

We're a social  
enterprise supporting  
people with learning  
difficulties and  
autism into jobs  
with a future





## Chairman's Introduction

2020/21 was my first as Chairman of the NOW Group. It was also a year like no other in that it was blighted by the coronavirus pandemic. I am proud to say that the team still managed to deliver real impact for its participants and stepped in to help out both the local community and business partners.

The detail follows in this report, but I would highlight a few key successes here. The support given to participants from a workforce that adapted overnight to delivering online and from home is second to none. This is truly impressive when a different type of organisation could have simply pulled the shutters down. Where we did, literally, have to pull the shutters down on our Loaf businesses we quickly pivoted to an online model that allowed us to sell both food and pottery – a lot of pottery. We also offered free lunches from our Grosvenor Road café to any children experiencing holiday hunger – however much we grow, we remain true to our roots and principles.

We were also able to step in to support our partners at National Museums NI by opening Loaf branded cafés in another two of their sites when they needed help at short notice. The strength of the working relationship we built during our first year of operation at the Ulster American Folk Park in Omagh meant they needed to look no further than Loaf.

The juggernaut that is JAM Card continued undaunted and we celebrated the landmark of 60,000 users in December – that number continues to grow exponentially as we sign up key, large-scale partners like Lidl across the island of Ireland.

Our training expertise was recognised by Open College Network NI who honoured us with their Provider of the Year accolade. We have ambitious plans to build on this with both programmes for our participants and mainstreaming our neurodiversity training.

We were also pleased to be recognised as one of the UK's Top 100 Social Enterprises by Pioneers Post.

Never an organisation to rest on its laurels, our future plans are truly ambitious as we seek to grow all our services across this island and beyond.

I want to thank my fellow Board members for generous donations of time and expertise as we look forward to continued growth and success during the 2021/2022 year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Gordon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**John Gordon**

**Chairman, NOW Group**



## Chief Executive's Introduction

I'll start my reflection on the past year like no other with our numbers. Yes, it was challenging, but we rose to the challenge and then some. Each of these numbers represents a real life positively impacted by their engagement with the NOW Group.

We supported 1020 people to achieve 570 qualifications and get 52 jobs – all against the backdrop of a global pandemic. In response to that pandemic and switching to home working and online support of our participants we managed a staggering 33,693 virtual interactions. The team supported everything from fitness classes and learning to cook healthy meals to working on CVs and on-line social groups. Engagement from our participants actually increased during lock down as other providers reduced the services that they were delivering.

We don't underestimate the wider impact of the numbers above and I am pleased to report that our social impact figure this year is £20. This means that for every £1 invested in NOW Group we return £20 - this measures the true wider, social impact of every one of the above jobs and qualifications and every impact that our community activities have.

I am immensely proud that we continued to put the health and wellbeing of our participants at the heart of everything we did during the year.

We managed to pivot our Loaf business online to enable it to keep its head above water. The pottery business positively thrived online with our range flying off the digital shelves as people sought to make ethical buying decisions and spend their money with social purpose. On the catering side, with no corporate catering orders we switched to making nutritious, good value family meals for delivery or collection and we also provided 1832 free lunches to people that needed them and 3900 portions of soup to a local soup kitchen.

At NOW Group we believe it is all about how you make people feel and it is our people that makes NOW Group special. We are so fortunate to have team with grit and who live our values and this showed more than ever when times were at their toughest. Internally the team worked hard to support each other and we used our new virtual platforms to stay connected. My colleagues on the Executive Team, with the support of the Board, were very committed to ensuring the wellbeing of our staff as they strove to support participants who were also experiencing very difficult times. The team has emerged from this unprecedented year feeling stronger and more closely bonded and ready to rise to future challenges.

With grateful thanks to the staff team and Board of NOW Group for their continued commitment.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maeve Monaghan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Maeve Monaghan**

**Chief Executive, NOW Group**

### Impact in 2020 –21

- 1020 people supported
- For every £1 invested in NOW Group, £20 social value was generated

### Jobs & Qualifications

- 52 people gained paid jobs
- 570 qualifications achieved

### Volunteers

- Our volunteers donated a total of 3124 hours
- There were 89 participants on our Family Service
- There were 177 sessions of our social groups with 2140 attendances

### Growth

- We stepped in to support our partners National Museums NI during Covid by running cafes at the Ulster Museum in Belfast and the Folk and Transport Museum in Cultra. This helped us gain valuable experience of large-scale operations.
- We gave away over 10,000 JAM Cards.
- We provided 3,900 portions of soup to a soup kitchen in the early days of the lockdown and we gave out 1832 free lunches for those who needed them during school holidays

### Our people

- Of our 80 employees 15% have a disability and 70% are female
- 48% of our team works full time
- Our NPS score is 59% - that's the number of staff that would recommend us as an Employer of Choice
- We gave all staff 2 additional annual leave days and ran a series of wellbeing initiatives across the year
- We focused on strengthening internal communications with our CEO broadcasting fortnightly to all staff and we established a staff feedback ground (NOW You're Talking)
- 12 of our staff sought financial advice from our partner Kith and Kin and 16 made use of the benefits of our Health plan.

