

Resourcing Remote Rural Social Enterprises to Foster Resilience and Regional Development

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Abstract : The recruitment and retention of high quality employees can prove to be challenging for social enterprises, particularly in some of the core business support functions such as marketing, communications, IT and finance. This holds true for social enterprises in urban contexts, where roles with more attractive remuneration in these business functions can often be found quite readily in the private sector. For social enterprises situated in rural locations, the challenges of staff recruitment and retention are even more acute. Such challenges can lead to a skills deficit in rural social enterprises, which can, at best, hinder their growth potential, and worse, jeopardise their chances of survival. This in turn, can have a negative impact on the sustainability and resilience of the surrounding rural community in which the social enterprise is located. The purpose of this paper is to report on aspects of a collaborative initiative established to stimulate innovation and business growth in remote rural businesses in Scotland. Launched in 2010, this initiative was designed to attract young students and graduates from the region to stay in the region upon completion of their studies, and to attract others from outside the region to re-locate there post-university. To facilitate this, SMEs in the region were offered wage subsidies to encourage them to recruit a student or graduate on a work placement for up to one year to participate in an innovation or business growth-oriented project. A number of the employers offering work placements were social enterprises. Through analysis of the placement project and role specifications devised by the participating social enterprises, an overview is provided of their business development needs and the skills they require to stimulate innovation and growth. Scrutiny of the reflective accounts compiled by the students and graduates at the close of their work placements highlights the benefits they derived from being able to put their academic knowledge and skills into action within a social enterprise. Examination of interviews conducted with a sample of placement employers reveals the contribution the students and graduates made during the business development projects with the social enterprises. The challenges of hosting such placements are also discussed. The paper concludes with indications of the lessons learned and an outline of the wider implications for other remote rural locations in which social enterprises play an important role in the local economy and life of the community.

Keywords : resilience, rural development, regeneration, regional development, recruitment, resource management, retention, remuneration

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