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Community Enterprise: success stories of engaging students in social enterprise

Liz Carter

Community engagement has been a strength of Leeds Met for a number of years, but now, as a result of projects catalysed and undertaken by the Institute for Enterprise, Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), a drive is underway to connect staff and students with community-based social enterprise. This paper highlights a range of case studies which provide examples of engagement with social enterprise and community initiatives, both locally and internationally.

Introduction

Social enterprises are defined as businesses with “primarily social objectives, whose surpluses are reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners” (Department of Trade and Industry, 2005). The pioneers of social enterprise can be traced back to 1840s Rochdale, where a workers’ co-operative was set up to provide high quality but affordable food (Business Link Yorkshire, n.d.). Enterprising people are vital to business growth, to the delivery of public and third sector services and to the regeneration of communities (Make Your Mark, n.d.). The concept of social entrepreneurship is discussed mainly implicitly within curricula in higher education but it is patchy in its breadth and poorly evaluated.

Why does social enterprise matter?

The UK Government estimates that there are more than 55,000 social enterprises in the UK (Cabinet Office, 2006). Overall in the UK it is estimated that some 3.2% of the working age population is engaged in social entrepreneurial activity (Harding, 2006).

Social enterprise is particularly appealing to young people and the highest level of socially oriented entrepreneurial activity (SAE) occurs among 18–24-year-olds (Harding, 2006). Education is a strong predictor of social entrepreneurial activity, and those in full-time education are the group most likely to be active in SEA (Harding, 2006). It can be helpful to provide exemplars of good practice for students who may be potential social entrepreneurs to enable them to understand the value of social enterprise, grow the economy and support stronger communities. The Institute for Enterprise aims to support students at Leeds Met through the development of emotional intelligence and transferable skills to become the social entrepreneurs and social sector change agents of the future.

Outline of projects

Four models of social enterprise projects are described which illustrate how the Institute for Enterprise has engaged with community-based social enterprise and how this has impacted upon student participants:

1. The Kaliandra Foundation, Indonesia
2. Holbeck Foods, Leeds
3. Tribewanted, world-wide
4. Shadwell School, Leeds

International volunteering projects such as Leeds Met’s Community Partnerships & Volunteering association with **The Kaliandra Foundation** have proved beneficial to staff and students alike through the enhancement of employability skills including team working, reflective practice and the widening of world-wide horizons. Kaliandra operates as a philanthropic organisation running village-based development programmes in East Java. Leeds Met has a continuing partnership with Kaliandra and 2009 saw the third group of University volunteers participate in a range of activities including teaching English, sustainable design and construction, and eco-tourism activities. Following volunteer placements, a number of participants from the projects have established their own social enterprises, some of which have been heavily influenced by the experiential and community engagement elements of the Foundation. Although the project is not directly linked to the work of the Institute for Enterprise, a number of Institute staff have participated in international volunteering opportunities which developed a motivation to engage others with social enterprise.

Local social entrepreneurs such as **Holbeck Foods** founder Lee Griffiths (a volunteer with The Kaliandra Foundation in 2007) have acted as role models to inspire, motivate and connect people. Following completion of an HND in Business, Lee created Holbeck Foods, a social enterprise operating in Leeds. The project aimed to open retail premises in the Holbeck area, which is known as a ‘food desert’. The premises, functioning as a community market in the first instance, sold locally grown fruit and vegetables at a subsidised cost to enable residents to purchase affordable food. The project has engaged on a regular basis with the University, working with students and staff to develop branding and design concepts, initiate a feasibility study and recruit volunteers to participate in related events in the Holbeck area.

From meeting the need for local services at home to reaching out globally to tackle issues affecting the world, there are numerous places for social enterprises to operate (Make Your Mark, n.d.). **Tribewanted** founder Ben Keene was invited to speak as an entrepreneurial role model during Global Entrepreneurship Week 2008. Ben provided an inspirational link between online communities and real-life eco-tourism projects. The event provided an opportunity for staff and students to hear of Ben's start-up journey when establishing a culturally sensitive tourism project within the Mali community in Vorovoro, Fiji. The event engaged many staff and students, including some from the International Centre for Responsible Tourism and Community Partnerships & Volunteering teams.

