
Raising student awareness of enterprise skills: accredited and non-accredited routes

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Abstract

Three enterprise modules have been developed by the White Rose CETL for cross-curricular and *ad hoc* delivery across the University of Leeds. These are supported by non-accredited enterprise activities. Student reflections on the modules suggest that while these are potentially GEES focused, they attract multidisciplinary cohorts who value the opportunity to work with colleagues across campus.

This paper reports briefly on the development of the three enterprise modules and draws on student reflections. The teaching materials are available for anyone to adopt and adapt (Kneale, 2008).

Introduction

Enterprise is frequently confused with entrepreneurship, which is unhelpful because only a very small proportion of students set up in business during or immediately after their degree. Broadly, enterprise is about having an idea and taking advantage of opportunities to make it happen. The skills and attributes of enterprising people (passion, vision, organisation, networking, flexibility, adaptability, self-confidence and communication) mean that enterprise in students should be encouraged.

Arguments for including enterprise and entrepreneurship in curricula include its presence on vice-chancellors' agendas, government agendas (SBS, 2004; Yorkshire Forward, 2008), and self-employment as a graduate career option. Entrepreneurship is more limited in the UK, compared with the USA, and has been consistently so over many years. The USA in 2007 shows early stage entrepreneurship at 9.6% of the adult population, whereas the UK has 5.6% (Harding *et al*, 2008, p.6-7). There are gender issues nationally and internationally with more men starting up businesses than women (CIBC 2008, Prowess 2008, Wagner 2007). In the UK, 8% of the female workforce is self-employed, compared with 18% of the male workforce (Carter and Shaw, 2006).

While regional development, government and university policies push towards enterprise and

entrepreneurship, it needs to find an appropriate space in the curriculum. Arguably, GEES academics are well placed to weave enterprise activities into the curriculum, given that resources and resource management, economic and regional policy, and work placements are already typically part of the student experience. Social entrepreneurship, ideas around sustainability, and not-for-profit organisation processes have synergies with human geography and environmental science—this can be seen particularly in the GEES Enterprise, Skills and Entrepreneurship Pack produced by the Subject Centre.

Enterprise modules

The enterprise modules attracted a hundred students in their first year, from over 70 different programmes, including 35 from GEES Schools. Some students were already in business, some were potentially interested in starting a business, but the majority were generically interested in enterprise and enterprise skills. There were a small number (7%) of international students, whose motivation was '*this is something just not available to us in Sweden*', and '*it looks really interesting, and it's an area I haven't had a chance to look at in my degree so far*'.

LEED1110 'Exploring Social Enterprise' aims to help students to understand the processes and practice of social enterprise, and particularly the drivers and attributes of social entrepreneurs past and present. Role models range widely from the historical Robert Owen and Florence Nightingale, through larger businesses, such as John Lewis, to individuals making major impacts nationally and internationally, such as Vikram Akula, Jeroo Billimoria, and Veronica Khosa.

LEED1120 'Insight into Leadership, Creativity and Innovation' focuses on ideas creation, implementation and the leadership and change management required to put new ideas in place.

LEED2110 'Skill Build for Enterprise' is designed to explain business and enterprise processes, and to support students who are considering business start-up. It addresses a range of skills using students' own ideas for starting businesses as often as possible.

All modules are taught in a workshop style, with the emphasis on learning by doing, personal exchange and debate, in a flexible informal environment. Problem-solving and group work are at the heart of every session.

Assessment involves a personal project, and a weekly reflective log, from which a summary evaluation statement was drawn. In the first two modules, there are small group projects, but in practice participants undertake group work and formative presentations in every session.

One considerable advantage of this diverse mix of students was that group work is with people outside friendship groups. Students exchange emails and phone details, knowing that they won't find each other in passing in their departments, and generally keep to agreed meeting times.

Student insights

Student insights (in italics below) into the modules were sought through analysis of the reflective notebooks and commentaries. These are particularly valuable in showing how participants' ideas and understandings evolved.

Module choice

There are almost as many reasons for choosing the modules as there are students taking them. Common themes involve doing something new, something different, and related to skills development:

When I was choosing this module I felt I needed something that wasn't totally academic-orientated. Although I knew there were essays to be written, I also was aware that it was more about developing my skills and learning how to be innovative and creative.'

Approximately 10% were specifically looking for business start-up skills, but it was more common to find a desire to develop skills generally:

'A crucial motive for my taking this module was I felt I had no skills that would be valuable in the workplace.'

'I chose to this module due to the fact that both my parents are entrepreneurs and I had always wondered whether I would be able to be one too.'

'Another reason for taking this module was to meet like-minded people who I could bounce ideas and theories off.'

'I didn't have a specific business idea but I wanted to explore different options.'

The value of reflection

'At first I didn't really see the point on keeping a reflective log, but my opinions of this have changed greatly over the course of this module.'

It would be surprising if the average undergraduates fully grasped the value of the weekly reflection. It is interesting that it typically takes four to six weeks for the student to see the process making an impact. In some cases, the process takes longer:

'A previous module I have done involved reflective writing and I can find it tedious but having done it for a second time I am starting to realise that reflection is a skill worth developing.'

