



‘Sharing to Learn; Learning to Share’ Entrepreneurship Education for the 21st Century

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Abstract

The paper presents Bishop Grosseteste University’s (BGU) experience of introducing an innovative first cycle (Bachelors) programme in Business (Team Entrepreneurship).

The programme uses coaching and mentoring methods of learning and teaching, based on ‘Tiimiakatemia’ principles. As part of the ‘Team Academy’ network, the programme is part of an international learning community created with the specific aim of giving young adults the skills, knowledge and personal qualities required to run their own businesses while at the same time studying for a University degree.

The programme does not use traditional classrooms, lectures, examinations or assessment methods. Within the first two weeks of enrolling on the programme, students form teams and are given the task of developing and establishing real businesses, which will generate income and / or social enterprise. Local business leaders, academics and students, as co-creators in their own learning, participate in a variety of real-world projects – from organising events to running retail outlets – to create profitable and productive businesses within a social enterprise context. Students learn the theory and practice of finance; marketing; leadership and strategy; ethical and moral principles of business and entrepreneurship as members of local, regional and international business and learning communities.

The paper will discuss the challenges, benefits and lessons learned of establishing an innovative learning and teaching programme within a traditional University; approaches to gaining the support and participation of business-leaders and social entrepreneurs; students’ engagement in the learning process and successes to date.

1 Introduction

1.1 The University

Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU; the University) is located in Lincoln, UK. It was founded in 1862 as the Lincoln Diocesan Training School, an Anglican teacher training college for women. It was renamed Bishop Grosseteste College in 1962 and University title was confirmed in 2012. The established portfolio of Initial Teacher Education and other education courses has expanded in recent years to include Social Sciences, Humanities, Business, and Health and Social Care programmes that lead to first, second and third cycle qualifications.

The University has three academic Schools, with over 2,500 full-time and part-time student enrolments. It hosts, on campus, a business and enterprise centre, ‘BG Futures’, designed to provide a supportive environment for start-up businesses and offers a home and services to a range of ‘virtual tenants’. The University’s Careers, Employability and Enterprise (CEE) staff are also housed within BG Futures and offer an extensive, integrated range of services for staff, students, alumni, employers and stakeholders.

1.2 Rationale

Concern for the low or negative rate of economic growth in many countries and few employment opportunities open to young people, including graduates, as a result of a world-wide economic downturn, coupled with a changing policy context for HE has prompted increased interest in enterprise education among HE practitioners, policy makers, and students. In the UK, growing interest in enterprise education has been matched by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) developing more extensive support for graduate employability, in part to address economic challenges, but also to improve their own attractiveness to potential students. The principle behind many of these recent developments is that entrepreneurship skills enhance students’ career prospects and employability, either through enabling them to create their own employment as a self-employed person or entrepreneur, or through increasing their potential value as a more ‘enterprising’ employee.

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BGU has both an enviable record in graduate employability, with 98% of graduates securing employment or further study within six months of graduating^[1], and an extensive range of collaborative business partners and stakeholders. In order to further enhance these strengths and meet the aims and goals of the University's Five Year Strategy 2014-19 strategy^[2]; to enhance the academic portfolio, to capitalise on existing strengths in student employability, enterprise and innovation in business support and to become an 'entrepreneurial university', the University has embarked on developing an innovative enterprise education programme to complement its existing academic portfolio.

2 Development of the programme

2.1 Leadership

A review of the academic portfolio in 2014 provided BGU with the opportunity to build on areas of existing strength, diversify its academic portfolio and reconsider its approach to teaching and learning. Members of the University's senior leadership team became sponsors and champions of the new programme, supported by a strong committed multi-disciplinary programme development team. Considerable time and resource was initially dedicated to developing a thorough understanding of the 'Team Academy' concept that underpins the programme, explaining the approach to internal and external stakeholders, engaging influential local and regional business leaders and promoting the programme to current and prospective students. The development of advocates for the programme – drawn from a variety of roles and levels within the University and among its stakeholders - was crucial to the acceptance of the programme as a viable and exciting addition to the University's portfolio.

