

# Social Enterprise Mark- Eligibility Criteria

## Principles

- The **Social Enterprise Mark** is the long-standing accreditation for businesses who are primarily dedicated to trading in support of serving social purposes (which include environmental objectives) ahead of individual and shareholder profit interests. It is designed for genuine social enterprises committed to demonstrating their credentials by standing up to the scrutiny of external assessment, thereby proving they have met the sector agreed criteria that define what social enterprise is, earning the recognition and credibility this bestows.
- The Social Enterprise Mark is a brand that tells customers that a product or service comes from a social enterprise. In order to build a credible and trustworthy brand, documentary evidence is relied upon in support of the operational credentials of social enterprise that the Mark embodies.
- This evidence is often available in the public domain (i.e. Companies House) and this will be referred to as part of the assessment process. If information is not readily available organisations will be asked to provide this. They must also provide responses to a set of questions asking them to describe how they have strived to achieve their social objectives. These social impact statements will be published online via the [Social Enterprise Mark Directory](#), to both promote Mark Holders and reinforce interests of public accountability for their claims.
- Social enterprises can be very different from one another. The Social Enterprise Mark does not dictate one legal form or one way of demonstrating social impact, so long as organisations are able to show how they fulfil the criteria that follows below.
- As well as proving how they meet this criteria, all applicants must agree to the terms and conditions for holding the Mark, along with other declarations relevant to the assessment process. If ever there is reason to suspect a failure to comply with these conditions, Mark Holders may be required to submit additional evidence in support of how they are meeting different criteria.
- The Social Enterprise Mark CIC (SEMCIC) reviews all applications and licence renewals. Awards are overseen by a Certification Panel, who are independent to SEMCIC. They consider and make judgements on all new applications that do not readily conform to existing precedents governing eligibility and assessment of the evidence in support of this. They routinely examine a selection of all applications that have been approved by the SEMCIC across the year, to ensure consistent standards of assessment are being applied.
- Social Enterprise Mark status is subject to an annual renewal process, through which an organisation must be able to confirm that it remains committed to the same eligibility requirements, declarations and licence terms, as when they first applied. Unless there have been significant changes or other developments in an organisation's circumstances, this is usually a very straightforward process. Organisations will otherwise be required to submit to a fuller re-assessment at least once every three years, where all relevant evidence outlined in this framework must be updated and reviewed.

## The Eligibility Criteria

	Criteria	Rationale	Relevant Evidence (not necessarily all compulsory)	Commentary
A	A social enterprise must be primarily dedicated to social objectives <sup>1</sup> .	Transparency of purpose is a vital element of being a social enterprise.	Governing documents. <sup>2</sup>	<p>In the case of organisations who retain profits to pursue their own social purposes, social purpose should be clearly articulated within the legal objects of the organisation (NB: social purpose include environmental purposes). Ideally speaking, this purpose should be articulated in the form of the overarching social aims the organisation is working to achieve, and not be a simple description of the activities that may contribute to the fulfilment of these aims (which may vary over time).</p> <p>This may be directly relevant to an organisation’s trading activities but social purpose must clearly hold precedence over all other non-social objects.</p> <p>Governing documents may refer to other objects, but it must be clear that these are only pursued in support of achieving these primary social purposes.</p> <p>Organisations with overtly commercial objects or non-social objectives may still qualify. However, they must have a relevant profit distribution clause and be able to regularly prove how they distribute annual profits in support of the social objects of others – as defined under Criterion D below (e.g. the trading arms or other businesses that gift aid profits to registered charities).</p> <p>If an organisation supports purposes or acts in a way that might reasonably be considered unethical or socially questionable, then this may render them ineligible.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Social objectives should clearly be concerned with addressing some sort of local community or wider societal need or problem: all references to social objectives throughout this criteria document are meant to encompass any that fulfil this basic definition, including environmental related objectives.

<sup>2</sup> The term “governing documents” refers to a company’s constitution – typically memorandum and articles of association or company rules that are available in the public domain.

	<p>A social enterprise must be an independent business.</p>	<p>Independence and self-governance distinguishes businesses from the public sector, from projects within larger organisations, and from other corporate interests.</p> <p>It also ensures a social enterprise is primarily committed to pursuing social purposes in line with Mark criteria, without undue influence or control from other legally registered entities who do not clearly share similar purposes.</p>	<p>Governing documents (including Annual Returns or Shareholding Statements, Lists of Members, etc.).</p> <p>Additional evidence may be required for externalisations from the public sector.</p>	<p>Independence means that no public or government agency or body, or other private, corporate bodies, hold majority ownership and therefore final decision-making control of the organisation: this may be evident in any external agencies or companies holding a dominant shareholding, membership, or director representation on the company board.</p> <p>The only exception to this is if the dominant shareholder or member (and/or director representation) is made up of organisations who are registered charities or social enterprises. In some circumstances this allowance may extend to organisations with other sorts of legal structure; in such cases, their other operational interests should not evidently compromise social and ethical business principles and they must be able to demonstrate their social purpose in setting up the applicant subsidiary.</p> <p>Projects within other larger organisations are not eligible for the Mark as they are not independent businesses with their own constitutional documents. Such projects may still be able to benefit from using the Mark of their parent organisation, if the parent successfully applies.</p> <p>Externalisations from the public sector may still retain some level of public sector involvement or control. In such cases, assurances will be required regarding the autonomy of the applicant.</p>
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C	A social enterprise must earn 50% or more of its income from trading.	50% traded income is currently accepted as a way of distinguishing a business from a donations, or grant reliant organisation.	Annual company accounts (preferably registered in the public domain). Other financial statements that are produced in support of annual accounts.	<p>If an organisation has been trading under a different guise and has only recently incorporated, accounts from the previous trading history may be considered, if the activity is the same.</p> <p><b>Abbreviated accounts are not acceptable</b> and full financial statements supporting such accounts will be required. The details required are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a breakdown of different sources of income;</li> <li>• main areas of expenditure;</li> <li>• confirmation of any profits generated;</li> <li>• confirmation of any dividend or similar distributions.</li> </ul> <p>Trading income most commonly derives from the sale of goods and other services. This is typically evident in the receipt of payments and other fees, income from contracts or other agreements. It can sometimes be labelled as grant income; some grants are <i>solely</i> paid according to strict expectations of delivering specific activities and outputs that are subject to service level agreements or other contractually defined conditions, which effectively constitutes trading income.</p> <p>Typically, pure grant income is recognisable in that it is not <i>solely</i> directed at service outputs. It may be awarded according to quite general terms linked with supporting a particular project or directed at organisational inputs – that is, the resources required to provide services (e.g. premises, tools, equipment, staff etc.).</p> <p>Some grants may include service delivery conditions but if the grant is not <i>solely</i> payable on delivery of agreed outputs and outcomes it does not constitute trading income.</p>

