

Edinburgh Napier University

The Entrepreneurial Eco-system at Edinburgh Napier University

Stage in the typical student journey

It is suggested by the QAA (2012) report that finding learning environments that encourage the development of creativity and innovation together with business acumen are rare. This is something that we at Edinburgh Napier University (ENU) already have in place and intend to further develop.

Desired Outputs

We believe that by offering this blend of creativity and business acumen we are supporting the following desirable outputs.

- Supporting students and graduates starting their own businesses, by providing know-how, professional skills, self-awareness, self-efficacy, and networks of support.
- Preparing graduates for a changing labour market where enterprising behaviour is not only valued but increasingly required.
- Equipping postgraduates with the ability to transfer their cutting-edge knowledge into firms who can use that to grow and gain access to new markets.
- Enabling graduates to access the micro-business and SME sector and add skills and knowledge to those businesses from their first day by having developed sufficient business acumen already through their university experience.
- Helping academic researchers to better understand how businesses operate and thus enables more ideas and technologies to successfully translate into products, services, and improvements.
- Building a culture within the university that supports an enterprising, outward-facing, serendipitous, and opportunity-seeking attitude amongst both staff and students.

Research indicates it is not a lack of funding that prevents most start-ups emerging, or most micro-businesses and SMEs growing, it's a lack of confidence in knowing how to do it. By maximising the elements of our entrepreneurial ecosystem we will embed a philosophy to encourage building networks of support, through our module provision harnessed with the advice and support in our extra-curricular value added services that will create communities that foster entrepreneurial confidence.

Context

Entrepreneurship at ENU has a long and constantly evolving track record in providing all students at the university the opportunity to study entrepreneurship to gain academic credit and, or, engage with a range of activities which enable them to realise their own entrepreneurial tendencies and enrich their learning experience.

There are eight undergraduate and two postgraduate modules. Over 1200 students per year now take at least one module, including learning about both starting-up and growing a business.

The Moffat Centre and Bright Red Ventures are incubators for students and graduates of ENU who want to set up and run their own businesses. Both facilities offer free office space and are open seven days a week. Businesses formed are owned 100 per cent by the individuals. In addition to the incubation space and business advisory services, students and graduates have access to a calendar of events, seminars, workshops and networking opportunities both in-house and through our network of external contacts. The 'softer' benefits for students of a supportive environment, working beside others with a similar entrepreneurial vision, are also crucial. They learn from each other and the skills acquired are invaluable, whether later they are self-employed or employed in another business.

The advantage of our entrepreneurial ecosystem is that there is a simultaneous range of triggers in place (education, incubation, master classes, competitions and exchanges) which leads to the building of confidence among our students that they are capable and supported in their entrepreneurial endeavours. Our focus is on the student entrepreneurship experience.

The foundations of a learning environment, which fosters creativity and business acumen, are noted as being rare and valuable, and it is from this position of strength that ENU intends to move forward to be a positive example of an entrepreneurial Scottish university.

Description

The Centre for Entrepreneurship was born out of the Scottish Enterprise Business Birth Rate Strategy in the mid-1990s and built its offering on the Babson model*, one of academic underpinning, interactive delivery and practically assessed learning, often referred to as a 'for' entrepreneurship LTA. We are based in the Business School but service programmes with our modules across all three university Faculties. We offer a portfolio of entrepreneurship activities which deliver experiential learning to our students to ensure they have deep and transferable knowledge and skills on graduation. The team activities have evolved from module delivery to include the Moffat Centre and Bright Red Ventures (our student incubators), International Entrepreneurship Exchanges, to most recently developing a consultancy service where hand-picked graduates (junior consultants) are supported and mentored by senior consultants to deliver cost-effective business services to local businesses through BRT.

