Project Title: PES Celebration
Project Team: (include exAcademic client – Barry Blake Academic Supervisor – Jackie Mulligan Student Team – Elizabeth Sanders Charlotte Smith Poppy Woolley Melissa Clay Megan McCready Rebecca Tock and Justine Pattison ternal partners/stakeholders)
Abstract: Students reflect on a project that was to engage students to showcase a practical events module in order to celebrate the achievements of the events management students and attract clients to consider commissioning the students to manage events for them for the following academic years.
Project aims: Initial aim of the project was for a team of events management students to stage an event to showcase and celebrate a practical events management module 'Professional Events Solutions (PES)'. Once funding had been gained from enterprise the aims encompassed using the event to evaluate and inspire enterprise.
Process: The project was for a group of students to manage an event which would showcase a very enterprising and practically based events management module to celebrate student achievements and attract potential clients. Alongside the more typical issues of event management such as logistics marketing production entertainment and catering there were a number of additional and more complex challenges for the students to overcome which will be addressed later in the section. • How to tangibilise the intangible – the event would be to showcase events not products? •How to finance the event - the students were not given a budget but were tasked with not only managing the production of the event but also raising the funds to stage it? • How to engage over 200 events management students to support the event and produce work voluntarily? • How to document their achievements and how to evaluate enterprise? The students were supervised by one academic. The academic took the role of 'consultant' – providing some guidance when requested for instance in role allocation marketing potential funding sources student engagement. However intervention was kept to a minimum. The group quickly assigned roles and nominated their own group leader. The group leader guided them through the process and for the event and another group member was nominated as event manager on the day. All group members took specific areas of responsibility such as 'client and sponsor liaison' 'entertainment programme manager' etc. Communication was a critical factor in the process the students ensured regular communication with the client and to each other through online discussion boards and minutes from the meetings. The group were clearly enthused about the event from the outset one group member reflects "As a group we had in my opinion little problems in the way we conducted ourselves and distributed the work. I was very happy with all my team and feel everyone worked to their highest standards. To overcome challenges we worked as a team to think of ways round any problems sticking to individuals strengths" Enterprising challenges How to tangibilise the intangible – the event would be to showcase events not products? The students decided that

the main method to tangibilise the events experiences that had been created by the students was to stage an exhibition. The exhibition would be created by their fellow students undertaking the module. Each of the thirty groups would be asked to create a display for the PES Celebration event. Alongside the exhibition the students contacted the groups and put together a programme of entertainment on the evening including video footage salsa dancing speeches and live music to reflect some of the events that had taken place though the module. The tangibilising of the intangible enabled the students to solve problems creatively and made some realize the need for a more positive approach to creative problem solving "I learnt that I have more knowledge and confidence in areas than I had previously realised. That I can be quite negative about problems and should try look at problems in a more positive light. Finally that I am more of a leader than I had previously realised." How to finance the event - the students were not given a budget but were tasked with not only managing the production of the event but also raising the funds to stage it? A key concern for the students was the lack of budget. They managed to produce a proposal and pitch full of ideas but without funds the event would not meet their or the client expectations. They considered sponsors and negotiated with the University to get reductions in room hire charges. They persuaded the centre to provide some funds for the venue but still needed more funds. At a discussion with the group the academic supervisor alerted them to a potential funding opportunity through the Institute of Enterprise. The group would need to write a funding proposal and undertake a very enterprising pitch to demonstrate how the event could help the Institute meet its objectives. The students adapted to the task excellently researching the aims of the Institute considering how they could convey their creativity and enterprise in a pitch to convince the attendees to invest in the event. They succeeded in producing a very convincing case and gained the funding. This was a very significant milestone for the group and for the individuals who had been more directly involved in the funding application. One student reflects "From completing the PES module I have learned many new skills including interactive group skills writing funding proposals and networking skills. The most beneficial has been writing funding proposals. This was a big challenge for me as I had never written one before. I learned to keep it concise and clear. The PES module has been really interesting and beneficial" How to engage over 200 events management students to support the event and produce work voluntarily? The engagement of the students proved one of the greatest challenges for the groups. Through the process they had to learn how to enthuse their student peers in spite of many groups not understanding why they should spend time on a non-assessed piece of work. The group worked hard to incentivise the groups and communicate with them in their own domains. They developed a competition for the best exhibition with an excellent range of donated prizes. They established a website and a facebook site to communicate effectively attended classes and lectures to speak directly to the student groups and at least one member of the team was assigned to attend and document every event. The footage taken at the events was used to tangibilise the event experiences through website images and a short film about the module. One student reflects "The event tested my creativity in producing a fun event while still sticking to the client brief. Although we needed to focus on professionals and gaining networking/ potential clients we as a group had to be very creative to gain student interest which eventual paid off more than we anticipated from the turn out at the event." How to document their achievements and how to evaluate enterprise? A key aspect of the event for the students was evaluating its success. The students considered numerous ways to evaluate an event with traditional surveys and feedback at the event. However they decided to engage their creativity and enhance the event by setting up an inflatable video booth for attendees to express their views on the event as well as on enterprise. The booth proved an event highlight. In addition evaluation was sought through the evaluations of the exhibitions where attendees needed to visit the exhibition stands and use the marking criteria to assess the quality of the events. One group member notes "The end result was really worth it however and it was interesting seeing how ideas which were expressed in the early planning stages

such as evaluation techniques were carried out and achieved a good result."

Outputs:

Development of a short video for the module Creation of several exhibition boards by the students Increase in number of clients interested in the module for the next academic year Video evaluations of enterprise Photographs of the event

Impact:

The students organising the event enhanced their creative skills and developed an understanding of the importance of navigating more open and ambiguous challenges. They also strengthened their promotion and persuasion skills convincing funders and sponsors to support the event and students to engage and work on the event voluntarily. More students than expected participated in the event using their own creative skills to produce some imaginative displays to demonstrate their work. The students gained an opportunity to network with clients and showcase their achievements one to one - and gained another opportunity to engage with enterprise through the sponsorship.

Evaluation:

The event evaluation has come in the form of student reflections from the participants as well as video recordings from attendees on the evening.

What next?

The academic team have learnt much from this process. We would like to undertake a student showcase of this nature in future with some budget set aside for it. There may even be a competitive element for a group of students to win the opportunity to produce the event which may become a hallmark event for the centre.

General conclusions:

In spite of all the creative challenges and the need to adapt throughout the event as it developed and changed thanks to funding and responding to the needs of the additional stakeholders and prize sponsors the group still cited 'group work' as the main challenge. As team work is such a key part of employability it is clear that modules do need to provide students with the experience at University. "I have learnt a great deal from the experience of the Event. I feel I have developed as a student and as an individual. I have learnt that my working style is different from others' – sometimes they don't like mine and sometimes I don't like theirs but I feel that I am capable of separating any personal issues away from business matters and can encourage others to stay focussed on the end goal and achieve it....In conclusion I have really enjoyed the experiences on the PES Celebration. I am a more creative and experienced individual because of it and the end result definitely was worth all the hard work put in.

Keywords:

Celebration showcase teamwork funding students