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Risk and Reward: The Development of Social Enterprise within the Criminal Justice Sector in Ireland – Some Policy Implications*

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Summary: The emergence of social enterprises (SEs) within criminal justice jurisdictions across Europe has increased significantly in recent years. Prison- and community-based income-generating businesses are providing employment for those who find it most difficult to secure jobs as a result of their previous criminal lifestyles. Combining a business model with a social mission, SEs are particularly attractive to those working with offenders, as securing employment plays a key role in recidivism rates. Despite the proven successes of SEs in criminal justice sectors across Europe, they remain uncharted territory here in Ireland. Based on primary research conducted with key stakeholders from the Department of Justice, the Irish Prison Service, the Probation Service and the community and voluntary sector, this paper explores the factors that support or hinder the development of SEs across the Irish criminal justice system. It concludes by proposing possible next steps to addressing the factors that have delayed their development up to this point.

Keywords: Social enterprise, offenders, criminal justice, employment, desistance, recidivism, Third Sector, progression, prison, probation.

Introduction

The Irish criminal justice sector has seen significant changes to the type, nature and frequency of offences committed during the past 20 years. This

* The research on which this paper is based was completed as part of the requirements of an MBS in Co-operative and Social Enterprise with the Department of Food Business and Development, University College Cork. In addition to the academic focus, the research was intended to help the Probation Service and other criminal justice agencies to explore possibilities for the development of the social enterprise sector in Ireland.

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is evidenced by a 100% increase in the prison population between 1997 and 2011; 2011 was the year when the number of people incarcerated was at its highest (4587 on 12 April) (Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT), 2015). Although the number of people in prison fell in the following four years, all prisons in Ireland are operating at or above capacity. Rising levels of drug-related crime, violent offences, prolific offenders and gangland activity have challenged the criminal justice system to respond effectively, as well as increasing the financial burden on the state. In 2014, the average cost of an 'available, staffed prison space' was €68,959, representing an increase of €3417 from 2013 (Irish Penal Reform Trust, 2015). It is in the interest of all citizens that these figures are tackled effectively, and with a long-term vision, so that the number of victims of crime reduces as the number of people committing offences falls.

The research on which this paper is based examined the potential role of social enterprise (SE) in reducing reoffending rates. It is widely known that the securing of employment plays a significant role in desistance from crime (Farrington *et al.*, 1996; Maruna, 1997; Visher *et al.*, 2005; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002), and as such it is enshrined in legislation as a key target for criminal justice agencies when working with their clients (The Probation of Offenders Act, 1907). Research also indicates, however, that the motivation to remain crime-free post-release reduces over an extended period of time in the absence of ongoing supports to the offender (Tripodi *et al.*, 2010; Visher *et al.*, 2005). SE as an approach to providing supported employment for offenders has been under-utilised within the sector. This research explores the views on SE among key decision-makers within various agencies of the criminal justice system.

Research has shown that the rate of unemployment is disproportionately higher among prison populations (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Farrington *et al*, 1996; IPRT, 2014). Mair and May (1997) found that, of 3299 offenders on probation in the UK, only 21% were employed (Cosgrove *et al.*, 2011).

The Theory of Desistance (Maruna, 1997) argues that being in gainful employment is a key factor in reducing or desisting from crime. Desistance from crime is defined as 'the long-term abstinence from criminal behaviour among those for whom offending had become a pattern of behaviour' (McNeill *et al.*, 2012: 3). While employment is recognised in legislation, policies and evidence-based practice as being important, a criminal record is a significant impediment to securing employment. SEs not only provide employment opportunities and training for ex-offenders;

they do so in a supportive, client-centred environment where other factors leading to offending behaviour can also be addressed (Nicholson, 2010: 17).

