



The Enterprise Intern Scheme: The Role of Students as Ambassadors in Peer-to-Peer Marketing and Culture Change

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Abstract. This study evaluates a novel scheme in which students were employed to educate their peers on the benefits of enterprise skills and facilitate the promotion of entrepreneurship across the Newcastle University campus. In recent years, much government attention in the UK has focused on raising levels of entrepreneurship and innovation in order to cultivate a more competitive economy. Universities recognise that they have a role in equipping students with entrepreneurial skills and educating them in the benefits of entrepreneurship. Students employed as interns in the Newcastle scheme created an interface between students and staff and were found to be very effective at dissemination, having a positive impact on student awareness and participation in events, graduate start-up rates and staff awareness of enterprise provision at the University. Interns benefited from increased entrepreneurial understanding. Findings suggest that this approach can help in developing an institution's entrepreneurial culture and shows potential in influencing educational practice.

Keywords: peer-to-peer marketing; student internship; enterprise education; entrepreneurship; enterprise culture.

1. Introduction

In recent years there has been an exponential growth in enterprise education and entrepreneurship in schools, colleges and universities. Hannon (2004) has observed that as enterprise becomes more evident and student numbers increase, so too does the demand for entrepreneurship education. Within Higher Education the enterprise education agenda is broad and encompasses generic graduate skills, which aim to "equip them for a lifetime in a fast changing work environment" (Education and Skills 2003). Current developments include moving entrepreneurship out from business schools into other areas of study and educating the growing number of professors and instructors on the pedagogies appropriate to enterprise teaching.

It has been argued that in order to create more entrepreneurial graduates, enterprising styles that are more student-focussed and action-orientated are necessary (Kirby, 1992). Lundström and Stevenson (2002) suggest that for successful implementation of a comprehensive entrepreneurship education approach, a learning process that encompasses certain critical success factors is

required. These elements are reiterated by Kirby (1992) and Hannon (2004). A list of similar critical success factors has also been adopted in schools by the Scottish Executive (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2004). The factors include a list of quality indicators on the teaching of enterprise. This paper focuses on a scheme which addresses three of Lundström and Stevenson's critical success factors: entrepreneurship education champions; teacher support/exchange mechanisms; and promotion of enterprise through a new scheme which attempts to use student ambassadors to create an interface between students and staff.

2. The Regional Context

With the growth of the enterprise agenda, there has been a corresponding growth in the number of modules and programmes at all levels containing enterprise and entrepreneurship education. Most higher education institutions now offer support for students and graduates wishing to create a business (Hannon, 2004). This is of particular significance in the North East of England which has the lowest start up and survival rates for new businesses in England, and a very low level of general entrepreneurial activity amongst the population; in 2004, the figure for the North East of England was 50% below the UK average. This region also has the lowest level of self-employment in the UK, at around 60% of the UK average. The rate of business ownership is also very low, and consistently ranks the lowest for numbers of VAT-registered companies in the UK, at half the national average. Graduate company start-up rates are 2% below the UK average (DTI, 2006).

As a reaction to these poor statistics, there has been a drive in the region to try and address low start-up rates. A range of initiatives has been established, including expanding the availability of seed corn venture capital, the restructuring of business support services and the involvement of successful entrepreneurs to inspire an enterprise culture (Benneworth, 2006). The North East's universities have a major role in encouraging start-up activity within the student and graduate community, by offering an increasing range of enterprise education programmes, and establishing and supporting a growing number of incubation units. The regional economic strategy 2006-2016 (One NorthEast, 2006) encourages entrepreneurship in the teaching and research missions of the Higher Education sector as it recognises graduates as a key source of business ideas, skills and enthusiasm. Universities must be seen to allow enterprise education to be embraced through curricular development, teaching and research to stimulate a more entrepreneurial culture. One NorthEast, the regional development agency in the North East, set objectives for universities to increase awareness among graduates pursuing professional careers as to the benefits of entrepreneurship, thus stimulating an entrepreneurial culture and ultimately increasing the number of new business start-ups by graduates in the region. Many university students who specialise in science, engineering and technology are leaving the region after

graduation. As part of a drive to keep these 'high value' graduates in the region, universities are attempting to educate them on the benefits and support to new start-ups. If this drive is to be successful, however, enterprise must be embedded within core curriculum activity to ensure engagement with as many students as possible. At Newcastle University, enterprise support is provided by its Enterprise Centre, established in 2002. Since 2004, the Centre has played a cross institutional role in promoting and delivering enterprise to students and alumni of the University. As well as responding to regional economic strategy, the Centre reflects institutional priorities of third strand, business development and employability.

The Enterprise Centre offers a rich diversity of activities that reflect institutional responsibilities and respond to student market demands and an emerging enterprise agenda. The Enterprise Centre has a specific responsibility to create a culture that recognises and values entrepreneurs. It aims to do this by raising awareness within the student body of self-employment as a positive career choice, the importance of enterprise skills in all future employment and by enabling new venture creation. In the academic year 2004–2005, the Centre engaged at a variety of levels with some 1600 individuals and supported the creation of 14 new ventures with a similar number in development. In addition the Centre operates a successful business plan competition, enterprise network and ideas incubator.