### Awards

- Open College Network Training Provider of the Year
- Pioneers Post Top 100 UK Social Enterprises



## 1 Objectives and Activities

NOW Group is a Limited Company with charitable status that has been operating since 2001. It provides quality training and employment services for local people with differing levels of learning abilities who often are furthest removed from the labour market.

### The purpose of NOW is:

Supporting People with Learning Difficulties and Autism into Jobs with a Future

### The Company's objectives are:

- (a) to advance the education of the beneficiaries in the area of benefit and to relieve poverty and unemployment by the promotion, facilitation and organisation of adequate, accessible and quality programmes of vocational and educational training, information and support in an effort to acquire skills and retraining to assist the beneficiaries in obtaining new skills, qualifications, employment or practical work experience and thereby assisting in developing independent living skills;
- (b) to relieve unemployment through the maintenance, management and support of supported employment schemes for people with learning disabilities, difficulties and associated problems;
- (c) to promote or assist in the promotion, facilitation and organisation of capacity building programmes and projects for the beneficiaries within the area of benefit who have need of such assistance as a result of their youth, age, ill health, disability or infirmity, or social and economic circumstances, by the provision of information and training, advice, mentoring, classes, workshops, support and instruction in an effort to increase the abilities, skills and self-confidence of the beneficiaries;
- (d) to promote social inclusion and integration for the public benefit by associating together volunteers and organisations in a common effort to raise public awareness of the issues affecting those suffering from learning disabilities, difficulties and associated problems and their families and carers and to promote the participation of the beneficiaries in all aspects of society.

For the purposes of this this clause the expression "learning difficulty" shall include any learning disability, difficulties and associated problem or those who appear on the autistic spectrum, a developmental disability of the mind, sensory impairment, acquired brain injury or mental health problem.

Over the years, NOW Group has developed a range of services to help people realise their full potential. These are defined in the following three main aims:

1. To ensure people have the support they need to make informed decisions about their post-school future
2. To ensure people have access to quality, accredited training which helps them prepare for independence and the world of work
3. To provide people with the support they need to access the job they want, and keep it.

### Public Benefit

In shaping our objectives and planning the activities to meet those objectives the Trustees have considered the Charity Commission NI's guidance on public benefit including the commission's 'Public Benefit Reporting' document CCNI PBR1.

The direct benefits which flow from our purposes are:

- a) Increase in the qualifications and skills gained by the beneficiaries
- b) Supporting the beneficiaries to move into employment with a sustainable future
- c) Enhancement of education for beneficiaries
- d) Social inclusion of beneficiaries

The direct benefits flowing from our purposes are set out in section 2.

## 2 Achievements and Performance

We provide a range of services to participants, including:

- Employment
- Training
- Family Service
- Community Opportunities
- Volunteer Service
- Social Groups
- JAM Card®
- Ambassadors

We also operate two social enterprise businesses:

- Loaf Catering and Cafes [www.loafcatering.com](http://www.loafcatering.com)

Loaf operated four cafes during the period this report covers and an outside catering business. Loaf cafes are accredited assessment centres and provide training and employment opportunities for NOW Group trainees.

- Gauge NI [www.gaugeimpact.org](http://www.gaugeimpact.org)

Gauge Impact is a Community Interest Company owned by NOW Group which provides evaluation and training services specialising in social impact and Social Return on Investment measurement to the private, public and third sectors.

### Employment Service

Verve, NOW Group's flagship programme is funded by the European Social Fund and is now into the third year of delivery. Verve is targeted at participants with learning difficulties/disabilities and/or neurodiverse conditions who need additional support in order to access sustainable paid employment opportunities or sustained voluntary opportunities. The programme provides participants with opportunities to avail of innovative pre-employment academy training courses, which fall in line with labour market trends. Tailored interventions include:

- A dedicated Employment Officer to help participants prepare for employment or volunteering
- Assistance to find the job participants want and support to sustain them in the new position
- Access to a range of training courses to help participants prepare for work, including; CV building, job search techniques, customer services skills, effective communication skills and essential skills
- Tailored career guidance and access to a job club.

Verve is part-funded through the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme 2014 – 2020, the Department for Economy and the Department for Communities. Verve is also match funded by; BHSCT, Antrim & Newtownabbey Council, Ards & North Down Council and Mid & East Antrim Council. In 2020/21 Verve delivered employment and training services across nine council areas; Antrim & Newtownabbey, Ards & North Down, Belfast City Council, Causeway Cost & Glens Council, Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Mid & East Antrim, Mid Ulster and Newry, Mourne & Down.