Interest in social enterprise has increased significantly in recent years due to an awareness of its potential to address deep-rooted societal issues while operating from a model of inclusion and community development. In the UK, specific social enterprises have targeted people with a history of offending in an attempt to reduce recidivism. This growing interest has also been influenced by the global financial downturn; austerity measures implemented in many First World countries mean that communities cannot rely on the state to provide resources or services. This research explores the factors that support or hinder the development of SE in the Irish criminal justice sector. In addition to the academic focus, the research was intended to assist the Probation Service and other criminal justice agencies to explore possibilities to assist with the development of the SE sector in Ireland.

Social enterprise defined

SE presents a different and refreshing way of doing things that recognises societal issues and need as well as being inclusive of those most affected by disadvantage and/or the financial crisis. However, defining what an SE actually is can be difficult, and there is no universally accepted definition (Gardner *et al.*, 2014; Forfás, 2013; Eustace and Clarke, 2009; Everett, 2009).

A definition that is frequently used is provided by the UK Department of Trade and Industry and cited by Doherty *et al.* (2009: 26):

> A social enterprise is a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximize profit for shareholders and owners.

Using similar themes and language, the Social Enterprise Alliance in the United States presents the following definition (2014):

> Social enterprises are businesses whose primary purpose is the common good. They use the methods and disciplines of business and the power of the marketplace to advance their social, environmental and human justice agenda.

Having analysed a number of European definitions, the Forfás Report (2013: 2) proposes the following definition in an Irish context:

> A social enterprise is an enterprise: i) that trades for a social/societal purpose; ii) where at least part of its income is earned from its trading activity; iii) [that] is separate from government; and iv) where the surplus is primarily re-invested in the social objective.

Common to all of these definitions is the social focus or mission, income-generating capacity and reinvestment of profits into the organisation in order to benefit the community and wider society (Gardner *et al.*, 2013). Despite the numerous definitions, there remains a lack of clarity on certain elements such as the amount of surplus to be reinvested, legal structures and the level of independence.

In addition, SEs are part of the Third Sector: the umbrella term given to any organisation that is independent from the state but may receive state-funded support and may contribute to the delivery of public services (Eustace and Clarke, 2009).

Typology of SEs

As a result of ambiguity around the definition of SEs, categorising the various forms and functions they perform can also be challenging. Following a mapping of SE ecosystems across Europe, the European Commission (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2014) categorised SEs into six broad activities: social and economic integration of the disadvantaged and excluded (e.g. work integration and sheltered employment); social services of general interest (e.g. disability services, childcare); other public services (e.g. community transport); strengthening democracy; environmental activities; and solidarity with developing countries (e.g. promoting fair trade initiatives).

This report highlighted work integration SEs (WISEs) as the most visible form of SE across Europe, supporting the employment of those who are disadvantaged or marginalised, such as the long-term unemployed (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2014; Defourny and Nyssens, 2012). 'The main objective of these enterprises is to help low qualified unemployed people, who are at risk of permanent exclusion from the labour market, and to integrate these people into work and society through a productive activity' (Nyssens, 2006, cited in Defourny and Nyssens, 2012: 76).

In an Irish context, the Forfás report (2013) states that there are four types of SE in operation:

1. commercial opportunities with a commercial dividend
2. creating employment opportunities for marginalised groups
3. economic and community development
4. service delivery.

Because WISE organisations support employment for those most excluded or marginalised from the labour market, a category within which offenders fall, this is the type of SE that is most commonly written about and researched in relation to the criminal justice sector.

According to the European Network of Social Integration Enterprises (ENSIE), one of the main objectives of social integration enterprises or WISEs is 'the training and re-integration of the excluded persons from the labour market and mainly the low qualified unemployed and the disadvantaged persons to stop them been [*sic*] permanently excluded from the labour market and to re-integrate the society in general' (ENSIE, 2014). WISEs, therefore, would seem to be the best fit for those who have been, and will continue to be, excluded from the labour market due to their criminal history (Fletcher, 1999; Maruna, 1997; Sturrock, 2012).

