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Case Study

Talent Pool & Summer School

Mr Gurpreet Jagpal (University of Birmingham) is the Postgraduate Enterprise Consultant and Operations Manager, working as part of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Team. His portfolio of projects includes (i) Talent Pool, operational since February 2010 and (ii) Postgraduate Enterprise Summer School, which has been operational for six years. The Talent Pool is a six-day course that is delivered one day per week over six weeks. The Postgraduate Enterprise Summer School is a full five-day non-residential programme. The Talent Pool is free for participants and the Summer School costs £30 which includes all materials, refreshments etc.

Additionally there are approximately 5-8 one-day events available to postgraduate researchers.

Resources

The Entrepreneurship and Innovation Team (EI), part of the University's Careers and Employability Centre, consists of 5.5 FTEs. EI is the University of Birmingham's hub of entrepreneurial learning and encourages and promotes enterprise, innovation and entrepreneurship amongst students, staff and alumni. The programme uses internal staff from the EI Team, University staff, external practitioners and facilitators and guest speakers. For programmes such as Talent Pool and Postgraduate Enterprise Summer School, alumni PhD graduates already involved in business related fields such as consultancy, spin out or licensing are also invited to deliver lectures.

Staff Development

Mr Jagpal was recruited to design, develop and deliver the Talent Pool Programme. The University is adding value to the programme by providing the programme manager with an MBA (Master of Business Administration Degree) which will improve the quality of the programme whilst also allowing the educator to deliver on the programme.

Software

The programme uses toolkits such as Ketso (an idea generation toolkit) and Xing (Understanding Business) and electronic resources and software such as SimVenture (Online Simulation Tool) and eFACETS (entrepreneurial capabilities), widely in its programmes.

Needs Analysis

A 'needs analysis' was conducted by the programme manager and there has been continuous evaluation throughout the workshops and at the end of the activity. The Talent Pool was created with a specific focus around consultancy and commercial awareness, through the use of interviews, focus groups, and workshops which were used to illicit the programme content and mode of delivery. At the end of each workshop, programme and event, participants were required to provide programme evaluation to influence the future direction of the course content and to describe how the participant will use their new knowledge.

Mr Jagpal stated *"Talent Pool participants say, it's the best thing they've ever done!, We get to know that through programme evaluation workshops. We also do a reunion event and record video testimonials. The supervisors have also encouraged their researchers to attend and are satisfied with the types of skills being delivered to them."*

The Postgraduate Enterprise Summer School is a more intense, weeklong course that was designed with the needs of researchers in mind. The focus is more on

commercialising research and how to turn an idea into a business. The needs of participants are different to those engaging in the Talent Pool and the requirement was to include a course that covered the various aspects of starting a business but to be delivered as an intense 'boot-camp' like activity.

Design

The Summer School considers the business start-up training needs of its researchers whereas, the Talent Pool is more focussed on the transferable skills. *"We use social enterprise so as to engage people from all disciplines who can contribute, business, education, healthcare, science etc perspectives"* To determine the effectiveness and usefulness of the programme an independent evaluation on the Talent Pool programme will be conducted in March 2012. *"The training forms part of the Roberts recommended training programme as it supports the transferable skills agenda and prepares researchers for careers in and outside of academia"*

For the Talent Pool, the team also integrated the perspective and demands of employers on the type of skills they require from researchers. *"We knew consultancy had to be in there, so we had to bear in mind that the programme was introduced to develop the researchers and with a specific focus on enabling them to behave like a consultant and to be able to sell their services to industry. We also decided to structure and design it in such a way so that each workshop builds on the previous content; it follows a very logical structure"*.

Terminology

For the Talent Pool programme, the programme team decided to adapt the terminology as they recognised the differing needs within the research community. *"Undergraduates usually want a taste of entrepreneurship such as running a business, however, postgraduates are more interested in commercialising their research. Therefore, there are two different contents and contexts and we shouldn't mix these two things up"*.

The term 'enterprise' is clearly defined in the advertisements and, more importantly, so is the potential impact it can have for researchers. Although the Talent Pool started as a consultancy business skills programme, its title has been adapted towards 'Professional Skills Development Programme'. Mr Jagpal stated *"The term*

'business' may be a turn off for researchers, however, if you explain entrepreneurship to them in the wider setting and context - which is not just about starting up a business but rather the transferable skills, it will help them to understand it more. In the Talent Pool we do use the term entrepreneurship in the content; we refer to it as entrepreneurship skills development and transferrable skills."

Awareness

Programmes are advertised through a range of methods such as induction programmes, training booklets, websites, and staff awareness. *"We also use posters, e-cards, flyers, e-commerce, presenting at events, speaking to supervisors, and actually the most effective way was word of mouth recommendation within our researcher community as they promote the programme by telling their peers."* The programmes manager also expressed the need for collaborative work and promoting the research angle at conferences. *"We delivered a poster at the International Conference on Enterprise and Employability at the Catholic University of Portugal, as well as publishing an article in Phoenix Magazine (a careers advisor magazine). We presented jointly with Huddersfield, Durham and Cambridge at the IEEC Conference in 2010."*

"By talking to the research students at induction events we can raise awareness of what enterprise and entrepreneurship is. Also, we use email to contact the students and to get feedback from them. By attending events we can also communicate with them and collect their feedback towards the programme."

Students

The Talent Pool is hosted twice a year with 40 researchers attending each time. Since its launch it has worked with approximately 250 researchers. The Postgraduate Enterprise Summer School programme accommodates approximately 50-60 researchers. Both programmes are available to full time and part time students. However, MPhil students may attend if they are signed up to a PhD following the completion of their course.

The programme invites researchers from its five colleges and has been successful in creating an interdisciplinary environment. A number of participants have created new

ventures and the students have used the skills learnt from both of these programmes to find suitable employment. *“Helen Lees found employment at the University of Stirling after mentioning that she had attended the Talent Pool. Some created their own businesses, so we supported them through other programmes”*. Mr Jagpal also stated that Researchers tend to complete the programme and then create a business few years later, for example on the Postgraduate Enterprise Summer School, a researcher had created a business called ‘PlayDNA’.

“Some students may have a EUREKA moment, as they will come into a training session thinking their research has no commercial value and at the end of the programme they leave knowing that they can create a consultancy business, or sell products which typically happens after leaving the course.”

The Talent Pool team provides assistance in identifying consultancy projects for participants following the completion of the programme. Opportunities are found internally with an intrapreneurship angle, they are projects typically delivered to various departments within the institution. The programme team has also created a voucher scheme that enables the Researchers to interact and work with the external business community.

Accreditation

Both programmes (Talent Pool and Postgraduate Enterprise Summer School) are now internally accredited as Masters Level modules (15 credit each), which means that participants can receive academic credit. The University is piloting a Postgraduate Certificate in Advanced Research Methods and Skills in which the Talent Pool and Postgraduate Enterprise Summer School are two optional modules that are available to researchers. The same modules are also available to the Doctoral Training Centre within the School of Chemical Engineering.

Organisation

From an organisational perspective, the development of researchers is important because the University of Birmingham has ambitions to grow the number of PhD's.

Learning Points

- Involve supervisors, they have more contact with researchers and can encourage them to participate.
 - Speak to the research community to identify their needs and ensure programmes are designed with these in mind.
 - Delivery should be flexible and participants' preferences should be considered i.e. weekends, residential, one day a week, etc.
 - *“To get good people doing the delivery is important”*
 - Ensure there are clearly defined learning objectives and outcomes
- Invite ‘relevant’ guest speakers to deliver motivational talks – particularly early on in programmes. These speakers need to be able to relate to the participants.