to be extended further and collaboration should be given to developing other partnerships from across Northern Ireland perhaps through introducing human-centred design thinking to infrastructure organisations in the VCSE sector.

Collaborative

- Establish a dedicated Steering Group made up from partners and other stakeholders in order to arrive at an Action Plan to maintain and build momentum. There should be rural representation on this group. This group should:
  - Consider the role of the wider initial stakeholder group at this stage and what contribution they could make to future planning for Social Innovation NI.
  - Agree how future engagement with the DfC’s Social Innovation Working Group will be conducted and what the desired outcomes of engagement are; so that a strategic approach can be taken.
  - Agree what future engagement should be with the Department of Finance’s Innovation Lab and to what end.

Strategic

- Language may not seem like a strategic issue – but it is. Social innovation will not be supported by stakeholders at any level if it remains an opaque concept to them. The Trust must simplify the language – move away from concepts and models and towards real examples – and remember that the language of social innovation is new for many, not just those in the VCSE.
- Based on the plans and outcomes put in place by the Steering Group, consolidate the relationship with DfC’s cross-departmental Social Innovation Working Group going forward.
- Utilise the Social Innovation Working Group as an opportunity to demonstrate the value of social innovation to other departments as well as DfC. This means demonstrating the potential of social innovation to meet Programme for Government outcomes and to support the wider NI Innovation Strategy, but also showing its relevance to the processes which departments are being asked to embrace such as consultation and co-design. These are ideal mechanisms for meaningful user engagement and design thinking. Through the Working Group Social Innovation NI could invite a department (such as Health) to sponsor a challenge prize for a themed social innovation which addresses a particular challenge that they face. VCSE organisations working in that area could be invited to pitch ideas with a view to obtaining the challenge prize which would enable them to develop the idea. CFNI could be invited to sponsor an innovation fund to partner with the relevant challenge prize department.
- There was also a suggestion for a partnership of CFNI, private Sector, and Councils to employ a cluster animator for social innovation across a range of council areas, funded through council Community Development or Economic Development budgets, with additional private sector sponsorship through business organisations, Chambers of Commerce etc.
- Seek specific points of connection with Councils, in Community Development departments, and in Community Planning, community engagement and co-design. Co-design offers the most obvious opportunity for collaborative, cross-sectoral, and innovative approaches to be developed and delivered. Social Innovation NI should seek more opportunities for co-design and should encourage public sector organisations to support the input of VCSE colleagues who bring knowledge and expertise around social issues, but who are not currently resourced to participate in co-design. Again, the best way to do this is to demonstrate utility and relevance through case studies.
- The Seed Fund has provided a valuable progression path for projects with a good idea needing further resource to develop this. Social Innovation NI should promote this concept to organisations in the public, private and foundation sectors as a model of working and to demonstrate the value of relatively small pots of money to kick start potentially impactful new solutions to entrenched social challenges.

In the Social Innovation NI programme, Building Change Trust has created a unique set of interventions in Northern Ireland aimed at creating better solutions to seemingly intractable social problems. The window of opportunity to communicate its successes, and to rally those who have been most engaged in it, is now.