2.2 Entrepreneurial staff, mentors and coaches

Prior to launching the programme the University took deliberate steps to recruit staff with the necessary experience in the 'Team Academy' approach and familiarise, train and support local and regional business leaders and social entrepreneurs to participate in delivering the programme. The staff team comprises experienced academic, business and support services professionals. The Academic Coordinator for the programme is a trained 'Team Academy Master', supported by award-winning social entrepreneurs, local business leaders and the BG Futures CEE team. The local business community play an integral part, working in collaboration with the staff team through an Advisory Board and in the design of the content and delivery of the programme. Local business leaders provide challenges and opportunities as part of the assessment process for students which enable them to put into practice their team processes, often leading to further project generation. This successfully combines the practical and academic elements of the course to provide a rich learning experience.

The 'Team Academy' approach is also part of a global learning community that encourages participants to cooperate and collaborate with other team companies around the world. Students are provided with opportunities to explore global networks and undertake projects with fellow 'Team Academy' students in other countries as well as grow their business partnerships and contribute to sustainable and responsible business growth.

2.3 Innovation in the curricula, teaching, learning and assessment

The BA (Hons) Business (Team Entrepreneurship) is an applied three year full-time degree programme based on the principle of 'learning by doing' that incorporates a number of innovative features in teaching, learning and assessment. From the outset students begin to establish a team company, trading as a functioning business and finding, keeping and growing customer and client networks, locally, nationally and internationally.

The pedagogical model on which the programme is based is the 'Team Academy', founded in 1993 at JAMK2 University of Applied Sciences in Jyväskylä, Finland. It is a model in which teams of students create and operate real enterprises which the students themselves own and control. Key to the ethos of the 'Team Academy' model is a focus on coaching as a delivery and learning process rather than taught inputs. This contrasts with conventional and well-known existing approaches to teaching and learning that seek to simulate such learning experiences, provide work-based learning or placement opportunities, 'sandwich' years in industry or which provide training opportunities in businesses that are owned and controlled by educational institutions^[3].

Enterprises created and owned by students that operate in an open market is central to the Team Academy's philosophy for developing skills of management, leadership and entrepreneurship. While



students have access to a full range of traditional facilities, learning materials and resources to support their developing entrepreneurial, business and team knowledge, the 'Team Academy' approach emphasises cooperative learning through a "process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire"^[4] and developing skills of dialogue^[5] rather than formal teaching, classrooms and curricula.

2.4 Students empowered to act and take risks

The programme has attracted students from a range of background; a number directly from school and further education, others returning to learning having previously worked in a range of industries and sectors. The initial cohort, while disparate in age and background share similar views of traditional HE delivery methods and a critical self-awareness of their own learning style drew them to the applied and practical nature of the programme.

To support students to develop their understanding of setting up, running and growing a team company, students participate in a series of professional workshops, seminars and creative laboratories. A flexible learning approach is adopted where students take full responsibility for their learning and running the business. Throughout the programme students are guided and supported by staff 'coaches' who work with them during training sessions and in action learning groups. As well as being profitable and productive, each Team Company is expected to operate with the highest ethical and moral principles, exploring building businesses within social enterprise context and with the support of the global Team Academy network.

Students are assessed on key parts of learning directly connected to the establishment and running of their companies and have a central role in determining how and what they learn; when and where they learn it. Assessment is on a continuous basis with the success of the team and the company forming evidence of attainment. Students are expected to apply theory to practice in the form of reflective logs, creative presentations and project work and gain feedback from peers, coaches and clients to inform business development. This approach is considered^[3] to make a significant difference to students' psychological and emotional engagement in the enterprises and gives them a level of responsibility far beyond that which vocational training or experiences provide.