By combining one-to-one support, job coaching, relevant work experience and training leading to employment, WISEs offer significant potential for the social reintegration of offenders.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews with eight key stakeholders were undertaken to seek an understanding of their perceptions in relation to the role of SE in the criminal justice system and the risks and rewards of developing SE in a criminal justice and integration setting. Four stakeholder groups were identified as having views or positions relevant to the research. These were relevant senior decision-making staff within the Department of Justice, the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service as well as a representative from a community-based organisation working with criminal justice clients and with experience of operating an SE. The focus was on groups whose remit included rehabilitation and/or the ability to contribute to policy development in the area.

Key stakeholders were purposively sampled due to their influence in relation to policy within the criminal justice or SE support sectors.

Findings

Based on a thematic analysis of the interviews conducted, 14 emerging themes were identified, all of which have been synopsised for this paper.

1. Recognition by decision makers that there are limitations in knowledge and awareness of SE within Ireland

Seven of the eight respondents reported that their level of awareness and understanding of what SE is and how SE is defined was very limited. Of this group, none had practical or first-hand experience of SE. One stakeholder had practical experience of having developed an SE for people with criminal convictions.

Four respondents stated that they were unsure of how to define an SE as distinct from a charity or other small business, and provided examples within their dialogue of this lack of clarity. Five of the eight respondents were unsure as to whether particular businesses they were familiar with were operating as SEs.

Three respondents could name an example of general SEs operating in Ireland (Rothar, Churchfield Garden Café and IT Recycling were all named) while the remaining five individuals were not confident in naming SEs or stated that they were unaware of any.

Interviewees were also asked if they could identify any SEs operating within the criminal justice system. Four were unable to do so. The remaining four respondents stated that they were more familiar with SEs operating further afield; examples were named in the United Kingdom, France, Italy and the USA. All of these examples were within the criminal justice system and were familiar to respondents because they had previous experience or contact with them. Interviewees were aware that SEs had been established more successfully and with more institutional support in countries other than Ireland.

When asked about whether SE was a genuinely new model or simply a reworking of previously trialled models, there was a clear agreement (seven of eight respondents) that SE presented a tangibly different way of providing services, if done well. The main reason for the difference was perceived to be the core business model, and the reality that this brought to the training aspects of the programme.

Another theme to emerge, and which would not be in line with common understandings of SE,[1] was a belief that in order to operate successfully as an SE, the enterprise would or should become completely self-sustaining. While this may be a productive or appropriate goal for some SEs, to regard it an imperative in all situations or as a singular marker of success highlighted a lack of knowledge in relation to the spectrum of SE models, especially where these related to WISE or supported employment initiatives and where some element of state funding may be an ongoing element of the SE business model.

Another area of potential confusion was in relation to which type of organisations can run SEs. One interviewee's comments indicated that it was possible for public sector bodies to establish and run SEs. Again, this runs contrary to key definitions of SE (Senscot, 2014) which clearly state that the state cannot establish an SE.

Despite an acknowledged limited awareness of SE, seven of the eight respondents felt that the model had relevance for the future criminal justice system. SEs were regarded as offering alternative ways of doing business that benefit individuals, families and communities.

Interviewees were clear that their working or technical knowledge of SE was very limited. However, within the boundaries of their knowledge, there was support for what the model could potentially offer the Irish criminal justice system.

2. Acknowledgement of the potential benefits of SE in the criminal justice sector

All eight respondents reported that they would like to see the development of SEs within the criminal justice system increase, as they believe SE offers significant potential for the welfare of the client group and its families, and for the state and its agencies in relation to efficiency and service outcomes. Benefits articulated could be divided into two groups: benefits to the criminal justice system and benefits to the offender or individual.

[1] Senscot criterion 2 states that 'Social enterprises are trading businesses aspiring to financial independence. This is demonstrated by an enterprise earning 50% or more of its income from trading. A high level of income from the public sector is acceptable however in the form of contracts, not grants' (www.senscot.net/view_art.php?viewid=9636). Similarly, the Forfás definition given above emphasises the financial position. The EMES definition states that 'Social enterprises are voluntarily created by a group of people and are governed by them in the framework of an autonomous project. Although they may depend on public subsidies, public authorities or other organisations (federations, private firms, etc.) do not manage them, directly or indirectly' (Spear and Bidet, 2005).