3. Peer Relationships

Peer relationships in this context involve individuals at the same career or professional level providing each other with mentoring and career/personal life development (Viator & Scandura, 1991). Mentoring in the traditional sense includes teaching through the transfer of knowledge and skills, and counselling through dealing with organisational, career and personal life issues between the experienced (mentor) and the less experienced (learner). Peer mentors help fill a void by providing essential horizontal communications and traditional mentoring functions (Siegel 2000). Psycho-social functions of mentoring involve personal feelings of confidence, competence and job acceptance; and a career enhancing function by strengthening the individual's ability to become a leader in his/her profession (Kram, 1985). Peer relationships have also been shown to help individuals cope with organisational change (Kram & Hall, 1989); accelerate communications (Loke & Chow 2005), and reduce hierarchies through mutual support and collaboration (Siegel 2000). Siegel *et al.* (1994) showed that mentoring helps employees refine their organisational role, prepares them for advancement and provides a psycho-social sphere in which they receive role modelling counselling and friendship (Siegel 2000). The importance of exposure to convincing role models is recognised as integral to entrepreneurship

development. This study considers how student peer communication can increase the impact of enterprise education and facilitate a greater understanding of the concepts of entrepreneurship within the student culture in higher education institutions.

Peer communication works on the concept of ‘viral marketing’, a technique which aims to exploit pre-existing social networks to produce exponential increases in brand or service awareness through processes similar to the spread of an epidemic (Dobele *et al.*, 2005). This type of marketing is a form of emergent behaviour that has been defined by Dobele *et al.* (2005) as a word-of-mouth referral endorsement from one client to other prospective clients. They define this further from a marketing perspective, in which it becomes the process of persuading individuals to pass on useful and engaging information. Such an approach considerably decreases the cost of marketing whilst increasing the speed of acceptance (Dobele *et al.*, 2005).

A key part of viral marketing success is the development of an engaging campaign that encourages consumers to pass the message to others. This concept has been applied to student entrepreneurship based on the recommendations of Lundström and Steveson (2002) who suggest that an effective strategy to generate widespread awareness of entrepreneurship in society is mass media coverage. With this in mind, a student peer-marketing scheme was launched at the Enterprise Centre at Newcastle University in 2004 that aimed to disseminate information and market enterprise provision across the campus. Student entrepreneurship education champions or student ‘interns’ were used to promote enterprise across the campus to try and engage with students who studied non-business related courses such as engineering, arts, and science.

4. A Novel Team Approach

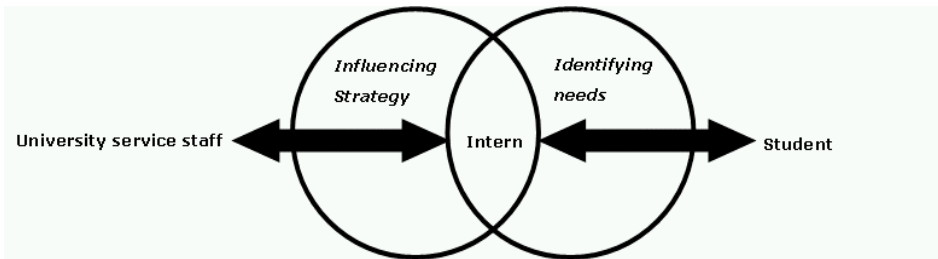
In 2002, a co-ordinator scheme was set up at the Scottish Institute for Enterprise (SIE), with support from the SIE Innovation Fund, to encourage students to promote enterprise. The scheme created paid part-time jobs for students (one at each Scottish university campus) to help promote enterprise. The co-ordinators benefited from direct work experience and helped raise awareness of the enterprise agenda among other students on their campus.

In 2004, a scheme was introduced at Newcastle University that used students to promote events and services. The Careers Service implemented a voluntary ‘student communications team’ annual scheme, made up of 60 undergraduates who primarily promote services and events across the campus. The position covers 20 weeks, and students work around two hours per week from September to April. The role involves distribution of materials, promotion of events, assessing student materials, providing feedback, and doing ‘lecture shouts’. Twice a semester, these students are also expected to get involved with the

planning and organisation of Careers Service events. In return for their efforts, this scheme offers the students development of transferable skills, CV enhancement, and training and support through the year.

In the light of the success of these schemes, the Enterprise Intern Scheme was launched in 2004 to facilitate the promotion of enterprise provision at Newcastle University. Care was taken to recruit students from each of the University's three faculties: HASS (Humanities and Social Sciences); SAgE (Science, Agriculture and Engineering) and Medical Sciences. The group of six interns consisted of one undergraduate and one postgraduate from each faculty to give as comprehensive a representation of the student body as possible. Interns worked on peer promotion of services, educating their peers about the concept of enterprise and entrepreneurship and providing support in organising and running events. The interns were employed to act as an interface between enterprise support staff at the University and the student community, serving a role in identifying needs and influencing strategy (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Interns as an intermediary between staff and students



As in the SIE co-ordinator scheme, paid part time jobs were created with students working a maximum of ten hours per week. Salaries were positioned mid-way between the minimum wage and typical postgraduate demonstrator hourly rates. Because the students were relatively well paid they were subject to the normal expectations of an employer, which cannot always be enforced in voluntary schemes, and in return had access to their own development opportunities. Unlike the SIE co-ordinator scheme however, the students were all based at one institution and were expected to work together on implementation of planned activities, thus benefiting from their own peer support. This paper reports on findings from the scheme as it was offered in Newcastle in 2004-5.