As well as these extra-curricular experiences the team 'walk the talk' by being one of the most active divisions in the Edinburgh Institute. BA Business & Enterprise (BABE) launched in 2007, is a programme which created a route for approximately 250 mature learners (growing year-on-year) to achieve a degree award. These learners thought on leaving secondary education they would not go to university. A feature of this programme is the delivery model, which is scalable and we currently deliver at hubs across the UK. We then followed this in 2012 with the development of a Master's programme (Entrepreneurial Leadership) to provide a pathway at master's level for BABE graduates and other learners in full-time work. The programme is flexibly delivered and practically assessed through portfolio and research based coursework. The focus of this programme is to prepare individuals to lead and manage in increasingly challenging and unknown situations through a methodology of strong personal reflection to build on strengths, networks and communications skills blended with cutting edge thinking around entrepreneurial leadership and corporate entrepreneurship. The programme is inspired by Babson thinking and supported by their professors.

According to the QAA report *Enterprise and entrepreneurship education: Guidance for UK higher education providers* finding learning environments which span creativity and innovations together with business acumen are rare - this is what ENU provision does, and we plan to build on this moving forward.

* Babson College, USA, is recognised as one of the world leaders in entrepreneurship education

Summary of impact

Our business incubators have assisted 249 businesses to start-up. Of these, 152 are still active. Since the Moffat Centre opened in 2004 over 1000 students have used the resources and there are usually around 50 students and graduates in the process of researching their ideas.

We have seen an increase in number year-on-year since 2004 in terms of both number of businesses started and numbers of active businesses. On average we support 27 start-ups per annum, which is 'far more than most other universities.' (Universities Scotland, 2013).

Recently published EE-BCI statistics indicate we are now reaping the benefits of our entrepreneurship education strategy where we are positioned a closely run second highest for business survival activity across all Scottish universities. This can be attributed to the breadth and depth of provision in place across the university.

Strengths

We believe our entrepreneurship ecosystem should start on a student's arrival at university during Induction, and our relationship build throughout their university life and on graduation continue as part of a lifelong enterprise network. This is demonstrated by those who maintain contact either seeking advice long after graduation or offering opportunities for the next generation of entrepreneurially minded graduates.

To maximise our entrepreneurial ecosystem, we need policies which embrace an entrepreneurial spirit and mindset, agile management to support a flexible infrastructure if we are to fully foster and realise the entrepreneurial potential of our university for the benefit of our students and receive the external recognition of the unique and comprehensive range of learning and student life-enriching experiences we offer.

Improvements

ENU has a conducive culture and leadership, quality human capital and extensive and effective networks. However, the ecosystem has challenged our ability to ensure all students have opportunity to experience entrepreneurship. Over the last decade we have witnessed the 20 credit structure which manifested itself in departments reviewing and reducing their entrepreneurship presence in programmes. Our philosophy has been to have a hub which serves the whole university with a single 'for' entrepreneurial LTA strategy, a model recognised and supported by QAA (2012).

ENU will seek to move forward with a coordinated and university-wide strategy to maximise impact. We need to move our activity up a level to embrace the changing economic landscape, and recognise the pivotal role for enterprise and innovation in contributing to economic development by planting the seed and fostering the growth of entrepreneurial spirit (thinking and action) across all faculties.

Partners

Entrepreneurship activity at ENU is led by the Business School but operates across all three faculties, and works with core central functions such as Student and Academic Services and Knowledge Transfer & Commercialisation.

Edinburgh Napier has a well developed external network and we collaborate closely with the local business community. We are a member of the Edinburgh Business Gateway Partnership and are a Partner in Enterprise with the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce. In addition we value the contribution provided by the Scottish Institute for Enterprise.

Our alliance with Entrepreneurial Spark offers us major opportunities through the complementary nature of our portfolios. Entrepreneurial Spark are geographically wider spread, host key entrepreneurial players on their Board and have excellent extended networks of entrepreneurs willing to give time and resource to the project. We are able to add value to their proposition by the delivery of tailored enterprise and innovation courses for the 'chiclets' at the various stages of development and providing full access to the university resources.

Funding

All activity is funded by the university regarded as core to what we do, but we have seized opportunities when presented (Moffat Centre funding from the Moffat Charitable Trust, Regional Coherence Funds to resource the design and development of BRT and so on.)

Website link

www.napier.ac.uk

www.brightredtriangle.co.uk

www.entrepreneurial-spark.com

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