The Employment Team also supports people already in work as part of the Workable (NI) programme which is funded by the Department for Communities. This service supports employees with any form of learning difficulty and/or neurodiverse condition who are working 10 or more hours per week. It also works with employers to provide disability awareness training and advice around reasonable adjustments.

As an innovative and dynamic organisation, NOW Group has continued to deliver all services to participants during the global Coronavirus pandemic and national lockdown period, simply pivoting our delivery model, moving online. Within the financial year of 2020/21 NOW Group staff delivered 33,693 online virtual interactions with participants service wide, with 24,074 online virtual interactions with participants from the employment programmes. NOW Group used a range of online delivery platforms including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, closed YouTube channels and closed Facebook groups, along with standard methods of communication such as telephone, text messaging, e-mails etc. The Employment Team offered a blended learning style approach, with all interactions delivered using both face to face engagement methods and virtual sessions. The benefits included participants accessing even more of Employment staff time and resources than previously.

A successful job club model operated across nine council areas, continuing to focus specifically on developing employability skills and sourcing opportunities even during a global pandemic. Within the financial year 2020/21 the Employment Team delivered 321 Job Club sessions, a combination of both face to face and virtually, with 85 participants attending. The Team also ran four skills groups in 2020/21 within the funded council areas, focusing on increasing and promoting independence amongst participants, along with exploring and securing

voluntary and work placement opportunities. There were 876 Skills Groups sessions delivered using the blended approach of face to face and virtual platforms, with 54 participants attending.

In 2020/21 the Employment Team supported 52 participants into new paid employment with an 87% retention rate after six months. The Employment Team also supported 71 employees to sustain employment through the Workable NI programme, along with securing 5 voluntary job positions and arranging 11 work placement opportunities in a variety of occupational areas for participants. In order to support both paid employment opportunities and voluntary positions, the Employment Team also assisted 19 participants with appropriate route training, allowing participants an opportunity to develop the confidence and awareness to travel to and from employment independently.

Strategic relationships and stakeholder engagement are also vitally important to NOW Group. We see ourselves as the bridge between the employer and the employee. The Employment Team has been instrumental in assisting employers and businesses with the phased return of staff with lockdown measures easing, offering expert advice and guidance, along with recommending suitable reasonable adjustments. The team engaged meaningfully with 42 new employers. Meaningful engagement with employers is measured through participants achieving employment, placement or an interview opportunity. Along with engaging with 42 new employers, the Employment Team actively maintained relationships with 157 employers across the province.

## Training Service

NOW Group's training service assists people with learning difficulties and autism to tackle barriers they may face when seeking paid employment through the provision of innovative training courses. Participants can benefit from both accredited and non-accredited courses delivered in a manner that suits the learning needs, styles, and abilities of individual participants.

The NOW Group Academy model offers accredited and soft skills training options which have been specifically tailored to map to current labour market, sector specific, and economic growth trends. The Academy model is a 12-week training programme consisting of both theory and practical learning methodologies. In 2020/21 we expanded our course delivery with the addition of a range of new academies including Facilities Services (Cleaning) and ICT.

The experiential learning process along with classroom-based theory allows participants to gain a holistic perspective of the vocational area and develops well-trained, qualified participants, ready for the exploration of employment opportunities. This year the innovative delivery of the Academy model by the NOW Group Training Team resulted in winning the OCN PROVIDER OF THE YEAR AWARD 2020.

In March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic caused the delivery of "in-person" training to pause. The Training Team developed a robust timetable of "virtual soft skills courses" in response to this. The core focus was to support participants during the pandemic while continuing to engage them in learning. The course timetable was developed around topics that would equip participants to cope well during lockdown. Topics included Mental Health & Wellbeing, Health and Fitness, Independence Skills, Money Management and Driving Theory. The movement of "in person" course delivery to "online" delivery presented many challenges. The training team considered issues such as safeguarding, learning a new range of ICT skills, and enabling participants to use ICT more effectively. The NOW Group trainers quickly learned how to deliver virtual classes and use ICT facilities for teaching and training purposes. Work packs were created for completion by participants at home. Trainers supported participants in setting up ICT equipment for online lessons, and video tutorials were produced to enhance this. Training was also delivered to staff and participants on Safeguarding and On-line Conduct.

This later led into a phase of expansion where accredited courses were re-introduced, and practical assessments were carried out using video recordings, photographs, and audio recordings. The use of virtual and blended learning approaches has allowed our participants to grow in resilience and independence whilst continuing to move towards employment, or in some cases gain employment. It has also allowed us to reach a wider geographical spread and accommodate those participants who find classroom environments difficult. We will endeavour to continue with both virtual and blended learning moving forward.