The Newcastle study is particularly interesting as it was the only scheme of its kind in England at the time of research. It was conducted to examine the success of the scheme in its first year, how the scheme could be improved and how the scheme could change the way the enterprise team works and functions. Whilst there is a wealth of research focusing on using students to tutor and mentor other students, there is little information on the effects of student peer marketing

in the field of enterprise. This research aims to investigate the impact of running such a scheme, the participants' perspectives on the effectiveness of their role as promoters of enterprise to their peers, what the gains are for the interns and how this can change student aspirations. The research also focuses on the culture shift needed within the university and implications for policy makers, enterprise educators and students.

5. Methodology

5.1. Implementation

On starting the role, student interns were given an intense two-day training programme where they learnt how to communicate about enterprise services and entrepreneurship at the University and received guidelines on best practice. Students worked a maximum of 10 hours a week and were interviewed in the middle of the programme and at the end to evaluate their experiences of the process.

5.2. Data Collection

5.2.1. Study Methodology

The research aimed to examine the role of student ambassadors in peer-to-peer marketing and culture change and a case study was conducted which focussed on the internship scheme run at the Enterprise Centre at Newcastle University. Three main target groups were identified within the University: the student interns, students not currently involved in enterprise; and University staff. The study reviewed 66 participants: six enterprise interns and a random sample of 60 students who were not engaged in enterprise activity. The students not engaged in enterprise were spread across faculties in a similar way to the intern students and represented undergraduates and postgraduates. Data were collected over a three month period, through qualitative methods: individual interviews and a focus group; and quantitative methods: questionnaires. The data were then analysed based on categories derived from the responses given by each group:

1. Peer-to-peer promotion of 'enterprise' – perspectives from the interns on the effectiveness of their role as promoters of enterprise to their peers.
2. Culture shift needed within the University institution – found within both the 'difficult' academic culture and the 'hesitant' student culture.

Evaluation was drawn surrounding the experience of the interns, their suggestions for improvement and the benefits they gained from the position. Each of these methods of data collection will be discussed; in addition, consideration will be given to ethics, validity and the generalisability of the data.

A case study is a broad approach to social research that provides a 'spotlight' on a particular instance. The logic behind concentrating on one case rather than many is that there may be insights to be gained from looking at the individual case that can have wider implications. The aim was to 'illuminate the general by looking at the particular' (Denscombe, 2003). There was no other case, at the time of research, within HE institutions in England where six students were employed to promote enterprise across the one university campus. The case study approach, therefore, as a 'focus on just one instance of the thing that is to be investigated' (Denscombe, 2003) was an appropriate strategy to provide a valuable and unique insight into the pioneering programme to deliver greater student access to enterprise activities.

A 'mixed method' approach was therefore adopted to provide cross validation and triangulation of the data, which was obtained from a variety of sources. The rationale for this was primarily the multi-faceted nature and vast range of opinions on communicating enterprise, and also the complex nature of enterprise itself.

5.2.2. The Research Site

The main site for operations and meetings was the Enterprise Centre, at the time situated within the Centre for Academic Development (CAD), located within the Chemistry building. The building was not an ideal location to attract students from other disciplines as it was relatively out of the way from more frequently visited parts of the campus. The Enterprise Centre, however, had been recently refurbished to accommodate new facilities: PCs, office equipment, phones etc. and a 'hatchery'. This 'hatchery' is an early stage incubator unit offering office space and equipment for students in the process of business start-up to enable them to begin trading immediately.

5.3. Methods of Data Collection

5.3.1. Focus Group

A focus group was conducted with the six interns in May 2005 as an ancillary method alongside a follow up open-ended questionnaire. The questions asked in both the focus group and the interviews were piloted on members of staff who knew the interns and worked in the Centre to ensure the order and type of

questions used was as effective as possible. Consent forms were given to students to read and if they were satisfied they were signed by participants.

The researcher's aim within the focus group was to facilitate and stimulate a group discussion and not to elicit the group's answers. The pre-prepared questions were thus a 'focussing exercise' which attempted to concentrate the group's attention and interaction upon the three main topic areas: the personal gains they got from their participation in the scheme, what they thought of the Enterprise Centre's promotion of skills development and their role as promoters of enterprise to their peers.

5.3.2. Semi Structured In-depth Interviews

In order to gain relevant insight into the individual opinions of the student interns, participants were interviewed separately. One of the main advantages of the interview is that it enables the interviewer to gain subjective meanings from participants rather than obtaining responses in the standard format (Banister et al, 1994). This allows complex issues to be explored within the interview which are difficult to investigate through quantitative techniques, and could lead to oversimplification of complex answers. Interviews were flexible allowing participants the opportunity to raise issues that the interviewer had not envisaged, and further probing the interviewees' responses with tailored questions. To alleviate interviewer bias, all interviews were recorded with the participant's consent, providing a verbatim account ensuring reliable data and true reporting of attitudes and facts.