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				<p>In distinguishing if grant payments may constitute trading, asking the following questions may help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ are the services provided ones that the paying body is statutorily obliged to provide? If yes, it is likely to be a fee and is therefore trade;</li> <li>▪ does the paying body benefit directly from the services provided? If yes, it is likely to be a fee and is therefore trade.</li> </ul> <p>Most loans, investments and interest receivable count against the balance of trading income compared to overall turnover. Capital loans and investments may be an exception, as is interest receivable in organisations who deliver financial services as part of their core trading purposes.</p> <p>If an organisation is on the cusp of the 50% trading requirement or has received a grant or loan, causing them to dip below this, then trading levels in previous years and plans for future years can be considered in determining whether or not they are primarily trade dependent.</p>

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D	A social enterprise dedicates a principal proportion (51%+) of any annual profit or financial surplus generated to social purposes.	Social enterprises are driven by social objectives rather than the maximising of profit or surplus for private gain by shareholders and owners.	Governing documents. Annual company accounts (preferably registered in the public domain). Other financial statements that are produced in support of annual accounts.	<p>There should be relevant clauses in governing documents, which confirm an organisation's commitment to how profits or any financial surplus generated is distributed. Such clauses should unequivocally commit to the stated Criterion requirement, clearly holding precedent over any other clauses that might otherwise serve to undermine or contradict the required application of annual profits.</p> <p>The business may distribute its profits/surplus in a number of different ways that have a positive social/community and/or environmental benefit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ if the <b>trading activity</b> of the social enterprise is, in itself, socially beneficial, then direct reinvestment or retention of profits/surplus;</li> <li>▪ <b>donated to other organisations or resources for social benefit</b>, e.g. a registered charity, or investment in some other socially beneficial activity or resource that is external to the organisation.</li> <li>▪ <b>distributed to shareholders or members who primarily serve social purposes</b> (most typically this will be formally constituted charities or other social enterprises).</li> </ul> <p>It must be clear that at least 51% of any distributable annual profits or surpluses generated are distributed as above. Any dividend, profit, interest or similar payments made to shareholders, owners or members should not exceed 49% of the total net profits generated in that same year. However, on occasion there may be legitimate circumstances where the amount distributed to such entities exceeds 49% (e.g. late dividend claims from previous years); in such cases further clarification will be sought to justify why and to explore profit distribution trends from previous years, to ensure an overall balance has been maintained.</p> <p>NB: this criterion requirement does not allow for the use of profits as alternative means of paying director or employee salaries (possibly to reduce tax implications), beyond this 49% distribution allowance.</p>

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E	On dissolution of the business, a social enterprise distributes all remaining residual assets for social purposes.	As for (d) above.  A commitment on residual asset distribution demonstrates a commitment to social objectives.	Governing documents.	<p>There should be relevant clauses in governing documents, which confirm an organisation's commitment to how any residual assets would be distributed in the event of dissolution ("winding up" of the company).</p> <p>The Mark is not limited to Charities, Community Interest Companies (and some forms of Industrial Provident Society/Co-operative) where such "asset locks" are subject to legal statutes. Other legal forms may also be eligible if they have an appropriate dissolution clause that commits all residual assets to the furtherance of social purposes. This usually takes the form of the residual assets being committed to other organisations who are primarily constituted to serve social purposes; in such cases, their registered governing documents will contain clearly defined social objectives and clauses having equivalent or even greater restrictions on private profit distribution and asset distribution on dissolution, than those described in this criteria document.</p> <p>Any outstanding company debts are payable before any residual assets are finally calculated. Shareholders may also be repaid the <i>nominal value</i> of their shareholding at the date shares were issued, prior to the distribution of remaining assets (i.e. the original price of the shares at the point of issue – not the price it may have changed to at the point of dissolution or the price the shareholder may have purchased the shares for during the lifetime of the business).</p>
F	A social enterprise can demonstrate that social objectives are being achieved.	Social enterprises exist to produce social benefit.  A social enterprise must at least be able to describe how it has strived to achieve its social objectives.	Satisfactory social impact statements.  Other supporting evidence may also be presented towards this criterion, <i>but statements are mandatory.</i>	<p>Applicants must agree to a statement that as a Mark Holder they would strive to maximize social impacts and minimize negative environmental effects in the course of trading.</p> <p>Organisations must commit to confirming how they have strived to fulfil their social purpose over the previous year. This involves answering a set of questions designed to explore this, which will provide social impact statements that will form part of a public declaration promoted via the Mark Holder directory on the SEMCIC website.</p> <p>Further details of these questions can be found on the <a href="#">SEMCIC website</a>.</p>