

Enabling Enterprise

City Bridge Trust Stepping Stones Case Study
First Interview – October 2015

It's perhaps not typical to walk into a classroom full of five year olds to see the aspirations of 'working as a team', 'communication' and 'leadership' written on the walls, and yet this is what Tom Ravenscroft does on a regular basis as Managing Director of Enabling Enterprise.

Seven years ago Tom was a Business Studies teacher, explaining to fourteen year olds how to write invoices, cash flow forecasts and employment contracts. However in the midst of this he knew that something wasn't quite right. In order for his students to be a success in employment they needed more than this set of knowledge, they needed a foundational layer of softer skills, of enterprise skills. So he set up a new organisation to deliver just that.

Enabling Enterprise now works in over 200 primary and secondary schools across the country. "The huge challenge I experienced as a teacher was that my students would leave school without all the skills they needed to succeed. Even now, the CBI consistently identifies the skills gap between our young people and the employers looking for the next generation. This is part of the reason that unemployment rate for young people is twice that the general rate. At Enabling Enterprise we want to bring about a systemic change where enterprise skills are valued alongside academic learning, literacy and numeracy."

In the last year, Enabling Enterprise worked with over 45,000 children through their programmes. Subscribed schools commit to delivering one enterprise lesson a week with training, and resources provided, and organise their students to take part in enterprise projects including creating a radio show, developing a fundraising campaign, or running a school postal service in the run up to Christmas. Enabling Enterprise also facilitate school visits one of their 100 employer partners to experience the working world first hand. This practical and reflective project-based learning is intended to steadily build core enterprise skills in students throughout their school lives from the age of five, right through to 18.

"We wanted to make sure a potentially intangible concept became an achievable goal so we worked with employers and youth organisations to identify eight core competencies: aiming high, presenting, team working, leadership, communication, resilience, creativity and problem solving. We've turned this into a set of age-specific skills that allow progress to be observed and built upon. By the time they are creating CVs and business plans, they've got the foundational skills in place to use them effectively" says Tom.

However despite experiencing rapid growth in their six years of existence, the vision from the very start was huge: “The model was always about up-skilling schools, not just servicing them. It was systemic change. Our ambition for five years’ time is to be able to support any school in the country that wants to sign-up to the programme”. This kind of growth is impossible without significant finance, and therefore social investment is something that Enabling Enterprise were looking to explore.

“Social investment is appealing to us because as a social enterprise we do make a profit in order to grow, but not enough to attract the same kinds of finance open to other companies” Tom explains. “We applied to the capacity-building Stepping Stones grant to achieve one major task with two positive outcomes. We want to better automate our method of assessing the progress of students so that we can firstly better demonstrate the impact of our programme, and secondly reduce the costs of delivering the programme”.

Reducing the cost of the programme is key to Enabling Enterprise’s model because the surplus gained will be vital in servicing any social investment they seek, social investment that will enable them to achieve their ambitious expansion of the social programme. In fact having a surplus in the business model has more than financial benefits: “We’re fortunate that delivering our social mission can simultaneously deliver a financial income. It means that we can focus on delivering to schools with a high quality, and not have to worry about increasing our fundraising activity to match our growth”.

The Stepping Stones grant gives Enabling Enterprise the capacity to test and improve their student assessment process that they would not have otherwise had, and therefore the ability to explore social investment further. Tom knows that this is just the next step: “At the end of the grant period we will be able to see the effect of our assessment process and the evidence gathered on our costs and the number of new schools we’ve been able to sign up. At that point we will know if social investment is an appropriate next step for us, and if so, we’ll begin to explore what that might look like, whether in loans, equity or another avenue”.

In terms of social investment, Enabling Enterprise as just at the beginning of their development with much still to learn and explore, yet the future looks bright. Much the same could be said for the groups of young school children across the country that Tom has the privilege of visiting.

Second Interview – February 2016

Since the start of their City Bridge Trust Stepping Stones project Enabling Enterprise shows no signs of slowing down. Growing their school partnerships from 200 to 225, they now expect to work 62,000 students in this academic year, a 38% increase in four months. They’ve also been able to expand their work outside London into both Manchester and Birmingham. Tom Ravenscroft, Manager Director, is delighted with where they are as an organisation: “We’ve got great momentum now. Schools are

getting in touch with us proactively. We know we've really got something valuable to offer them."

Growth and demand like this gives Enabling Enterprise not just the option but also the requirement to consider how to sustain it. For Tom, up scaling to a nationwide ambition requires at least three things: continued quality, reduced marginal costs, and finance. Their Stepping Stones funding is allowing them to explore all three.

The core of their project under the capacity building strand of the grant fund is the development and implementation of a new system to capture evidence of impact of their programmes on students. In this area they've taken great strides.