5.3.3. Questionnaire

A multiple choice questionnaire was selected as the most cost efficient and effective research method in terms of time, money and reach. Questionnaires were completed by a team of students who had minimal contact with the Enterprise Centre. This method of survey also ensures anonymity increasing respondent honesty and in turn reliability.

6. Results

6.1. Participants' Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Their Role as Promoters of Enterprise to Their Peers

The student intern team were interviewed after completing a year in the role of promoting entrepreneurship services. The results show that a high level of

student engagement was generated, alongside a high level of personal development in individual interns: Questions are followed by indicative answers in the interns' own words and a summary of the responses.

6.1.1. Has Peer-to-Peer Marketing of Enterprise Been Successful?

All six intern students reported that they believed the scheme had made a big impact on the students at the University.

I think we've made a lot of headway in terms of getting the message out there, and telling students where the Enterprise Centre is and what it does. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern A)

We often find ourselves in the Students' Union or one of our common rooms listening to someone's conversation and you think, aha! I can do something here. (Open ended questionnaire, Intern B)

This informal networking with the students had a number of positive effects, students were receptive to the interns and felt comfortable talking to them informally about ideas they have or skills they would like to develop.

It was fantastic how much they (students) told me, they really trusted my judgement. It felt great to actually be able to help...we just chatted about what steps they should take, booking them in with a Development Officer, setting them up on our online database, but I think it made a real difference to another student, someone on their own level, it's much less scary! (Open ended questionnaire, Intern B)

This is crucial to the notion of peer-to-peer marketing and it comes down to the argument that students are more comfortable going to a peer with whom they have a 'weak' tie. As a first point of contact, students are comfortable speaking to a peer who they know will take their ideas seriously and can discuss them without intimidation. The interns suggested that this works better than a member of University staff in the first instance when actively promoting enterprise.

I really have enjoyed seeing tangible results from the things we do. Chatting to people who have never heard of the Centre is great, as you know that it could make a real difference to them. People are really positive about the Centre when they hear about it, so getting the message out to as many people as possible is so important. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern C)

Results also suggest that part of the success of the scheme was attributed to the fact that the interns all came from different disciplines, backgrounds and had different interests outside of enterprise. As such, they were more likely to capture the diverse student audience.

The University student body contains a huge range and variety of people, and peers who are supposed to be promoting enterprise to other peers should reflect that. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern D)

Echoing the struggle to conquer the ‘difficult’ academic culture, the interns suggested a need to have ‘enterprise’ embedded within the academic curriculum where it would be seen to have support from academics.

This reflects hesitancy from students who feel that attending enterprise events is something extracurricular and without support and encouragement, unless they are highly driven, they are hesitant about attending.

I think it’s a bit much to say to students – ‘If you’ve got an idea just come along and set up a business’ – you need to help them have ideas. (Open ended questionnaire, Intern D)

Yeah I know, a lot of people would probably think that self-employability would probably be a great idea, but they’re not confident enough in their own ideas. (Open ended questionnaire, Intern E)

The last point illustrates another element of the hesitance within the student culture, associated with confidence in their ideas and abilities. One of the recommendations from the interns was to boost student confidence and to inspire them by using role models:

They need to be given practical role models. For example, with the fine art students it hit home because we got two very successful fine art graduates who are now very successful fine art entrepreneurs, and I think it was inspiring for them and I think that maybe that’s what we need to do. (Open ended questionnaire, Intern B)

6.1.2. Have Students Generally Shown an Enthusiasm for Entrepreneurship?

All six interns mentioned that they had found more students to be interested in the benefits of being their own boss than they expected, although they reported many showed less enthusiasm when it came to the detail and what exactly they might do. All interns reported among the barriers perceived by students that many seem to fear the insecurity of running their own business but liked the idea. During the promotion of enterprise by the interns a distinct hesitancy within the student culture emerged out of the research. The interns’ initial response was that:

I think that once they have tried it, they might like it, but it’s getting people to take that initial step and go along to networking events, or whatever. (Open ended questionnaire, Intern B)

Part of the reason for this hesitancy appeared to be a lack of understanding of the concept of enterprise and entrepreneurship. (The findings of this study also reveal hesitancy in the student culture from the people who do not understand enterprise.) People make an association that it is simply about being ‘business-like’ or managerial. This goes back to the question of what message needs to be presented when it comes to enterprise. There is a need to create a ‘culture shift’ within the student population to clearly define the enterprise message so that students understand that it is not only about starting up in business:

Students are generally confused about the meaning of the word ‘entrepreneurship’. I find that they very much like the idea of working for themselves, but many see it as an unachievable dream. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern B)

The interns found that once they had explained the concept of entrepreneurship to students, and how it was relevant to them, they were eager to get involved and could see the benefits, whether they were interested in setting up a business or not. It’s also important to remember that entrepreneurship skills build on student’s skills, helping them to add to their degree so that they are more employable.

