
University of York

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Model

Find, Fund and Support

Starting Point

The University of York already had an established system of support for social entrepreneurs. However, this HE Support Programme has allowed them to scale up and make the existing provision more useful and relevant to a wider group of people.

Delivery Approach

A Programme Advisory Group that included Student Societies and external partners was established to ensure coordination and synergy between their activities. The Core Team includes representatives from the Careers Service, Social Policy and Social Work (Academic), the Business Engagement Team, York Management School, York Law School and the Research and Innovation Team.

Extremely useful to the whole process has been the membership of York Cares, an employee volunteering charity (<http://www.yorkcares.co.uk/>). It incorporates the majority of the city's major employers and allows access to a range of skills and experiences that have been really useful in working with the Charity sector. The University is one of the founder members of York Cares and its delivery team is based at the University. York Cares links employer skills directly with community need. With Social Enterprise (SE) activity they have been able to identify individuals who work for businesses who provide specific skills for SEs and, occasionally, these interventions also use students who can often deliver some of the work set out by these business mentors. For example, charities/early stage SEs requiring intensive support around their marketing strategy or business planning.

Within the University, they've been able to use existing networks/connections they have with a number of the departments where SE is now on the curriculum. Also, there are some newer departments where SE has obvious links; for example, the Department of Theatre, Film and TV has highlighted new ways of generating income for social and artistic purposes. Psychology is



another one where large scale public funding for more peripheral aspects of mental health support has declined and SE is providing a potential means of bridging the gap. For example students, with a number of staff, are selling the art work of autistic individuals and thereby investigating both the use of Art Therapy and the principals of financial sustainability. Delivery of the Programme has also been achieved through extensive collaboration with groups within the City of York, often accessed through York Cares and York Council for Voluntary Service (CVS). This has proved to be really useful for both staff and students in their thinking around SE, particularly through working with charities. Andrew believes a lot of the current SE agenda is dominated by start-up activity, but actually there are lots of existing organisations doing valuable work where SE activity can make a huge difference. Start up is exciting, but directly helping established groups to develop new income streams is just as valuable.

Did it go according to plan?

Andrew anticipated more interest from the student body in applying for small awards at a Try It level but, in fact, they've spent more effort and time with projects that combine both students and staff that have gone for slightly larger amounts (average £3K). All projects have involved students in some way, but normally a member of staff is engaged as well. It's been a welcome development and if the enterprises starting up are embedded through a member of staff, where student engagement rolls from year to year, there's increased likelihood of it being more sustainable, with greater longevity, both from a cultural and curriculum viewpoint.

Milestones

A highly successful Forum was organised where charities and businesses could meet (hosted by Network Rail). An early evening event, with a 'Speed Dating' format, for about 50 local businesses and 26 charities proved useful for

generating ideas of mutual benefit and identifying where students could bridge the gap between strategic business thinking and the need for practical action at the charity level.

Partnerships

The partnership with York CVS has worked very well. It's always easier to be a partner with an organisation when there's something tangible to work on. This Programme has helped this to develop and has contributed to a greater understanding of the slightly different cultures within the Third Sector, compared with the University and commercial business.

Informally – partnerships developed between the Academic Departments has been invaluable and unexpected, e.g. the Psychology Department. York has also formed a substantive link with the University of Madison, Wisconsin in the US. They have run a collaborative project to look at how SEs can generate income in different economic and cultural contexts. A 4-week student exchange has been organised, working with SEs in the respective locations. Both will produce reports on their activities.

Challenges

To develop something that is distinct from what happens already. Clearly SE is different from commercial enterprise support and volunteering support, both of which has been in existence at the University for a while. This Programme falls between the two and to develop its own identity has been challenging, but worthwhile. Applications have come in from commercially driven business ideas wanting to become socially responsible, along with those from charities with a desire to be more enterprising. There have also been some applicants drawn by the offer of money without really understanding what it's for. Building clarity on the role and purposes of SE within the institution has been an ongoing and extremely valuable activity.

Achievements and Successes

Andrew states: "It's great that we've been able to provide some really solid business skills to organisations that have genuinely benefitted from them. For example, a group of students have been engaged by Selby District Council, on a consultancy basis, to develop the cultural strategy for Selby. The Students have made a big difference, developing a strategy going forward. The University has added a lot of value to existing work in the community – making them more

commercially viable and efficient.

Results

Ten initiatives funded: six at Do it and four at Try it. There is staff engagement in six of these initiatives.

Outcomes and Impacts

Initiatives founded within academic departments with long term objectives, delivering a social purpose and contributing to academic learning. Mechanisms are in place to ensure continuous recruitment of students into operational roles, with staff oversight and support.

Lessons Learned

Overall, there is an appetite and a demand for the outlook that SE brings and Andrew thinks it's a way of viewing the world; making things happen without quite as much concern over the resources to hand, acting with the determination to find them from somewhere. Principally, there is just as much demand for this outlook in both the existing Voluntary Sector, as much as in Start Ups - both are as valuable as each other.

The Future

The future of SE at the University is assured and will continue. It's too important a social force to ignore. Their ideal will be a University where students can learn about SE as part of what they study and have the opportunity to explore and experiment with it on an extra curricular basis, combining formal with experiential learning.