When asked about the relative importance of securing meaningful employment for those leaving prison or engaging with the criminal justice system, all eight respondents stated that this was an extremely important goal. One respondent highlighted that the securing of employment is so important to reducing recidivism that it is enshrined in the 1907 Probation Act. The importance of employment and meaningful use of time was acknowledged by all eight respondents.

Respondents considered there to be a number of potential benefits that SE could contribute to the criminal justice system and offenders. These included enhancement of employment and enterprise opportunities for offenders and, for those availing of these opportunities, a reduction in recidivism rates. Also noted was the potential for a lower funding burden on state departments for similar outcomes to existing grant-funded services. SE was also viewed as having the ability to provide clear and measurable outcomes for the state's investment as well as providing direct benefits to the offender.

When articulating the benefits of SE to the criminal justice system, respondents also highlighted the potential benefits to the offenders engaging with them. Many practical benefits were noted not only to the individual but also to their families and communities overall; these included an improved and more positive self-image, increased household earning potential, reduced reliance on social welfare payments and a reduction in reoffending and conviction rates due to higher levels of integration in employment and the community.

3. SEs need to be responsive to individual client and customer need, which requires flexibility in funding structures

Responsiveness and ability to adapt quickly to the demands and needs of various stakeholders was a theme mentioned by four stakeholders. The need for responsiveness poses a challenge in relation to the standard structures of traditional grant aid funding where services are expected to have detailed plans and key performance indicators, and to meet these with minimal changes over the funding period. These requirements may constrain or not be appropriate to the environment that new start-up businesses operate within.[2] However, the ability of SE to take a more responsive approach to client needs was also viewed as a positive.

[2] Steve Blank, the well-known writer on enterprise, states that 'Most start-ups are facing a series of unknowns – unknown customer segments, unknown customer needs, unknown product feature set, etc. Writing a static business plan first adds no value to starting a company, as the plan does not represent the iterative nature of the search for the model' (2012).

These points highlight the need for funding structures to take account of the fact that a successful start-up will generally require significant flexibility in how it runs its business, in order for the needs of the business and client to be met.

4. The need for leadership and for specific entrepreneurial skills

Five respondents highlighted that existing structures within the state or currently funded community based organisations (CBOs) are not likely to have, or do not have, the expertise to initiate or develop organisations on a business (income-generating, profit and loss) rather than a grant-funded model. Leadership was seen as being needed at two levels: firstly, to establish SE within the criminal justice sector, and secondly, to establish and run new SEs. The view was that without dedicated and experienced leadership, change was unlikely to happen in any significant manner.

It was noted that, at the current time, adequate expertise was unlikely to reside either in state organisations ($n = 3$) or on the board of traditional grant-funded CBOs ($n = 3$). However, in both cases – CBOs and state agencies – respondents saw the solution as being either the co-opting of sufficient additional expertise or, in the case of CBOs, funding new organisations which had been explicitly established with appropriate levels of internal competence and experience to develop and manage an SE.

5. The need for organisations to maintain the focus on personal development and avoid mission drift

The primary goal of SEs operating in this sector is the personal development of clients and the enhancement of life skills and employment-focused skills. However, a business focus is also important to ensure the viability of the SE. It was noted that, at times, there was a challenge in maintaining this dual focus. One interviewee noted that when customer orders need to be filled, there is a temptation for project staff simply to do the work themselves when clients are presenting as challenges. This would present difficulties if it became a standard response.

6. A range of risks exist that are particular to SE: liability and decision-making

Two main risk areas were identified by respondents as affecting SE in a way that was not experienced in relation to other grant-funded services. These were firstly concerns around financial and governance liabilities, and whether these would fall to state agencies, and secondly risks related to closing down unsuccessful SEs: how this decision would be made and

its impact. The fear of financial failure and risks associated with it were mentioned by a number of respondents.