When people understand what our Enterprise Centre offers, and what we can offer every student, not just the ones who are certain that they want to go into business, they think it’s a great idea. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern C)

A lot of students I speak to say they’d love to set up a company but can’t, as they don’t have an idea, don’t know where to start and haven’t got the money. It’s our job to teach students that these are only minor barriers in the journey to becoming an entrepreneur! (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern A)

We need to change the way the students think. They really need to overcome the prevailing notion that the only way forward after graduation is to get a graduate job within a giant corporation. Again, it’s a perception issue – students are inspired when they realise that their ideas can be made a reality. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern E)

These comments indicate that peer relationships were an important aspect of selling the concept of entrepreneurship to other students. Strong peer relationships also emerged between the student interns, as indicated by the following quotation:

I saw the internship as a good opportunity to enrich my student experience, increase my confidence and meet a whole bunch of interesting and inspiring people. I’m continually inspired by my fellow interns and the team here at the Centre and the diverse range of students and start-ups who come through the door everyday. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern A)

6.1.3. What Have You Gained Personally from Being Involved with the Internship Scheme?

Interns reported feeling satisfied with the way their enterprise promotion had run and reported many personal benefits they had gained from their involvement in the scheme, especially commenting on the skills they have developed which make them more attractive to employers.

I've also got more things for my CV– the job is very diverse and I am always able to pull something from my experience as an intern to fit any criteria. Especially good is the general aspect of entrepreneurship and proof that you are able to think for yourself. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern D)

From a career-prospects, future employment side of things, I feel confident that I could go to an interview with 'that little bit extra': The Enterprise Internship Scheme offers many things: high quality work experience; business and start-up knowledge; networking skills; IT training, to name but a few. Other significant things I have gained are time management, confidence and opportunities to take part in numerous training and development skills. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern B)

These comments indicate that the intern students had developed new confidence in themselves and realised which areas they needed to focus on. One intern student commented on the enhanced confidence from taking part in the scheme:

It's given me a much clearer idea of my goals; I know I don't have to do what everyone else is doing. I've enjoyed the responsibility of being left with a task and being trusted to see it through on my own, which has really increased my confidence. It really alters your outlook on your own abilities and aspirations. It's been a great experience for me. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern C)

I have an increased awareness of what I am and am not naturally good at and how to work on this. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern D)

6.1.4. Have Your Career Aspirations Changed Through Your Work as an Intern?

Of the six intern students, two had considered running a business before they began the scheme and were keen to progress the idea after they left the job. The other four had not considered setting up a business, although at the end of their year in post, three were considering setting up in business:

"I don't think I would have ever even considered self employment before getting involved. Now I feel more confident about my future, I see owning my own

company as something I would not only like to do, but something which is achievable too.” (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern A)

I always liked the idea of running my own business, however after being an intern and meeting all the cool and successful people I have met I realise that you will only really succeed in something if you immerse yourself in it and love it. Subsequently I am now working on an idea that I feel passionate about and feel much more confident about making a success out of it. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern D)

The one intern who did not wish to pursue self-employment reported that the experience had made her more focussed and motivated:

The internship has definitely made me more ambitious. It’s opened up avenues that I didn’t think I was qualified for. It’s been a great experience. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern E)

6.2. Culture Shift Needed within the University

Referring to the point made earlier that students are just not clear about what the ‘enterprise’ message is, questionnaires conducted with students who were not involved in enterprise, attempted to gauge initial awareness (see Figure 2).

The majority (40%) of the sample saw ‘enterprise’ as creativity and innovation to start a new venture and 30% saw ‘enterprise’ as risk taking skills to produce a profit. This indicates that the vast majority of the sample questioned (70%) viewed ‘enterprise’ as a culmination of the skills needed to start up a new venture. The remainder viewed it as either a profit-making organisation (20%) or an opportunity that would benefit others (10%). This indicates a need for clarity of the term ‘enterprise’.

Figure 2: What is ‘enterprise’?

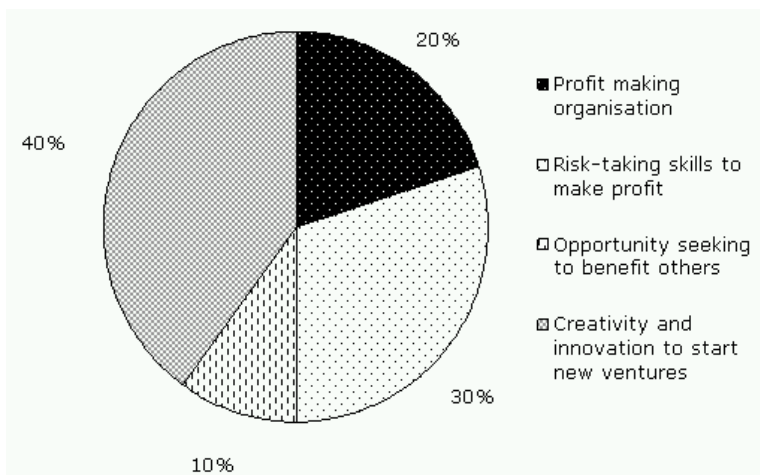
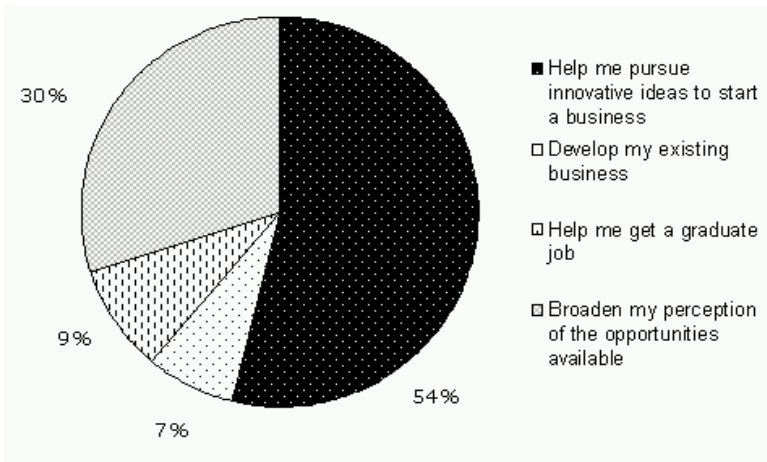