2.5 Dynamic and effective entrepreneurial University culture

The introduction of the BA (Hons) Business (Team Entrepreneurship) programme at BGU coincided with a period of significant change for the University, as a whole. The design and launch of the programme challenged the University's pedagogical culture, organisation and management structures, workforce planning, quality assurance regime and facilities. However, this period of change also prompted the University to review the environment and culture created by its current procedures, process and systems and the effect these had on the enhancement or inhibition of curriculum innovation and development.

The need to support HE institutions in creating an environment for the enhancement of entrepreneurial thinking and behaviours has been recognised and supported in the UK by the national quality assurance agency (QAA). Working with HE sector representatives, QAA produced guidance for HEIs on embedding enterprise and entrepreneurship in HE^[6]. The guidance proposes a learner journey that begins with raising awareness, progressing to the development of entrepreneurial mind-sets, to enhancing entrepreneurial capacities and finally to enhancing entrepreneurial effectiveness. This framework has contributed to the increased receptiveness of staff, students and stakeholders to considering how the concepts inherent in the 'Team Academy' approach could be embedded not only in the BA Business (Team Entrepreneurship) programme, but more broadly across the University.

3 Challenges, successes and lessons learned

Students enrolled on the initial cohort of the programme in 2015-6 established their company 'IgniTE BGU Limited' in December 2015 and shortly afterwards secured their first revenue generating project. Students have taken advantage of the global Team Academy network, working with teams from the Budapest and Debrecen Team Academies, with one of IgniTE's Directors is now a member of the International steering group planning the 2016 Team4Learning conference.

Less tangible, but equally important, successes include student's personal growth and development. Unafraid to present to multi-millionaires, Members of Parliament, academics and peers, students' ability to function cohesively as a group has enhanced their learning beyond the expectation of a traditional pedagogy. How this learning is captured and recognised as valid in the context of business education has proved challenging. Traditional assessment methods and assessment cycles do not easily accommodate the emergent learning approach that is central to the Team Academy model.



Supporting students to become truly self-determined learners has also proven time consuming and challenging as it requires both staff and students to examine often deeply held assumptions about the place and purpose of education.

Communication, constructive dialogue and challenge by the broad University community have been fundamental to enabling this pedagogical model to be understood and accepted as a valuable addition to the University and the academic portfolio. Vital in this process has been the support of the senior leadership team (SLT) in setting the benchmark of aspiration that this programme seeks to achieve. The willingness, and support, of the SLT to take a risk on developing such a new model of delivery for a subject area that did not previously exist within the University is evidence of entrepreneurial thinking and has enabled the programme to find a niche within the University and local and regional business community. Essential to the success of the programme has been the commitment to investing in appropriately trained and experienced individuals committed to the Team Academy approach to ensure that the ethos driving the model is maintained.

4 Conclusion

The 'Team Academy' approach claims an impressive track record of creating an effective and influential context for generating not just learning among its participants but also real new businesses that make a social and economic contribution^[4]. While these benefits are yet to be fully realised at BGU, the immediate benefits and successes and potential rewards for the University, staff, stakeholders and, most importantly, students are considerable.

The introduction of an innovative first cycle programme into a traditional 'conservative' University, albeit one that is striving to become an 'entrepreneurial university', has challenged long-standing pedagogical assumptions, modes of working, facilities, quality assurance processes and mechanisms for stakeholder engagement and management. In many ways BGU provides a case-study of the conditions, described elsewhere^[7], required to stimulate change in HE, and enterprise education in particular, that is: "visionary and transformative leaders at all levels in the organisation; entrepreneurial staff acting as inspiring role models; students empowered to act and take risks; mentors and coaches who can inspire and support entrepreneurial development opportunities; education activists and critical friends who will lead innovation in the curricula and learning; learning technologists; dynamic and effective entrepreneurial ecosystems and a diversity of stakeholders".

References

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