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Yasin, Naveed

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Case Study

Enterprise Summer School, Modules and Events

University of Manchester

Background

The University of Manchester has a wide range of enterprise programmes and there are approximately 10-15 optional workshop topics and specific programmes available throughout the year for PhD researchers and research staff. The University provides researchers with access to various types of programmes and workshops such as large events with guest speaking, mentoring, residential enterprise schools and a summer school programme. In addition, students have access to a range of workshops on enterprising topics such as opportunity recognition, starting a business, marketing, finance and many more. Five years ago, a programme titled 'Research to Enterprise' was launched as part of a £150,000 EPSRC entrepreneurship fund per year to develop enterprising skills for research students. Prior to launching the programme, extensive focus groups and surveys were used to identify the needs of postgraduates. Further details are available in a publication titled: Phillips, R.A. 'Encouraging a more enterprising researcher – the implementation of an integrated training program of enterprise for Ph.D. and postdoctoral researchers' (2010) *Research in Post Compulsory Education* **15** 289-299.

Terminology

The team recognised the need to use individual titles when advertising their workshops. Dr Phillips explained *“We don’t package it always as entrepreneurship. For example, a programme in negotiation is advertised as a negotiation workshop and we also explain that this can be useful in academia and industry which raises the need for people to attend. Despite this, I do appreciate calling some programmes as entrepreneurship for example, when an entrepreneur is invited to speak - we do get a large number of students attending such events. However, sometimes branding things like finance and marketing as entrepreneurship can potentially put students off”*

Programme Design

The programmes incorporate the research needs at a school level, *“we did some things for one school and tailored our material for that. Some things are generic and participants from any faculty can attend. We have also integrated government reports, for example the Gareth Roberts report ‘Set for Success,’ and the Research Council expresses the need to involve participants from different disciplines to collaborate. This works quite well when we do generic workshops which are fairly interactive. When you get business people mixing with scientists and various parts of the University, it works out quite well. I suppose if we are looking at skills of individuals we are adding a layer of skills to take advantage of opportunities and entrepreneurship helps them with that and in anything that they do.”*

After the student completes the programme, they are required to provide feedback on its usefulness, which is more useful than close ended questionnaires. A section of the questionnaire requires the participant to write a positive and a negative comment; this helps the organisers to improve the programme. The feedback is collected through about 20 different questions for the Enterprise School programme and it focuses on the participants’ career ambitions and if these have changed through their experience at the University. *“We do take it seriously following it up is very important. Some people that I have spoken to are quite happy but there is a vast number of supervisors who are ambivalent, some will allow their researcher to go onto the programme but aren’t really bothered”.*

Creating Awareness

The University has conducted focus groups and gained feedback from its participants at events. By understanding the students' needs, the programme team is able to understand the most effective ways to raise awareness of the programme. *"Some students say don't email us as we don't check it, having said that, I think email sometimes can be the most effective way which cannot be substituted. I have also put posters around the University to raise student awareness. We also have used social networking sites such as Facebook and included our entrepreneurship societies for marketing purposes."* Dr Phillips also commissioned a report in student engagement which has provided the team with suitable and innovative ways of marketing the events such as placing bar codes on the posters. *"We are still open to new methods; we also have integrated our programmes into the training booklets from all schools and put our leaflets into the welcome packs".*

Dr Phillips has published many articles in magazines for postgraduates and post-doctoral researchers' as well as for funding bodies such as EPSRC. *"...It has also included presenting material at national and international conferences which has been very well received. People are very interested in what we are doing at the University of Manchester."*

Staff Resources

The programme involves integrating its academic and central services staff because academic staff operate the workshops and central staff contribute practical skills and knowledge of University policy; members from the Intellectual Property office are also invited to provide input. As Dr Phillips stated *"All the programmes are free for our students and some elements can survive with no money in theory. There aren't many extra costs in delivering the workshops as we use members of staff to deliver the programme. However, the Residential Enterprise School can cost up to £500 per person for a four day event. Also, we have a big event every year in which we invite external speakers. At times this can be free through University contacts but at times we may have to pay, which can be very expensive."*

In relation to the staff development of skills, *"No staff had to be hired and none required training. We used mostly staff internally and I do have administrative staffs*

that help in our events and workshops. An average member of staff may do 3-4 workshops in a year and also provide assistance at events by delivering lectures, or being stewards. I am aware that Vitae provide training which can be valuable”.

