Enhancing and embedding enterprise

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In March 2009, the Institute for Enterprise invited Leeds Met staff to bid for project funding to support the enhancement and embedding of enterprise education across the University. This approach has been adopted successfully by other Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs), for example the Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning at the University of Manchester (**www.manchester.ac.uk/ceebl**) and the Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy at Sheffield Hallam University (**www.shu.ac.uk/cetl/cpla.htm**). Small-scale, fixed-term projects offer a particular range of advantages over rolling, ongoing initiatives.

"The intensive, short-term nature of project work can be a highly productive means of achieving clearly defined goals, allowing teams to concentrate their attention on a very specific area. Indeed, in-house projects can provide a focus for interaction, co-operation and discussion and the building of learning communities both within departments and across an institution."
(Segal, 2003)

Up to £3,000 per project was offered, with all projects expected to run for one academic year. We were keen to support staff in developing their project skills by becoming part of a project group and so applicants were encouraged to think collaboratively and to apply in teams. Applicants were strongly advised to seek the guidance of Faculty Enterprise Pioneers at the bid writing stage and to utilise existing experience within the institution, particularly from the CETL core team, with written statements of support being required from Faculty Heads outlining how the proposed project aligned with Faculty teaching and learning priorities in relation to enterprise.

Though we assured colleagues that the projects did not have to be 'rocket science' and our intention was not to be heavy-handed, we were keen to demonstrate that we had taken a serious, rigorous approach to the scheme and we wanted to encourage applicants to adopt a scholarly approach to their projects. We hoped that this would elicit a series of well thought-through and viable applications. On receipt of the bids it was encouraging to note the extent to which applicants made clear reference to the theories of teaching and learning that underpinned their ideas, some making written reference to the relevant body of literature surrounding their approach. The Institute received 18 applications and was able to fund 11 projects, details of which can be found at: **www.leedsmet.ac.uk/enterprise**.

Each of these projects had been awarded funding in accordance with the following criteria:

1. The enhancement and embedding of enterprise education was the 'no-brainer'! The CETL's own funding has been awarded for this specific purpose and so all our activities focus solely on this particular aspect of teaching and learning.

Stronger projects and better outcomes arise from work that involves more than one person sharing their skills, ideas and reflections. When considering project teams the panel looked for clear indication of roles and responsibilities. We were mindful that the capacity of staff to deliver in view of other responsibilities needed to be considered.

"The restrictions of short fixed-term projects can be frustrating, not least for the staff employed full-time on them. However, such projects allow staff who would otherwise be unable to participate to be involved for manageable periods. For those with a heavy workload it is often easier to commit to a short-term initiative than to an ongoing programme with no fixed end in sight. In addition projects can encourage individuals to test the water and may therefore be a less threatening forum for experimentation."
(Segal, 2003)

The CETL made a commitment to inform all successful applicants in sufficient time for them to seek work release and prepare resources to allow for projects to begin at the start of the academic year. The selection panel was pleased to receive some cross-Faculty collaborative applications, which clearly had a strong potential to promote enterprise across the institution and be more broadly applicable.

2. Projects could build on current enterprise-related activity, extend research into enterprise education or be innovative and groundbreaking. Whatever the approach, we were hoping to gain some sense of theoretical grounding for the project through applicants' provision of background information, reference to previous evaluated work and a clear understanding of the nature of the learning environment proposed.

"An explicit theory or theoretical orientation can form a sound basis for an educational development project and also for evaluation of that project."
(Baume, 2002)