"In the last four months of the funding we've made some really exciting progress. One of our big experiments was to test whether a teacher-led system of evidence gathering was better than the student-led model we had before. We're now at a stage where we've found that a teacher-led approach yields a much greater level of evidence. We've now got initial measures on our core enterprise skills from 15,000 students" said Tom.

As well as finding a better source of evidence, Enabling Enterprise wanted to ensure their system was as usable as possible for teachers. "We'd developed our assessment scale already, but this period has enabled us to test and learn what the best way to collect that information. We knew teachers would need to complete it for their whole class in less than 30mins. We've achieved that."

Their next goal with the Stepping Stones fund was to commission developers to build Enabling Enterprise their own data collection software to offer schools and roll-out across all their programmes. This will achieve the second of the requirements for scaling: reducing a marginal cost.

Tom: "The system we use at the moment costs us around £250 per month just for the collection and storing of data for just 70 schools. If we're aiming to use it across all our schools then this would rise to prohibitive levels. Our new system will give us a much lower marginal cost per school signed up."

This is central to Enabling Enterprise's growth strategy. It ensures they can afford to measure the progress of every new student who takes part in their programmes whilst still maintaining a profit margin that could one day service the social investment income required to jump start Enabling Enterprise nationwide.

Mid-way through the project, Tom knows that social investment itself is still a few steps away. "At this stage we're focussed on showing schools that we offer value for money. Schools are becoming more rigorous about investing in only what works. In May we'll collect our follow-up data with the new system and the insights from that will enable us to develop our programmes further for the next academic year. The next step after that will be defining our growth strategy for the next three years. It's then that we'll be in a position to sit down and explore more fully what we can offer to social investors."

It's been a positive learning process for Enabling Enterprise so far, and mid-way through the project Tom has these words for prospective new applicants to the City Bridge Trust Stepping Stones grant: "Have an idea of the direction you want to go and questions you want to ask around social investment. The answers will present themselves as you learn!"

Final Interview – November 2016

Following on from the midpoint of their City Bridge Trust Stepping Stones project, Enabling Enterprise continue to make swift progress, surpassing their expectations of working with 62,000 students, something Manager Director, Tom Ravenscroft is delighted with: "we finished the year working with 64,000 students which was a big increase from the 45,000 the previous year so that's been really exciting. We've also got our offices running in Birmingham and Manchester now and have been able to expand across the country, so it's been really exciting to see the scale growing and also being able to work with a lot more kids."

With the significant growth Enabling Enterprise has experienced, the importance of making it a sustainable operation is something Tom feels has been a strong consideration, "what we've been trying to do is ensure that as we grow we're able to do so at a lower cost for each individual student but also to make sure we're really assessing the skills of the students so that we're confident we're having the same quality and impact."

The capacity building strand has allowed Enabling Enterprise to realise their goal of developing and implementing their own successful database for tracking the progress of students: "We have now got a completely built out system which is hosted at skillsbuilder.org and what it's allowed us to do is move from last year where it took quite a lot of effort because we were using things like google docs, google sheets and trying to track thousands of kids, that was really quite difficult. We've been able to track about 6000 students across the whole year which begins to give you that really big, solid evidence base to understand what's working and what we can improve on."

In addition to implementing their own database, Enabling Enterprise have fully transitioned to a teacher-led assessment approach having formerly used a student self-assessment approach, "once you move to teacher assessment not only do you have much more accuracy in terms of the assessments but actually the teacher having completed the assessment really helps them to teach more effectively because they've gone through a process of really thinking about their class and understanding the needs and strengths of each individual student and that's really one of the unexpected, positive side effects of this project."

Exceeding expectations, Tom acknowledges the Stepping Stones fund has benefitted Enabling Enterprise beyond what he initially envisaged as a tool to streamline and

develop efficiency, “what’s been really rewarding with working with City Bridge Trust on the Stepping Stones fund has been really being able to invest in something which has been transformational beyond just the tool itself, because there’s been some freedom and flexibility with it, we’ve been able to stretch it further than we originally”.

Having made great strides in these areas, as well as a growth strategy which allows Enabling Enterprise to be sustainable, Tom is enthusiastic about the prospect of their framework being used by other organisations to measure the social impact on students “we’ve allowed other organisations to start using our skills assessment frameworks and we think if that grows it could be a real game-changer because it means that you can compare different organisations different interventions to see what makes the difference on the outcomes we’re really excited about.”

It’s been a positive learning process for Enabling Enterprise and at the end of the project Tom knows there are now tangible steps forward towards social investment following their journey over the past year, “we think if we can try and build a really clear view why our intervention is highly effective using the skills builder tool then that will be another step towards being able to get the social investment to really scale Enabling Enterprise much more quickly. Now it’s all about getting other people to use skills builder as well so that we start to build this common framework and common language and understanding, so it’s a really exciting next step to be taking.”