This year in total our participants have achieved 570 qualifications across a wide range of vocational areas. Our trainers have also delivered 578 virtual soft-skills sessions. The virtual training delivery has had such a positive impact on our participant's development and wellbeing during a difficult year. This is just some of the feedback from our participants:

*"Due to the restrictions of Covid -19 everything came to a standstill, and I felt very hopeless for the future. Doing courses with the NOW Group was something positive to do and helped me establish a routine which in turn helped to reduce my depression. It was good to interact with other people and I was glad to fit in and be a part of something and learn new skills."*

*"The fitness classes helped me so much with my health". "I'd say I'm ten times better than before lockdown." "The exercise classes helped me big time, they were really good!"*

*"The job interview went brilliantly, I felt confident and now I am feeling confident to do more interviews. I hope to hear back from [the shop] tomorrow whether I got the job or not but feeling positive whatever the outcome!"*

## Family Service

During this year, NOW Group's Family Service programme completed its 5th year of the National Lottery Community Fund project. The aim of the programme was to support new and expectant parents who have a learning disability, difficulty or an Autism Spectrum Condition with a child under 5 years old who live in the Greater Belfast area. One to one practical support included home visits and meetings to provide parents with help and advice, accompaniment to medical appointments and signposting to other services.

Building confidence, developing skills and helping participants feel more connected to their communities are among the targeted outcomes for participants. When participants are ready, opportunities are provided for parents to move on to NOW Group's Training, Volunteering and Employment Services and plan their future.

In 2020/21 the team delivered a wide range of support and activities to 89 parents and facilitated 105 peer group opportunities with 1418 attendances. Informing Choices NI (formerly Family Planning Association) delivered 166 hours of support to the service, including family planning workshops, contraceptive advice and one to one relationship guidance. 1457 home visits were completed in Year 5 representing a 58% increase from Year 4. The service attended over 75 social services meetings including case conferences, core groups and Looked After Children (LAC) reviews. 61% of the families

that we have worked with this year have had interactions with social services. This significant growth in activity and outputs has been achieved with no additional staffing or investment resources which is testament to the efficiency and effectiveness of the team and demonstrates excellent value for money for the funder.

The Nationwide 'Play Together, Stay Together' initiative ran in parallel with the Family Service. The aim of this programme was to build parenting ability, to create a nurturing home environment and provide intensive support to increase positive engagement with infants and children through play while building vital communication skills. We created and piloted a course aimed at educating parents on the five building blocks required for early childhood and lifelong development including Play, Talk, Cuddle, Respond and Relax. We delivered 4 rounds of the course with 34 families completing. The attendance and engagement levels at our weekly peer groups has significantly increased during this project, with more parents taking part in singing, sensory play and being more 'hands-on' with their children during group.

The Family Service also received additional money from the National Lottery Community Fund which allowed the team to deliver weekly food packs between April and July during a very difficult time for many families. A total of 960 hampers were delivered to 70 families which allowed them to prepare healthy and nutritious meals.

The Family Service also received funding from the Barclays 100x100 UK COVID-19 Community Relief Fund which allowed us to provide families with a weekly cooking pack that included the ingredients to cook a nutritious meal. Pack delivery to 60 families started in December 2020 with the aim of increasing the variety of foods and flavours for families. We provided an accessible recipe card each week and ran a monthly cook-along with our community chef proving top tips for cooking and answering participants' questions. This project encouraged children to get involved in cooking and to sit down and share a meal together.

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## Community Opportunities

NOW Group Community Opportunities is a programme funded by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust which supports participants with a learning disability who are not yet work ready. The aim of the programme is to increase opportunities for participants to gain the skills, confidence and training required to transition into employment or training services. In addition, the service promotes independent living and social skills which incorporate a variety of activities delivered by NOW Group staff and external agencies including route training, money, time management, healthy lifestyle and communication skills courses, music and drama workshops, volunteering and preparation for work courses.

There are two 'Transition Groups' within the programme – T2 and T1. T2 operates five days a week with two dedicated support staff and this year supported 23 participants aged between 18 and 30 years old. When participants have reached key milestones, they progress onto our Transition I (T1) service which further enhances their independence skills with an increased focus on employability. T1 supported a total of 18 participants in 2020/21 with focus on increasing independence and practical living skills for participants. Progression of participants has continued this year despite the pandemic. Three participants have positively progressed from T2 into T1. Four participants have positively progressed from T1 into Workforce III, with one participant going on to secure a job in Spring 2020.

We have pivoted our model of delivery so that support can be delivered online, in-person or a blended approach of both when restrictions are eased. We have also loaned ICT equipment to three participants to enable them to join activities online and communicate with their key worker.

We gave also increased our engagement with parents and carers during the past year, establishing a WhatsApp group to enable parents to engage with each other. We have also held quarterly 'Parent Engagement' session online to keep everyone informed during the pandemic and provide an opportunity for parents to ask questions and provide feedback to staff.

Participants were also provided with a range of opportunities for to socialise with their peers and visit new and exciting places. A number of participants in this service also access the range of social groups offered at NOW Group. Participants also took part in a 6-week DJing course with Belfast Electronic Arts and Music Academy. Participants have attended a number of Discos and events hosted by NOW Group during the Easter Holidays, the summer time and at Halloween, providing respite for their families.