One of the issues for lecturers using reflection, is to find ways to ensure enough practice occurs for students to appreciate the impact it can make on their thinking and learning. Reflecting weekly over a full semester gives this opportunity.

End of module

In their summaries, students picked up on particular skills. Networking was recognised by many:

'I have always found it hard to chat to new people, but after attending the networking workshop, I felt a lot more confident.'

'Meeting other people with different views allowed me to grasp the importance of networking in a business environment.'

Increasing self-confidence is a theme that most students recognise:

'I now enjoy making new contacts and see the scope for opportunity, rather than being daunted and shy.'

'I have developed the confidence to take risks and put my ideas across to other people.'

'I have improved in three key areas – knowledge I have gained, skills I have acquired, and my attitude towards myself and others.'

'Confidence in my abilities grew as I realised entrepreneurs weren't superhuman; rather, they shared a number of traits with the average person.'

Individuals identify aspects that impact particularly:

'One skill I really improved upon was my creative thinking. I learnt to use parts of the brain that I'm not accustomed to using.'

'I am now more open to criticism and taking on board advice.'

'If the module has shown me one thing, it is the need for organisation, clarity and not overcomplicating things for myself.'

For some people the modules encourage an entrepreneurial future:

'I have found this module incredibly valuable and it has inspired me to fulfil my ambition to become an entrepreneur.'

For others the opposite is the case:

'I now know I don't want to start my own business.'

Extra curricular activities

The White Rose CETL Enterprise also runs a series of eight evening lectures which are open to all students on campus, including those taking the modules. The workshops for Skill Build are advertised for *ad hoc* attendance. There are also networking lunches for students, competitions and events. These are designed to attract students who have some interest in enterprise, who do not want to commit to a whole module. They provide additional spaces for module participants to meet, discuss, and develop ideas.

Individually, the lectures were well attended with 30 -120 participants, but attendance by not-for-credit students was less consistent. In the first year, six not-for-credit students attended all eight lectures. Of these, four were already running their own businesses, and they attended the networking lunches and used the Enterprise Zone for meetings. A further ten attended at least five lectures. The modules in the following year recruited from these consistent attendees.

While the lectures and workshops are valuable 'signposts', they cannot offer the consistency of learning gained through the modules.

Conclusions

Students are unlikely to pursue a not-for-credit enterprise agenda unless they are very motivated. The workshop and lecture series does raise

awareness of the Enterprise Zone, and helps to recruit students to the modules in the following year. This type of activity, although undoubtedly enhancing the student experience, is not financially viable on its own.

The credited optional modules provide space for students to explore specific aspects of enterprise, and to recognise and enhance their skills. Social enterprise has particular synergies with geography and environmental studies. The reflective approach leads to conscious awareness of skills development, with students identifying their personal gaps and achievements.

Overall, students were very positive about the modules, and the opportunity to meet colleagues from many University disciplines.

Resources

For resources for enterprise teaching see:

- White Rose CETL: www.leeds.ac.uk/wrcetle/teachingdocuments.html
- National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship at www.ncge.com/communities/education/content/get/18
- Kauffman resources at www.kauffman.org/resources.cfm

References

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Yorkshire Forward, 2008 Regional Economic Strategy 2006-15. Online http://www.yorkshire-forward.com/www/view.asp?content_id=106&parent_id=17

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Looking for some learning and teaching support?

The GEES Subject Centre continues to publish resources FREE, for educational purposes, which are available for download or in hard copy. The following are just some examples:

- GEES Learning and Teaching Guides:
 - o Designing Effective Fieldwork for the Environmental and Natural Sciences
<http://www.gees.ac.uk/pubs/guides/eesguides.htm>
 - o Teaching Geoscience through Fieldwork <http://www.gees.ac.uk/pubs/guides/eesguides.htm>
 - o Practical Laboratory Work in Earth and Environmental Sciences: guide to good practice and helpful resources
<http://www.gees.ac.uk/pubs/guides/labspracs/geeslabsnpracs.pdf>
 - o Employability within Geography, Earth and Environmental Science
<http://www.gees.ac.uk/projtheme/emp/empguide.htm>
 - o Assessment in the Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies
<http://www.gees.ac.uk/pubs/guides/assess/gees%20assessment.pdf>
- Resource Packs:
 - o New and Aspiring Lecturer's Resource Pack
<http://www.gees.ac.uk/pubs/pubs.htm#otherpubs>
 - o Scottish Enhancement Theme Pack
<http://www.gees.ac.uk/pubs/pubs.htm#otherpubs>
 - o Enterprise, Skills and Entrepreneurship Resource Pack
<http://www.gees.ac.uk/projtheme/entrep/entrepres.htm>
 - o GEES Employability Profiles Resource Pack
<http://www.gees.ac.uk/projtheme/emp/empprofs.htm>
- Them & Us - A publication for Geography, Earth and Environmental Science Staff and Students
<http://www.gees.ac.uk/pubs/student/contents.htm>
- Archive of all previous issues of Planet
<http://www.gees.ac.uk/pubs/planet/index.htm>

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