In relation to the first area of risk, there was some concern that primarily state funded SEs would, if they failed, have recourse to state funding to cover outstanding liabilities.

The second grouping of risks, mentioned by three respondents, was how and when justice agencies would decide to stop funding an SE that had not performed adequately. Concerns related to, on one hand, the process by which decisions would be made and the factors that would be considered, and, on the other, the need for the service to have a process by which they could disengage.

The potential financial risks and future liabilities of SEs were noted as factors that have hindered their development up to this point. However, respondents noted that with adequate structures and agreements in place from establishment, through the independent legal structures of the SE, these risks and liabilities can be reduced and managed.

7. Public relations: risk and reward in relation to the development of SE

There were mixed views on whether SE could have a more potentially positive or negative impact on public opinion. However, all who raised this (n = 3) were clear that the introduction of SE would require careful consideration and management of PR, either to avoid potentially damaging media coverage or to optimise the potential benefits of this development. There is likely to be more of a spotlight on SEs than on other new businesses. How failure would be contextualised would need to be considered from the outset.

Other PR concerns were also noted, for example if the state services are seen to be connected to profit-making enterprises then this may be considered inappropriate. Also noted was that negative publicity related to one client case could have a significant and disproportionate impact on the overall organisation.

An alternative view was raised by three respondents who saw SE as being a potential source of good PR. This reflected previous themes whereby SE could potentially address some of the challenges of other funding models. SE was viewed as providing a clearer way for offenders to participate meaningfully in society through the labour market. This notion is connected to the idea that employment is a tangible way to 'give back to society', as opposed to attending state-funded programmes where the dynamic can be construed as offenders receiving support and not returning anything tangible.

One respondent, who had experience of SE in the criminal justice area, noted that the best way of mitigating PR issues at a customer level was to be up-front about the client groups, any associated risks of working with these groups, and the overall mission and goals of the project. It was noted that an honest approach may provide more initial challenges to customers and groups not familiar with this target group, but that this approach had better long-term results and was more effective as a risk management strategy.

Respondents noted a range of both potentially positive and negative views regarding the public relations of an SE employing people with a background in offending. An awareness of and sensitivity to customers' needs and concerns as well as the potential negative public perception of state-funded SEs competing with non-subsidised private companies need to be addressed in the marketing plan for any SE of this nature.

8. Attitudes to commercialism and the need for a wider culture change are barriers to SE development

Five respondents referenced the fact that Ireland had a different governmental culture to countries that had invested significantly in SE, and that these factors would need to change in order for SE to become supported at the mainstream state agency level. Cultural majority understandings or views that respondents highlighted as potential barriers that may need to be addressed included a fear of business or a general understanding that 'money and profit is not our concern'.

A comparison between the UK and Ireland was made by two respondents who stated that the UK had a state funding mentality that favoured hybrid-funding models, such as the engagement of private enterprises in social service provision or engagement with the commercial marketplace through an SE structure. Respondents were aware that a significant difference between the success of SE in the UK and within Ireland was attributable to cultural factors. The need for local success stories was seen as a critical success factor for the development and promotion of the work of SE within this sector.

9. The need for clear interagency and interdisciplinary structures to support decision-making in relation to SE

Five respondents stated that, in order for SE to be developed within the Irish criminal justice sector, there is a need to establish a cross-agency structure to support and fund new SEs. This steering group structure was

seen as essential to the engagement of individual state agencies and as a response to concerns around the risks related to SE and potential failure of individual enterprises. There was agreement that key partners would ideally include the Probation Service, the Irish Prison Service and the Department of Justice, as well as individuals from the business and SE community with expertise in areas such as finance and procurement.

There was strong support for a co-ordinated interagency process for establishing SE within Ireland or within the criminal justice sector. This process would ideally be defined by clear terms of reference, external expertise, and training and information supports for all those involved as well as within the general agencies. The need for robust, transparent and fair decision-making processes in relation to resource allocation was also highlighted.

10. The need for funders to understand SE value propositions[3]

The need for senior staff within state agencies to have a better understanding of SE has already been noted. Aligned to this is the need for an agreement on the value proposition of SE that takes account of internal standards and research.