Students

The programme attracts a large number of students from all disciplines in the University. The Engineering faculty is the largest in the University and therefore these students attend events in large numbers. *“Many overseas students come to our activities. They may be inclined towards taking advantages of all opportunities, perhaps because they are required to pay full fees. I don’t have any evidence for that. Nevertheless, overseas students represent a majority on the workshops”.* Participants of the Enterprise School are issued a certificate and those attending the workshops are also provided with an attendance certificate.

The programme team has been able to attract many students to attend one day events by inviting a range of speakers. These include former students; spin out company managers, and household names such as Pete Waterman, Nick Hewer, Ian Livingstone, Joe Fairly, and Luke Johnson. *“I would say about 500 people come to the event every year. It’s the University’s largest one day event.”*

“Many students have attended in proportion to the faculty size. The University has 4 faculties, however, in professions where people do or will start a business seem to engage with us at least. Some students will attend one workshop, some may attend all and some may not attend any. I suppose the larger event encourages people to come and have a look anyway.”

In relation to the application and transferability of skills gained through the programme, Dr Phillips explained *“Students have been able to apply and transfer the skills gained from the programme. We have used various types of feedback by using a Likert scale to assess the usefulness of the course. We do more following up in the mentoring and Enterprise School programmes where we do longitude surveys if they have started a business or have used the skills in their home environment.*

“We have a thousand students per year with an average of 20 people per workshop and we have 50 workshops per year. The residential enterprise school accommodates 40 people. In mentoring, the numbers vary but on average we

receive approximately 20-40 people. Some students are more serious as they require help with their business plans and grant applications and therefore, we try to cover everything”.

Outcomes

Participants have been able to successfully create various types of business ventures and many in the Enterprise School perceive entrepreneurship as a legitimate career option. Some academics maybe interested in starting a spin out company. *“We don’t change people’s mind to become entrepreneurs, it’s a self selecting group that comes to us. We have had a number of outcomes from the programmes in terms of new ventures which range from cottage industries to Nano film material which has been useful for many industries. On average, in the Enterprise School there were approximately 10% who have been able to clarify their ideas and been able to take it forward. With the mentoring approximately 20% of participants have a business idea. Depends on how we quantify a business, as someone may start to buy and sell things on eBay, which is still a business.”*

Many researchers have been able to evaluate the commercial feasibility of their research *“Some researchers hadn’t seen it [commercial potential] before but could now see the commercial application, particularly those that attend the Enterprise School. That was very much marketable as people saw commercial application and started recognising opportunities everywhere. Some students have engaged with industry following the completion of their PhDs and started businesses at a later period. The signs are quite positive from what we have been doing here.”*

Funding and Division

The rationale for separating undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate enterprise is due to funding provisions as undergraduate entrepreneurship is different. The University has been able to attract support from the EPSRC entrepreneur fund as a one off payment for many years to initiate the programmes. However, this year will be the last year that the programme will receive such a fund. Despite the lack of future funding, the University still intends to continue the mentoring and workshops but may reduce the large one day events in the future. As Dr Phillips stated *“We will*

try to be enterprising and make sure things go ahead. We may still be constrained in the future but we will still try. We may still invite external speakers and reduce the catering and other associated costs with the programme.”

Facts

- More than 2,200 people have attended workshops in the last 3 years.
- More than 1,700 people have attended the 4 annual summits.
- More than 130 people have attended the Manchester Enterprise School over the last 3 years or have been funded to attend Liverpool or Durham Enterprise Schools.
- More than 100 people have attended mentoring sessions.
- Four students have been funded to undertake the first Engineering YES competition in 2011 where they were mentored by MEC staff. The team won the heat stage in Birmingham and also won the final held in Loughborough, receiving not only the vote of the panel but also the peers' vote.
- Several people from the mentoring programme have started businesses, some have received funding e.g. NWDA grant, bank loan or DTI Grants.
- Many others have expressed an interest and many events are heavily oversubscribed. The above figure represents approximately 60% of total interest.
- Initial impact studies suggest that many researchers are using the new skills they have learned, self efficacy has increased and some have actually started businesses.