## Social Groups & Other community projects

During 2020/21, NOW Group has continued to increase the number of social groups it operates including 5 Fandom groups, Tales of Creativity, Kidnap Wednesday, THRIVE, Loaf Pottery Gardening Group, Football Club and Art Attack. Again, due to the COVID pandemic these groups needed to move to virtual support where appropriate and with the agreement of participants. These 11 social groups have 175 members in total and provided 177 sessions in 2020/21 with a total of 2140 attendances.

Fandom are volunteer led social forums for young adults who are socially isolated and have high functioning autism or Asperger's. This year we received funding from Northern Health and Social Care Trust to develop two new Fandom groups within the NHSCT with membership increasing to 100-member capacity across the five groups, with a steady flow of new participants joining when there is a vacancy. This funding allowed for the development of our first Fandom Junior Group for 15-18 year olds. The groups have continued to carry activities based around their interests in comics, videogames and movies. These activities have helped to forge their friendships with each other and improve teamwork skills when doing group-based games. They have organised a number of themed nights which allow members of the group to lead an evening at Fandom based on their own interests. Eight members of Fandom took part in an animation workshop - 'Draw my Life' - delivered by BEMA.

Lockdown has had a significant impact on participant physical and mental wellbeing throughout the COVID pandemic NOW Group participants were still offered weekly social group opportunities to reduce social isolation and loneliness and provide a sense of normality during difficult times. We were unable to hold our usual Christmas events, however, an online event was enjoyed by 60 participants from across all services.



## JAM Card

JAM Card continued to witness growth throughout 2020/2021 across all measures. In December to mark International Day of People with Disabilities we celebrated 60,000 JAM Card users - this figure had risen by 81,000 users by the end of March. Our website received requests for over 10,000 cards which were sent out, free of charge to the recipients, from NOW Group's head office.

11,535 JAM Card E-learning sessions were purchased, and we welcomed 655 new JAM Card friendly business locations across the island of Ireland.

We now have over 2,455 JAM Card Friendly businesses/organisations throughout Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and the rest of the UK.

Some major names from the service sector joined the programme this year including Ulster Bank and Bank of Ireland. From the world of transport we welcomed East Midland Railways who gave excellent feedback on the JAM Card training they received. In the retail sector Lidl became the first all-Ireland major supermarket to make the commitment and the Court Service, Ireland also signed up.

The Northern Health & Social Care Trust became *the first Trust to become JAM Card friendly saying "it will make it much easier for service users to access our services and for us to ensure we are adequately meeting the needs of autistic people and others with communication barriers."* We were also grateful for the support of Northern Area Autism Reference Group who worked with us on the co-design of a new JAM Card that says 'I am Autistic'. As one of the group told us *"I really like the new wording using identity first language, as autism is a fundamental part of who I am, not something I have and can be separated from me."*

We signed up our first local authority – South Dublin County Council – who stated that they wanted *"to send out a clear message of inclusion, access and quality customer service. We hope that our commitment will serve as a catalyst for other important services such as community, health, educational, cultural and leisure facilities, and so on to join with us to create a JAM Card friendly county."* [www.jamcard.org](http://www.jamcard.org)

## Loaf

2020/21 was an extremely challenging year for our Loaf Catering business. The first lockdown saw our corporate catering business and café sites close down – literally overnight. We were able to secure some significant contracts during the initial phase of closure including one to deliver meals to key workers still working across Northern Ireland and feeding the NHS programme. We immediately put our position and resources to good use by providing 3,900 portions of soup to the West Belfast Soup Kitchen to help people in need in the early days of the pandemic. We followed this up by supporting the Holiday Hunger campaign and provided 2,000 meals during October and February half terms.

We pivoted our corporate catering business to offer family meals for delivery or collection from our Grosvenor Road café. We also provided treat boxes for special occasions such as Mother's Day. We had great feedback from customers:

*"It was absolutely gorgeous. We had the jambalaya and I have frozen the lasagne and chicken and broccoli as I cancelled a rival delivery service for next week. Would prefer to buy local. Looking forward to making more orders."*

There was a definite groundswell of desire to buy local and social and Loaf benefited from this. Many people made cash donations and donated food and other items to support our Holiday Hunger programme (covered elsewhere in this report). This also elevated our brand and reputation to many new audiences.

We were able to step up to help one of our valued partners – National Museums NI – over the course of this year. We had already built a strong working relationship in our Loaf café at NMNI's Ulster American Folk Park site in Omagh. When they needed temporary help in getting their cafes at the Ulster Museum and the Folk Park in Cultra back open we jumped at the chance to bring our Loaf brand to more prestigious sites.

Probably the real star of the show this year has been our pottery range. Faced with closing the doors in Crawfordsburn and losing revenue from both the café and our successful events programme, we sought to ramp up our online sales of the mugs range. We supported an enhanced social media presence with a PR campaign that saw us featured in many national gift guides at Christmas, Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. Our sales increased by over 300% year on year and we expanded our range to include espresso sets and butter dishes.



