
University of Exeter

Embedding an Eco-System of support; Developing in social enterprise

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Model

Find, Fund & Co-Support

The University of Exeter are relatively new to social enterprise, but have significantly developed their support to social entrepreneurs over the course of the programme. Enterprise support is integrated across the organisation as a whole, rather than a specific department, and is part of the strategic remit of key people across the organisations who have acted as ambassadors for the programme. The programme has been delivered as part of 'Ignite', a student entrepreneur support unit established at the beginning of the academic year 2012/13 and run by the University of Exeter Students' Guild - the student union. Entrepreneurial support from 'Ignite' has included a range of inspiring entrepreneurship events, workshops, one-to-one surgeries, pop up shops, bootcamps, termly competitions, together with access to resources, retail opportunities and networks. The Guild has led on the promotion, administration and management of the HE Support programme - including raising awareness, supporting applicants in applying for the Awards, organising and managing the Awards assessment panels and subsequently, managing the Award Winners. Being part of the UnLtd/HEFCE project has immeasurably helped in establishing Ignite's credibility with students and campus partners and the UnLtd participation has enabled them to create a positive stream of social entrepreneurship at this formative stage. Without it, it may have become commercially dominated and many social outcomes lost.



Delivery Approach

The delivery of the programme has been led by Tracy and Louise:

Raising Awareness - a significant amount of time was spent raising the awareness of the programme to students, staff and graduates from within the University. Examples included:

- Promotion via the 'Careers Zone', and in particular the 'Careers Zone' section of the University's website - www.exeter.ac.uk/careers
- Organising events during national campaigns such as 'Global Entrepreneurship Week' and 'Social Enterprise Day' to promote the programme and attract potential social entrepreneurs.
- Significant time was spent working directly to promote the programme to complimentary courses within the University such as the MBA One Planet programme. In addition, Cornwall Campus Sustainability and Social Enterprise modules were provided with ring-fenced funding.
- Promotion through student and staff communication mechanisms such as Uni News in Brief - www.exeter.ac.uk/news/student
- Promotion to recent graduates via DARO, the University's Alumni office - www.exeter.ac.uk/alumnisupporters

Pre-applications Support - time was spent supporting those with initial ideas. This included delivering individual meetings, drop-in sessions and surgeries with potential social entrepreneurs, to tease out and build on initial ideas with the aim of working them up into quality applications. A key stage of this was to connect social entrepreneurs together for further support and venture development.

Application Assessments - Applications were assessed by a funding panel which included representatives from Ignite, the University's Employability & Graduate Development department and UnLtd.

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Post Award Support – As a ‘Co-Support’ partner, the University worked with the Partnership Support Manager from UnLtd to provide on-going support to Award Winners, to help them develop and grow their ventures. In addition, the University brought in external experts to deliver various training sessions, workshops and mentoring to support Award Winners. A success directly attributable to the UnLtd / HEFCE funding is that social entrepreneurs now have exactly the same access to resources as commercial entrepreneurs. This includes business development support at the Innovation Centre.

Challenges

The overall objective of supporting students/staff to set up and run viable social enterprises was achieved. However, the main difficulty was that Ignite was a new student support service with no track record or visibility with students. Added to this, the still low levels of awareness of the concept of social enterprise meant it therefore took longer than the programme deliverers anticipated to achieve the level of engagement. Many students who would engage with the social enterprise model wouldn't consider themselves as entrepreneurial or enterprising. At one point, the University had lower than expected take-up. However with a concerted communications push and offering drop-in surgeries specifically for the programme, they found themselves in a position of being over-subscribed for the funding. This resulted in a much more competitive assessment panel being held and not all applicants could be funded.

Partnerships, Achievements and Successes

The campus partners involved in the overall delivery and championing of the programme within the University are The Guild, the Employability and Graduate Development department, the Student Entrepreneur in Residence and the Innovation Centre.

The real achievement has been to develop a clear picture of social enterprise activity. In addition, a large cohort of social entrepreneurs now exist on our campuses, who had previously been off the University's radar, with little support provision. Despite the programme having a slower than anticipated start, with a dedicated delivery team and with the support from those across the whole University championing the programme, it has been a huge success and we are now supporting some truly inspirational social entrepreneurs. As well as the funding, the delivery team have gained a lot from the partnership with UnLtd and their

understanding of how to support student social entrepreneurs. It's also raised Ignite's profile on campus – across the student body and with key partners.

Outcomes and Impacts

The HE Support initiative has provided a solid base on which to start the dialogue on campus about the importance of social entrepreneurship, and having tangible support is a great hook. It has provided routes into academic departments and people of key influence who will help the delivery team build on these achievements for the benefit of the future eco system. Having Exeter University-based Award Winner case studies from this past year to share with other students will really help increase the idea of social enterprise being a viable career option.