Figure 3: What can 'enterprise' do for you?

Conversely, whilst students relate enterprise to new venture creation only 54% of the sample in Figure 3 recognised 'enterprise' could help individuals personally pursue innovative ideas to start a business. This implies that although students are aware of the necessary skills associated with new venture creation, they do not associate enterprise skills with the development of skills needed for self employment. Thirty percent of students interviewed believed that 'enterprise' would work to broaden their perception of the opportunities available to them in terms of employers and the wider business community. A much lower number of students (9%) however, made the connection that 'enterprise' would help them attain graduate jobs; this refers to the transferable skills development in areas such as team working skills, innovation and working under pressure in a changing environment. Students, therefore, seem keen for 'enterprise' or the Enterprise Centre to open up channels into the local and national business community although they do not make the connection with the skills development opportunities offered by the Centre.

7. Discussion

This study has provided an understanding of students' experiences using peer-to-peer marketing to promote entrepreneurship within the student community. Student interns reported that student perception of enterprise was hesitant, due to a lack of awareness of what the term encompassed. The interns recognised that including students in the organisational aspects of the enterprise services serves to identify emerging needs within the student community and to influence the strategies implemented to meet those needs. The notion of the student as a

‘customer’ in the educational experience becomes fragmented and replaced with students actively seeking out new ways of doing things as they become actors in organisational/implementation processes. Interns sit as an intermediary between their peers and staff within the institution. The interns were also given the target of raising awareness of enterprise among key academics within their faculty. There was a consensus that if academic staff were made more aware of the Enterprise Centre and its services participation would ensue.

In my department only two members of staff knew about the Enterprise Centre and my department is huge....once you target the staff...you get very good coverage of the entire school. The first point of contact (for a student) is their tutor, and if tutor knows there is a Centre the message can get passed to their students. (Semi-structured in depth Interview, Intern F)

The interns also emphasised the need for enterprise to be embedded within the academic curriculum, arguing that a move away from ‘endless lectures’ towards the embedding of ‘transferable enterprising skills’ would help to achieve a cultural shift towards a more ‘enterprising’ institution.

In order to achieve this, however, there is a need for a culture shift within the entire institution creating awareness among academics and management staff from the top down. If a change is to take place towards increased enterprise endeavour, the message of what ‘enterprise’ is and how it is to be ‘taught’ needs to be addressed and clearly defined.

Evaluation sessions proved to be a rewarding experience for the interns. These sessions were designed to extract the learning and experience from interns and allowed time for reflection on their work over the year. The reflection helped pin-point weak areas to be addressed the following year. Discussions on what the role entailed from the pilot year intern students, led to the creation of a guide for use in training the next set of interns, written by the students, and used in the training of the second year cohort of intern students. The training guide was very student focussed, showing again the benefits of peer-to-peer relations.