**Understanding our social value**

Each year NOW Group commissions an independent Social Return on Investment (SROI) of our work to understand, measure and communicate the full social value that the organisation generates for stakeholders. The SROI study generates a cost to benefits ratio.

For the 2019-20 financial year we carried out an evaluation of all our services to determine the changes experienced by all of our stakeholders as a result of our work.

We quantify the social value of the transformation by:

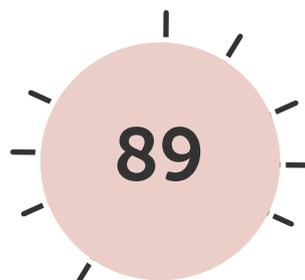
- Identifying the main groups (people or organisations) of stakeholders that experience the most significant changes as a result of our work.
- Asking stakeholders about the changes, known as outcomes.
- Establishing evidence of the changes, known as indicators; finding a means of placing monetary values, known as financial proxies on the changes which are acceptable to the stakeholders.

**OVERALL IMPACT %**

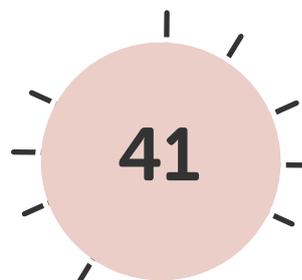
For every £1 invested in NOW Group we generated



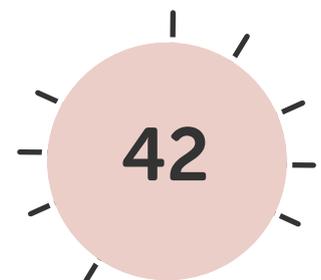
Participants Supported



Parents & Families Supported



People Supported through the NOW Group Community Opportunities



New Employers engaged



# ACCOUNTS

### 3. Financial review

Overall, this has been a successful year for NOW Group. In 2020/2021 NOW was able to increase its overall net income resources by £71.9k compared to £16.6k in the previous year and despite the significant negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Social Enterprises income in the year was 49% compared to 2019/20 due to the enforced Covid-19 closures. They were able to pivot their services throughout the year resulting in an increase of online sales of their handmade Potteryware and food delivery service. Increasing sales from existing and new Loaf café sites. Loaf Catering and JAM Card are still part of the organisation's sustainability strategy.

Despite the logistical difficulties imposed by Covid-19 restrictions NOW have also continued to provide services to participants throughout the year with engagement levels being sustained and qualifications being achieved in line with targets. NOW Group has secured funding for main services through to March 2023.

Reserves at year end were £1.02m of which £769k are unrestricted. The cash reserves at the end of the financial year 20/21 have remained at £225k.

#### Funding Sources

NOW Group's Board is extremely grateful to the following organisations, which provide the main sources of our funding activities:

- European Social Fund
- Department of the Economy
- Department for Communities
- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
- Northern Health and Social Care Trust
- Ards and North Down Council
- Antrim and Newtownabbey Council
- Mid and East Antrim Council
- Belfast City Council
- Omagh and Fermanagh Council
- The National Lottery
- Nationwide
- Coastal Communities
- Potterspurty Lodge
- Inter Trade Ireland
- Invest NI
- Barclays

## Reserves Policy

NOW has a cash reserves fund representing two month's staffing costs for the following purposes:

- Available funds in the event of disruption to Cashflow
- Loss of funding
- Organisation Wind up or Redundancy

To strengthen its overall position, the reserves policy will be further developed in 2021/2022 to support four distinct areas:

1. Protected Funds	To sustain and support 2 months working capital requirements
2. Designated Funds	To prepare for potential redundancy costs at the end of the last round of ESF funding if replacement funding cannot be found
3. Infrastructure Funds	To build a fund to support the refurbishment and replenishment of the organisations assets
4. Opportunity Funds	To explore and invest in future initiatives that drive impact

## Cashflow

Core funding activities are secured until March 2023. Focus continues expanding social enterprise activities including further diversification and expansion into other geographical areas.

NOW must exercise considerable prudence to ensure that adequate reserves are available to bridge any potential shortfall in funds and to allow enough time for replacement or additional funds to be found. Legally, NOW must be able to meet its debts as they fall due.

Since restricted funds can only be used for the purpose for which they are given, NOW must always ensure that it can support at any given time (from its reserves cash or otherwise) viable and contracted programmes should it ever encounter difficulties. The cash reserves protected funds enables the organisation to meet its obligations for two months with no funding available.

In addition, NOW must ensure that it is able to respond to any cashflow problems as a result in delays from either funders or social enterprise debtors.