The notion of the need for a return on investment was well understood; however, little in the way of other detail or concrete definitions was offered in relation to value and the outcomes that could be expected.

Three respondents identified an opportunity for the state to gradually reduce funding after a term of four to five years as a core aspect of the value proposition. However, this potentially overstates the return that SE can realistically provide, while underestimating the time frame within which the SE could become self-sustaining.[4] These comments point to a need to ensure that expectations in relation to the value proposition of SE are grounded in real examples from other jurisdictions, while considering challenges that may be specific to Ireland. It should also be remembered that SE is relatively new in Ireland and that many of the infrastructural supports may not yet be in place.

However, other respondents highlighted that there were significant opportunity costs of not having successful programmes to reduce

[3] A brief business or marketing statement that clearly describes the benefits to a customer as to why they should buy a particular product or service (Emerson, 2003).

[4] A recent report conducted with 33 SEs in Cork found that just under half (n = 15) had been in existence for 11 years or more. Only a quarter (n = 9) reported that they were fully self-sustaining (Gardner *et al.*, 2014).

recidivism, namely the cost of prison, and that the benefits of SE needed to be weighed against other models aimed at attaining similar outcomes, such as employment.

11. The need for SE to be contextualised within the overall criminal justice service provision continuum of care

The need for SE to have a defined place within the criminal justice service was noted. Two respondents stated that there is a clear need for new SE ventures to be able to articulate precisely why this pathway was appropriate and useful to them, and what separated it from other options.

SE could potentially provide supports to bridge the gap from courses or supported training programmes to employment. This gap is significant in some existing training programmes.

12. The role of state agencies as customers

Two respondents noted early in the interviews that the state had a role to play not just in supporting development and innovation of SE but also in purchasing or hiring from SE projects. Subsequently, all interviewees were asked whether they thought it was likely that the state criminal justice agencies would have adequate trust in criminal justice focused SEs to engage their services or buy products from them. Six of the eight respondents stated that, dependent on there being a need for the product/service offered, and it providing comparative value for money, this would be a positive and necessary development.

Respondents were asked whether they could identify a good or service that SE could provide to the criminal justice sector. The following list shows how frequently these services were identified across the eight interviewees:

- maintenance (3)
- cleaning (2)
- coffee shop in prisons for visitors (4)
- catering (2)
- recycling/handicrafts (1).

A significant theme was that in order for these potential opportunities to be actioned, certain structures or policies need to be put in place such as communications with staff, and practical considerations in relation to risk management, security measures and procurement rules.

13. Need for statutory leadership to support change in relation to procurement
The issue of awarding of contracts to SE through open tender processes was discussed with interviewees. It was noted by the majority that value for money was a major consideration of all procurement processes (n = 5). Respondents were also asked about whether they supported the idea of procurement processes giving weighting for social value, i.e. employment of ex-prisoners.[5] This highlights potential for additional training and information in relation to the way that the state and SE conduct procurement within other jurisdictions. Five respondents supported this idea.

In relation to large service contracts (cleaning, maintenance, laundry, etc.), it was noted that there may be legal issues in relation to changes in contracting arrangements, which may present barriers to the state contracting SEs.

Another potential challenge identified was the minimum annual turnover clause[6] in many procurement processes, which would be a significant potential barrier to many start-up SEs. The lack of a prior service provision history and satisfied client record was also viewed as a significant barrier to new SEs. However, these factors could also be managed through thoughtful changes in existing procurement practice.

While it was acknowledged that there would be both practical and perception-related challenges that would require specific targeted responses, the need for the criminal justice sector to explore its role as customer alongside that of funder was highlighted as requiring further consideration.