7.1. Student Perceptions of Enterprise

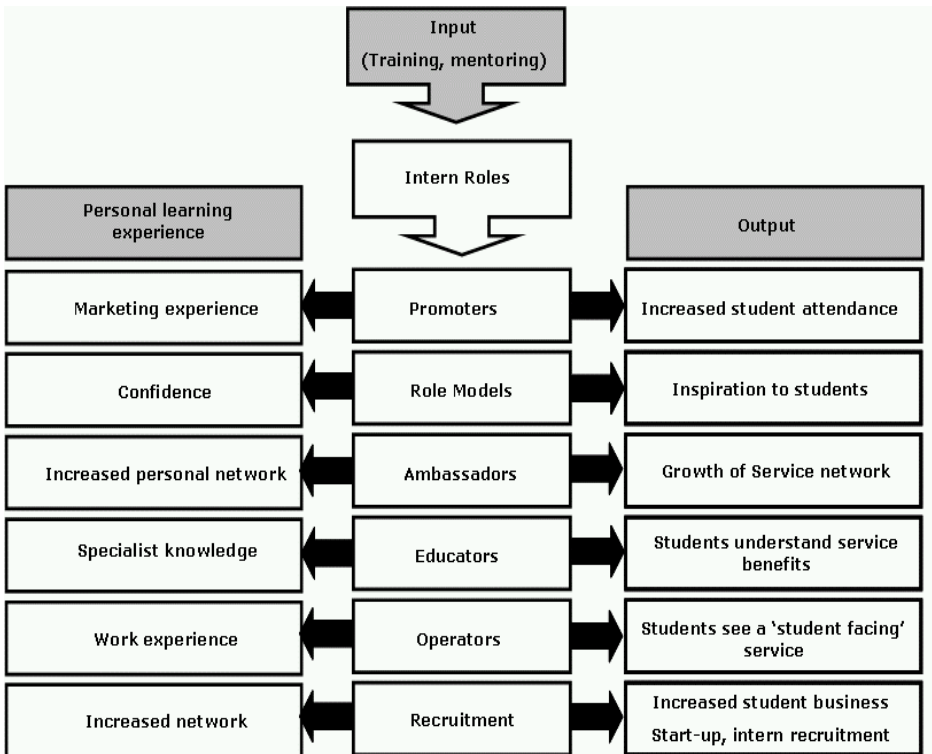
Questionnaires conducted on the student population indicated that although there is an understanding of what ‘enterprise’ involves, and students appeared to be aware that enterprise skills were useful in new venture creation, a low number of students made the connection that learning enterprise skills is valuable for employment. This reinforces the need to employ students to conduct peer-to-peer marketing and break down perceived barriers with students and educate them on the benefits enterprise can offer.

7.2. Operational Support

There has obviously been much to learn from this ambitious pilot project as it has required the development of strategies for new activities undertaken to reach a greater number and variety of students. Intern support over lunchtimes and at enterprise events has provided ‘headroom’ for staff to work on additional initiatives and events. The review process has highlighted the value of the Enterprise Intern Scheme and the students’ learning experience.

The findings show that students who participated in the internship scheme gained benefits from the experience in many ways. Figure 4 shows the interns’ roles and responsibilities and how these impacted on raising enterprise awareness across the University campus and on their personal development.

Figure 4: Intern roles, the benefits for Interns and benefits for a service



8. Conclusion

This scheme has shown that in promoting entrepreneurship services there is a need to involve, or better still employ, students in departments of the University where they can have a direct influence on the organisation, promotion and implementation of operations. The interns acted as catalysts of 'enterprise', aiming to instigate and champion the message about encouraging enterprise activities among their peers; they consequently served as 'weak' ties (Maden & Wyper, 2004).

The interns built up peer-to-peer networks with start-up companies, students within their particular faculty and students they met elsewhere. Considerable opportunities exist for further development of this scheme. In order to improve the scheme, previous intern skills and experience were captured in training sessions and written up into training documents for future interns. Testament to the success of this pilot scheme in promoting enterprise in Newcastle University, other areas of the University have adopted the use of students to promote their work. Both the Careers Service and Student Recruitment Service have used this model successfully to promote services, advertise events and gain a better understanding of the student market and their needs.

The key outcomes desired were achieved, with student interns acquiring confidence, awareness and skills useful in the workplace. Although it is difficult to measure the impact of the scheme on the student community, student sign up for enterprise bulletins rose dramatically in the year the interns were introduced. Feedback gathered from students by the interns helped tailor the services of the Enterprise Centre to be more student focussed and meet the demand of increasing interest from students in setting up businesses after university. Students who participated in the internship scheme for enterprise recognised the significant increase in their self development and five of the six student interns who left the scheme were inspired to go down the path of setting themselves up in business. The scheme is now run annually, using students to promote enterprise to a student body increasingly interested in self employment.

The success of the scheme in terms of peer recruitment has also led to the initiation of a similar scheme on campus, adopting Enterprise Centre best practice, at the Student Recruitment Office that has launched six paid placement opportunities for current undergraduate students (as a year-long sabbatical) or students just about to graduate. These posts were created to assist in carrying out visits to schools and colleges throughout the UK and promote the benefits of attending universities to their peers. The success of the intern scheme has led to much interest at other HE institutions, who are considering setting up a similar scheme.

9. Implications for Different Stakeholders

9.1. Implications for Policy Makers

Higher education has a key functional role to play in the development of regional economy and society in the effective application of graduate knowledge and skills. Enterprising graduates are a valuable source of cultural innovation and regional income and enterprise education is critical in encouraging a 'can-do spirit' in graduates, therefore increasing potential for new venture creation. In order for these educational approaches to be successful, and embedded in the student culture, university enterprise provision must adopt a strategy that has wide appeal to student interests. This paper indicates that viral marketing of a good experience by 'enterprise aware' students appears to attract more interest in entrepreneurship, through a quality peer promotion which illustrates self-employment as an achievable goal. The use of student promotion to peers also shows that developing enterprise skills can be a great deal of fun, and could prove of vital importance in winning over an 'enterprise hesitant' culture to have the confidence and self belief that an individual or group has the ability to undertake the actions required to start up a business. These student ambassadors break down perceived barriers to venture start up and are supported by credible support staff and successful graduate entrepreneurs. From the perspectives of regional stakeholders and related business support functions, recognition of the value in initiatives like the intern scheme and providing appropriate support is required for enterprise culture to be developed in the graduate community.