## 4. Structure, Governance and Management

### Organisational Structure

NOW Group is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status, incorporated on the 2nd day of August 2002, and registered as a charity in 2001. The company was established under a Memorandum of Association that established the objects and powers of the charitable company and is governed under its Articles of Association. In the event of the company being wound up, members are required to contribute an amount not exceeding £1.

NOW Group has a Board of Directors of up to 14 members who meet quarterly and are responsible for the strategic direction and policies of the charity. At present the Board has 12 members from a variety of professional backgrounds relevant to the work of the charity. The Secretary (currently NOW Group's Chief Executive) has no voting rights. A scheme of delegation is in place and day-to-day responsibility for the provision of the services rests with the Chief Executive along with the Executive Team.

The Trustees are also responsible for the setting of senior staff pay.

The Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring that the charity delivers the Strategy as set out by the Board and that key performance indicators are met. The Executive Team has responsibility for the day-to-day operational management of NOW Group, individual supervision of the Management team, skills development and good working practice.

### Recruitment and Appointment of Trustees

The Directors of the company are also charity trustees for the purposes of charity law, and under the company's Articles are known as members of the Management Committee. Under the requirements of the Articles, the members of the Management Committee are elected to serve for a period of three years, after which they be eligible for re-nomination and election provided that no director shall serve more than two consecutive three year terms and provided that he/she is recommended for reappointment by the directors. Gary McQuoid served as Interim Chair until his resignation in November 2020. John Gordon was appointed Chair in February 2021. Simon Snoddy was appointed as Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee in October 2016.

NOW Group has a robust Governance Manual based on the Code of Good Governance detailing all processes in relation to its Board. Board members conduct a review of contribution and training needs analysis annually to ensure that all members are contributing and have the appropriate skills, expertise and training to ensure NOW Group's strategy is met.

All members of the Board give their time voluntarily and receive no financial or other material benefits from the charity. Any expenses claimed from the charity are set out in a note to the accountants.

### Trustee Induction and Training

Our Board member induction process aims to ensure that new members feel comfortable in their role and can make a useful and rapid contribution. The process lasts for several months and includes review meetings with the Chair to consider further induction and development needs. The Chair endeavours to ensure that the specific talents of each Board member is appropriately used to the benefit of the organisation. Induction includes meetings with the Chief Executive and Executive team and the Chair meeting with new Board members six months after they join the Board to review the success of the process and to agree further actions. Board members are encouraged to network with staff at events and to attend meetings with key stakeholders, in order to continue to develop their understanding of the organisation and its environment.

### **Risk Management**

The Audit and Risk sub-group has conducted a review of the major risks to which the charity is exposed. A risk register has been established and is reviewed and updated quarterly. Where appropriate, systems or procedures are established to mitigate the risks the charity faces. Significant external risks to funding have led to the development of a strategic plan that allows for the diversification of funding and activities. Internal control risks are minimised by the implementation and annual renewal of ISO 9001 and 14001. The organisation has appointed a Safeguarding Champion and team of Safeguarding Officers to ensure the safeguarding and protection of participants. Staff and volunteers receive regular safeguarding training. Procedures are in place to ensure compliance with health and safety regulations by staff, volunteers, participants and visitors to NOW Group's bases.

### **Responsibilities of Trustees**

The Directors are responsible for preparing the Directors' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

Company law requires the directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under that law, the Directors have elected to prepare the financial statements in accordance with the United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice (United Kingdom Accounting Standards and applicable law). Under company law, the directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the trust and of the surplus or deficit of the trust for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the Directors are required to:

- Select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently
- Make judgments and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- Prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The Directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain charity's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. The Directors are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence to take reasonable steps to prevent and detect fraud and other irregularities.

### **Disclosures of Information to Auditors**

To the knowledge and belief of the Directors there is no relevant information of which the company's auditors are not aware. The Directors have taken all the necessary steps of which they are aware, provided relevant information and established that the company's auditors are aware of the information.

### **Tax Status**

Under Section 505(i)(a) and (c) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, The Now Project (NOW Group) is entitled to charity tax exemption.

### **Auditors**

This report has been prepared by Harbinson Mulholland in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

### **Donated services**

We are grateful to the following organisations who donated use of their facilities to support delivery of our services: Bangor, Falls, Andersonstown, Glengormley and Shaftsbury Square Jobs and Benefits Offices; Libraries NI; Carrick Community Forum; Sandy Row Community Centre; Sainsburys Bangor; Tesco Bangor, Newtownards and Carrickfergus and Asda Bangor

We are delighted that our partnership with Deloitte on their 5 Million Futures social impact initiative is continuing. We've been working with Deloitte to help 5 million people get to where they want to be through access to education and employment. Our partnership has been selected as one that will continue beyond its existing term.