14. The challenge for new SEs in developing trust with customers
The need for new SEs to gain the trust of potential customers – and the challenge this presents – was seen as a key issue by the majority of respondents (n = 6). This was noted especially in reference to services where ex-offenders may have access to people's goods, space or private information. Leading on from this, some services were viewed as being harder to sell: one respondent saw window cleaning as a harder sell than

[5] Social or community benefit clauses (CBCs) provide a means of achieving sustainability in public contracts by allowing procurement officers to build in a range of economic, environmental or social conditions into the delivery of contracts (Social Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Taskforce, 2012).

[6] This process means that businesses will only be eligible to apply for a tender if they can provide evidence that they have a certain minimum amount of money in their accounts. This excludes many small businesses and SEs.

making coffee, because it would mean that workers had access to clients' personal space. However, this was not viewed as an insurmountable problem; rather as a factor that needed consideration and careful management. Also, as stated by one respondent, with many services – such as existing cleaning services in the Probation Service – Probation staff did not have information as to people's criminal history; it is possible that current cleaners are ex-offenders but this is not particularly noted or viewed as an issue. However, in the case of an SE operating in the criminal justice sector, these issues would be a key factor influencing customers' perceptions.

Trust was viewed as being intimately connected with governance and it was recognised that senior staff within an SE had a core role to play in relation to developing trust with potential commercial customers and establishing trust in the service's quality, a component of which would be related to security and safety.

There is significant potential for criminal justice services to become customers of emerging SEs that can provide a useful service. However, issues in relation to trust and service quality will need to be managed and much of this will be down to the leadership of new SEs. External quality marks could also be a useful aid in developing customer interest and trust.

Policy implications

SE is recognised as an alternative approach to reducing recidivism rates for offenders by providing supported employment opportunities on an ongoing basis. The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of key stakeholders involved in the provision of services in the criminal justice sector with a view to identifying factors that might support or inhibit the development of SE.

Stakeholders, despite a self-acknowledged limited understanding of SE, were open to the idea of developing SE as a means to achieving key goals in the sector. They exhibited a keen awareness of the problems that might be encountered in this development process, but these were not viewed as insurmountable.

Potential benefits to offenders, their families, criminal justice agencies and wider society were seen as the main reasons why the development of SE should be explored. However, in order for this development to be effective, a number of key considerations need to be addressed, which include cultural, structural and policy reforms.

For SE to reach its full potential within Ireland and not just within the criminal justice sector, first and foremost a cultural change is required at government levels. Clearly defined strategy statements and policy reform in the area of procurement are needed. State support in the form of financial incentives will also support the development of SE from the top down. Policy changes that allow state agencies to become customers of SEs will be of significant benefit.

Change also needs to occur within the criminal justice sector to overcome a culture of risk aversion, especially in terms of developing new funding mechanisms particularly for SEs. Strategies to address financial and governance risks will assist with the creation of flexible funding structures required for SEs to operate effectively and to be responsive to the needs not only of customers but also of the offenders employed by them.

If SE is to be supported and to achieve realistic outcomes in the criminal justice sector, funders need to have a clear understanding of the notion of value proposition. Learning from operational SEs in other jurisdictions would assist core funders to shape realistic expectations in relation to either financial or social returns for SEs working with people with offending backgrounds.

The development of SE within the criminal justice sector will be greatly enhanced if it occurs within the context of existing structures. SE has the capacity to fill the current gap between traditional training programmes – provided both in prison and in the community – and employment. Each SE operating within this sector should take adequate steps to avoid mission drift: losing focus on the essential personal development aspects of the enterprise.

Having appropriately qualified people who have the capacity to drive SE initiatives is fundamental to their success. Leadership, entrepreneurial skills and business experience are important components that support the development of SE but are often lacking in state agencies or community organisations. The absence of these core skills is an inhibiting factor but not an insurmountable one.

Finally, for SE to be an effective alternative approach to reducing recidivism rates and increasing employment for people with a history of offending behaviour, public perceptions need to be managed appropriately. Well-thought-out public relations and communication policies need to be developed so that the general public buys in to the concept of supporting an SE that has been developed to give people a

chance and, in return, creating safer communities for everyone. SEs in the UK and further afield have successfully achieved this, which proves that it can be done and done well.

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