9.2. Implications for Enterprise Educators

Peer-to-peer interaction as a promotional tool has proved to be a very successful strategy. Furthermore, the intern's role as an intermediary between staff and student communities works to enhance the enterprise offering by allowing the student intern to be involved in both the identification of a need and the implications of strategy to meet that need. The positive collaboration of students and staff helps to create an environment where student needs and hesitations are fully understood and recognised, and generates beneficial outcomes for both stakeholders. Students enjoyed the intern experience and it appeared to students as an interesting variation to traditional marketing of services as well as being a high quality learning experience for the 'student learners'. Adopting ambassadorial students to promote enterprise is not only a very effective strategy but a very cost effective strategy as marketing is done primarily by word of mouth, by a team of students. Information is then passed on to other students, and thus reaches a large section of the student community.

In parallel with the introduction of the scheme, a 265% increase in students registering with the Enterprise Centre's student mailbase was noted in 2004-5 compared to 2003-4. It was possible to track intern related sign-up and circa 30% of this was attributed to the work of the interns. Student sign up in 2003-4 was solely the duty of Enterprise staff. Following recruitment of the intern students, staff capacity was freed up and allowed staff to focus more on embedding enterprise into the curriculum while interns took on the majority of student recruitment to the mailbase. Although these increases cannot solely be attributed to peer-to-peer marketing by the interns, these figures indicate sharp increases in the numbers of students engaging with the Enterprise Centre compared to earlier years. Whilst we recognise that the intern scheme attributed to a change in the entrepreneurial culture in the student body the longer term impact of transferring this into demonstrable skills and start up is anticipated but difficult to measure. The significant increase of mailbase sign-ups is a reflection of the power of viral marketing as highlighted by Dobeles *et al.*, (2005). This approach considerably decreases the cost of marketing whilst increasing the speed of acceptance.

Students can be more persuasive to their peers than members of staff and really sell the concept of why the services can be of benefit without intimidation. Educating students of the benefits of entrepreneurship education is fundamental to creating a more entrepreneurial culture. It is of critical importance that academic staff are educated about the positive impacts that enterprise education can have on students. It must be recognised that although the promotion of the Enterprise Centre and its services are important in changing attitudes to enterprise, entrepreneurship must be embedded within the curriculum so that if a university is to promote itself as being somewhere where enterprise is important, it is actually a reality when it comes to the student learning experience. In order to achieve this there is a need for a culture shift within entire institutions in order to create awareness among academics and management staff at every level. If a culture change is to take place towards increased enterprise endeavour the message of what 'enterprise' is and how it is to be 'taught' needs to be addressed and clearly defined for all to understand.

9.3. Implications for Students

Students are now expected to develop skills including knowledge, interpretation, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, which rise above the academic and vocational divide (Corrigan *et al.*, 1995). Enterprise education helps to equip students with these skills, although student's perception of 'enterprise' needs to be addressed in order for students to see the benefits. This study indicates that the majority of students regarded the term as something associated with the skills necessary to start up a new venture, yet only 30% of the sample believed that 'enterprise' could help them pursue innovative ideas to start a business. A lower number of students made the connection that 'enterprise' would help them attain graduate jobs through development of transferable skills.

Having educated peers acting as an interface between students and staff helps deliver a clear message to be transferred to the student community, who through their peers generate a good understanding of the personal benefits of involvement with enterprise provision. Students who participate in the intern scheme develop communication skills, increase their networks and gain a deeper understanding of the processes involved in creating a new venture. In this study, five out of the six participants began seriously investigating starting up a business, which sends out clear messages to their peers that new venture creation is achievable for students and graduates. Although these students were interested in setting up a business, five of the six student interns were quickly recruited into good jobs in both local enterprises and large international firms. A number of the interns recognised that their intern experience contributed to them gaining these jobs and this personal development aspect of the role is in agreement with Kram (1985) who recognised the career enhancing function of mentoring.

10. Summary

Developing the intern scheme resulted from recognition by staff that with such a large and complex student body it was virtually impossible to reach all students effectively. The interns not only provided a cost effective way of increasing support to enterprise staff but also provided new ideas, knowledge and skills to the team. As the results show, many students do not recognise the full range of opportunities that enterprise education can offer and how this can directly influence their personal development and aspirations. Acting as intermediaries between the staff and students, interns are able to translate and interpret the benefits of enterprise. The sophisticated set of skills that the interns require is reflected in a complex recruitment process that addresses high level communication skills, demonstration of entrepreneurial spirit and relationship brokering. The intern role is not solely about enterprise marketing but also operating as ‘animateurs’ to energise and enable students to understand and utilise enterprise services effectively.

The intern scheme presented here illustrates a way of reaching an increasingly diverse student population and contributes to the more fundamental need for cultural change as recognised by policy makers. From a higher education perspective this model is easily transferable either to target specific disciplines, or a more comprehensive approach can be taken as demonstrated here. Interns are able to draw in the more hesitant enterprising students, creating a more diverse community of students that can bring new perspectives to one another’s ideas and work. Interns make entrepreneurship more accessible by quickly navigating students to the most appropriate source of help. This is likely to impact positively on the number of start-up companies at the University in time.

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