3. A clear project plan was important – the scheme was time-sensitive and the Institute for Enterprise had strategic objectives reliant on the completion of the projects. Slippage had to be avoided and the projects could not be allowed to 'drift'. It was, of course, hoped that colleagues would be ambitious and creative but we also needed to be confident that the proposals were sensible and achievable.
4. The CETL was funded to enhance students' learning experience and to promote good practice in enterprise education across the University and the HE sector. The selection panel looked particularly favourably at applications that explicitly placed student experience at the heart of the proposal. But staff development was of equal importance and so projects that were designed or had potential to share practice, disseminate outcomes and benefit colleagues were also highly rated.
5. We hoped that staff would actively engage students in their projects – that is, not just as providers of feedback or as 'guinea pigs', but as consultants, designers, deliverers and partners in the project as a whole.
6. We wanted to consider how the project outputs and outcomes might be of relevance across a module, a programme, a School, a Faculty, the University or even beyond. We looked for evidence of transferability and for dissemination potential, opportunities to benefit a wide range of learners and educators. In this way, we hoped to inspire others to embrace the Leeds Met approach to enterprise.
7. A clear, integrated project evaluation plan was crucial. The panel looked for a description of the ways the project would be evaluated – both formatively (monitoring of progress throughout) and summatively (the effect or outcome of the project at the end). Evaluation is a dynamic process (Macdonald, 2002). Successful publication and dissemination activities rely on scholarship and evaluation, so these aspects were necessarily emphasised throughout the application process.
8. Any good project plan should include a clear identification of the purposes of the costings – not just figures.
9. Applicants were encouraged to demonstrate commitment and resourcefulness by seeking additional support for their project, either from the University or from external partners and organisations. Some applicants included, for example, input from alumni as guest speakers or mentors; Faculty commitment to provide space in the curriculum and in the physical environment for enterprise activities to take place; and use of 'real-life' projects and briefs from external organisations.
10. The projects stood a better chance of success and eventual embedding if they related to Faculty ALT strategy. The panel looked for harmonisation with institutional strategic plans, best evidenced through the formal endorsement of Faculty Heads.

What happened to 'light touch' and not being 'heavy-handed'? In return for close consideration of the criteria, our applicants were offered full support with any aspect of the application process with which they needed help. The Enterprise Pioneers were on hand with Faculty-specific advice, and as their roles within the Institute for Enterprise changed towards the final phase of the CETL initiative, were able to offer themselves as project partners and leaders. The CETL core team offered generic consultancy in relation to educational development, including project management, technology, financial planning, human resource considerations, models for evaluation and pedagogic research. In the light of such guidance, some applications were re-drafted several times before final submission. The idea was that by providing a solid framework for the projects, a sense of confidence would be instilled in all those involved, with a clear understanding of ownership and inter-relationship between aspects of the project and the people concerned.

It was hoped that staff would perceive participation in the project scheme as beneficial and developmental. The scaffolding described above was guaranteed to continue through the life-cycle of each project and the CETL made a strong commitment to offer 'at-elbow' support as well as opportunities for group discussion and cross-pollination of ideas, tips and information. A lively project launch event was held in July 2009 to introduce colleagues to each other and to the CETL team, including our Entrepreneur in Residence, Neil Warnock (who writes elsewhere in this issue). Together we identified some stages, phases and milestones and what they implied for individual project holders and the CETL. We discussed the extent to which the project plans could be approached

flexibly, and how we might need to modify or adapt in response to feedback or unexpected outcomes along the way. Immediately, many new connections were made as different perspectives were shared. Project holders were encouraged to think about their own professional development needs, and to consider ways that the CETL might enhance or provide for such needs, for example by:

- sourcing mentors
- developing a writing support group
- networking opportunities
- workshops and masterclasses
- brokering work-shadowing
- providing a platform and a profile for the project.

Later this academic year we have planned to host a further event to present 'work in progress' which will offer an opportunity for feedback, feed-forward and peer evaluation, and this will be followed by a more formal and potentially externally-focused symposium in April 2010 when all projects will have been completed.

Our project-holders will be encouraged to build capacity for enterprise education among colleagues by devising staff development workshops and contributing to away-days etc and will be offered support and resources. Finally, all participants will receive ongoing support in writing up their project for publication as well as conference presentation. We hope that through these varied and frequent communication mechanisms, with built-in monitoring, review and reflection, the chances of success will be maximised and any problems and opportunities can be addressed quickly. The emphasis throughout has been not on report-writing and auditing, rather on action, participation, collaboration and the sharing of knowledge and expertise.

The CETL team is looking forward to working with all the project-holders and some of their students over the coming year, and to learning more about how, why, when and where they engage in enterprise activity. We hope that the project scheme will serve to celebrate the excellence in enterprise education already in evidence at Leeds Met, that it will enhance and embed the exciting work of our colleagues and that it will encourage others to consider our approach. Most of all, we hope that the learning experience of our students is affected positively through the projects.

References

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If you have an idea for an enterprise project or activity and would like to talk to us about it, please go to our website **www.leedsmet.ac.uk/enterprise** and contact any member of the CETL team.