In addition to the use of the facilities listed above we are grateful to Fleet Financial who paid for the Christmas hampers for our Family Service. On the back of our Holiday Hunger campaigns we were gifted significant amounts of food and drinks by Hendersons, Smurfit Kappa, SHS, Irwin's Bakery and Murphy Brown's restaurant. Chef Conor Vernon came into Loaf and prepared 100 hot meals during October half term and chef Elinor Kavanagh helped us out with recipe development and the production of a cooking video to support the food education work we do with our participants. Tesco gave us cooking equipment for 25 families. SB Sportswear donated face masks and neck gaiters for Loaf staff and Zeus Packaging donated reusable cups. We are grateful too for a cash donation from Amazon and to the many individuals who donated to our work to alleviate food poverty.

We are also grateful for donated design services from [www.gerry-can.com](http://www.gerry-can.com).

**Reference and Administrative Details**

**Charity number:** NIC100093

**Company number:** NI043774

**Principal office:** NOW Group Head Office, 15-17 Grosvenor Road, Belfast, BT12 4GN

**Auditors:** Harbinson Mulholland, Centrepoint, 24 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast, BT2 8HS

**Bankers:** Bank of Ireland, 202 Andersonstown Road, Belfast, BT11 9EB  
Danske Bank, Belfast Business Centre, Donegall Square West, Belfast, BT1 6JS

**Solicitors:** Edwards & Co, 28 Hill St, Belfast, BT1 2LA

**Directors/Trustees**

The Directors of the charitable company NOW Group are its trustees for the purpose of charity law. Throughout this report they are collectively referred to as the 'Directors'. The Directors serving from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021 were as follows:

**Sharon Beattie** (*appointed 26.11.20*)

**Chris Brown**

**Edel Doherty**

**John Gordon** (*Chair appointed 26.11.20 elected Chair on 25.02.21*)

**Chris Lillie** *HR & Continuous Improvement Sub Group (resigned 26.11.20)*

**Gillian McAuley** (*appointed 26.11.20*)

**Rick McKee**

**Andrea MacLean** *Audit & Risk Sub Group*

**Gary McQuoid** *Interim Chair, Audit & Risk Sub Group (resigned 26.11.20)*

**Gerard McStravick** (*appointed 26.11.20*)

**Richard Moore**

**Mark Regan**

**Simon Snoddy** *Chair of Audit & Risk Sub Group and Treasurer*

**Alastair Todd**

By order of the Board on:

**Maeve Monaghan**



**Date 24th November 2021**

## 5. Statement of Financial Activities (incorporating the income and expenditure account) For the year ended 31 March 2021

	2021			2020		
	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total £	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total £
<b>Income and endowments from:</b>						
Donations & Legacies	122,735	-	122,735	32,228	-	32,228
Charitable activities	1,269,277	1,351,072	2,620,349	1,626,11	1,210,176	2,836,293
Other trading activities	3 16,863	-	16,863	25,395	-	25,395
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,408,875</b>	<b>1,351,072</b>	<b>2,759,947</b>	<b>1,683,740</b>	<b>1,210,176</b>	<b>2,893,916</b>
<b>Expenditure on:</b>						
Charitable activities	1,659,356	1,004,037	2,663,393	1,673,620	1,177,330	2,850,950
<b>Commercial trading activities</b>	<b>19,255</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>19,255</b>	<b>27,856</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>27,856</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,678,611</b>	<b>1,004,037</b>	<b>2,682,648</b>	<b>1,701,476</b>	<b>1,177,330</b>	<b>2,878,806</b>
<b>Net Income/(Outgoing)</b>	<b>(269,736)</b>	<b>347,035</b>	<b>77,299</b>	<b>(17,736)</b>	<b>32,846</b>	<b>15,110</b>
<b>Transfers</b>	<b>348,024</b>	<b>(348,024)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
Net movement in funds	78,288	(989)	77,299	(17,736)	32,846	15,110
<b>Reconciliation of funds</b>						
<b>Total funds brought forward</b>	<b>674,766</b>	<b>251,493</b>	<b>926,259</b>	<b>692,502</b>	<b>218,647</b>	<b>911,149</b>
<b>Total funds carried forward</b>	<b>753,054</b>	<b>250,504</b>	<b>1,003,558</b>	<b>674,766</b>	<b>251,493</b>	<b>926,259</b>

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.  
All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

## Balance sheet

	2021 £	2020 £
<b>Fixed assets</b>		
Tangible assets	486,101	486,101
<b>Current assets</b>		
Stock	22,017	19,703
Debtors	335,294	446,500
Cash at bank and in hand	787,248	431,935
	1,144,559	898,138
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>	(614,813)	(432,058)
<b>Net current assets</b>	529,745	466,080
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>	1,012,750	952,181
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year</b>	(9,192)	(25,922)
	1,003,558	926,259
<b>Funds</b>		
Unrestricted funds	753,054	674,766
Restricted funds	250,504	251,493
<b>Total funds</b>	<b>1,003,558</b>	<b>926,259</b>

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to small companies.

The financial statements were approved by the directors on

**John Gordon**

**Simon Snoddy**

**Date 24th November 2021**

Company registration number NI043774