The Institute for Enterprise is funded to promote enterprise through higher education locally and with national partners. A successful project that acts as an exemplar of how HE students can work with schools has been the partnership with **Shadwell Primary School**, which has supported the development of enterprise skills in primary age children through the creation of a school newspaper. The Institute hosted a newspaper launch and loans audio-visual equipment to the school as well as engaging in ongoing partnership activity. Pupils have been introduced to general enterprise skills and also, through exposure to the University environment, motivation and aspiration to enter HE have been increased. Feedback from the school has been extremely positive as Zoe Pickard, Shadwell Primary School, comments: "The [launch] event was absolutely fantastic! The children loved it, their parents did and so did the staff that came! It has caused a real buzz!"

Engagement strategies

The concept of social enterprise is developing and its remit is broadening in line with changes in the economy and Government initiatives. The importance of understanding the motivations of social entrepreneurs and the role that the enterprises they establish have to play in economic development in the UK must not be undervalued. Entrepreneurship has tremendous power to transform and change society (Harding, 2008).

Institute for Enterprise projects including those highlighted, Global Entrepreneurship Week activities and regular masterclass events have given inspirational people opportunities to showcase their ideas and share good practice and have also allowed others to exchange ideas. For each project, various

strategies were used to promote student engagement. External speaker events were marketed to student, staff and external audiences through traditional methods including emails and posters, word of mouth and social media. In some instances, projects contained elements which were integrated into module assessment and the involvement of academic staff was key. Links to employability and career development through the use of reflective practice and dissemination ensured that projects retained their relevance for students.

Summary

A number of points can be drawn out that can aid our understanding of the projects' impact. Like mainstream entrepreneurship education, promotion of a social entrepreneurship culture has to underpin the promotion of social enterprise and entrepreneurship (Harding, 2006). As it is widely understood that enterprise training increases the prevalence of entrepreneurial activity (Harding, 2006) this would ensure that clear next steps are established for participants to continue their entrepreneurial journeys after the projects are completed. Evaluating the value and quantitative impact of participation in social enterprise in curricula from the student and staff perspective will be important and it is unknown to what extent this is presently conducted.

Educational partnership projects have informed practice and development at the Institute for Enterprise. Through the pupil engagement initiatives and use of resources from the Institute's partner organisations including Young Enterprise, the UK's leading business and enterprise education charity, the university students of tomorrow are able to undertake programmes with community and social enterprise foci to gain personal experience of how businesses work and to understand the role they play in providing employment and creating prosperity (Young Enterprise, n.d.).

Leeds Met students will play an important role in the successful continuation of community-based social enterprise projects. The Institute has appointed Student Enterprise Pioneers who act as multi-disciplinary ambassadors to promote the Institute's activities alongside sharing ideas on how to motivate other students to develop and enhance their enterprise skills. The newly initiated Leeds Met Enterprise Society will work to increase entrepreneurial capabilities as well as providing opportunities for students to maximise their skills. Social enterprises operate within the best tradition

of sustainability, and additional opportunities for engagement lie with the School for Social Entrepreneurs housed at Shine in Leeds, which provides opportunities and training to enable the use of creative and entrepreneurial abilities for social benefit. Further entrepreneurial activity can be progressed through the newly established MA/PGCert Creative Enterprise, which contains a module entitled 'Creative Citizens: Engaging with Communities', which it is hoped will develop students' world-wide horizons and create the social entrepreneurs of the future.

In an increasingly global marketplace, entrepreneurship has a wider responsibility to function in a socially responsible manner and to act as a driver for economic growth, regeneration and employment. As young people are most likely to become active social entrepreneurs, it is suggested that by promoting social enterprise as an alternative business model within the curriculum, levels of social entrepreneurial activity could rise in line with early stage entrepreneurial activity. It is intended that through future projects and partnership activity the Institute for Enterprise will leave a legacy which ensures sustained engagement, promotion and implementation of educational support for social enterprise.

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