

Social Enterprise Resources - NUS

Innovation and Supporting Students' Ideas in Social Enterprise at the University of Gloucestershire

Social Enterprise at the University of Gloucestershire has two main angles. The first is our own innovation with Students' Union run Social Enterprises, the Cheltenham Chilli Company and Core Blimey Juice and Cider. The second is our commitment to help support, fund and in turn increase the volume of enterprising students' ideas that come in to our office. In the following article I will be discussing both of these angles in depth providing recommendations based on what has worked specifically for our institution and how different departments within the union and institution can support these.

The Cheltenham Chilli Company and Core Blimey Juice and Cider

Thanks to the NUS Students Green Fund, we had the funding at our disposal to get things moving very quickly. When setting up our own social enterprises the real key we found was relevance. What was relevant to our students and the local community? We identified that due to the rural setting of the University twinned with the local resources we had that food, growing, local produce and producers were all good places to start. On top of this we looked nationally, what the current climate was within student opportunities and realized that skills necessary for employment and work experience were very high on students' priority lists whilst at University.

From combining these two ideas, the Cheltenham Chilli Company was born. The idea of providing the platform for students to gain experience in any area of a startup business they wanted, whilst learning about a more sustainable way to do business, through supporting some very key environmental issues in the county, became an excellent and innovative tool for engagement.

Through students growing chillies on campus, creating products, marketing, branding, selling and managing the Cheltenham Chilli Company we have created an ideal environment for collaboration and skills development. On top of this great mission, the company is also promoting local and seasonal food in the community with a view to funding a large council led initiative in the county. Currently we are upscaling production of our chilli sauce to a much greater level so that we can increase volume of sales and in turn profits to provide a lot more opportunities for students and see some more active change within the community. As a really key legacy point for the Cheltenham Chilli Company to carry on after the Green Fund Funding we identified that it needed to be profitable enough to fund a part time student to take on the day to day running, so this is where we are heading.

Core Blimey Juice and Cider is considerably newer but was born out of a lot of the same ideals. The business model we used with The Cheltenham Chilli Company really worked for us so we were able to easily tweak it to fit with what we wanted to do with Core Blimey. The differences here are products and what our eventual outcome for students was, however, the importance of keeping it relevant to the community, student demographic and institution was still paramount.

Core Blimey's main focus is on students skills so the approach we have taken to the enterprise is slightly different. We have conducted research into what our students would want to get from working

within an enterprise and what form they would like this to take. The overwhelming response was that turning Core Blimey into more of a society format would meet most of the needs of students. This would mean that a Management Committee would be selected every year with predetermined roles that will be filled, in a very similar way to the President, Treasurer etc. roles within a standard SU Society.

This format will turn Core Blimey into a wholly student led social enterprise, turning over every year and selling through our already established distribution links. It will be a working enterprise model that students can take over and operate themselves every year to really be in charge of a company. We believe the skills and experience gained here will be absolutely unparalleled within the institution.

Collaboration within our own organization and the institution has been a real key effort that we believe has driven a lot of our Social Enterprise activities along. As well as taking advantage of our own Jobshop and Volunteering services to source students to come and work with us we have also used our University internship scheme. In our case we outlined that all of these services were operating towards the same goal and working together was a key to success.

Social Enterprise has also been a key part of the delivery of the University Enterprise Scheme (VENTURE into Enterprise). This has led to the opportunity for us to be involved in facilitating targeted Social Enterprise workshops across a wide range of courses and even key delivery at the annual VENTURE conference. The real innovative part here is “targeted”. For example at our campus that mainly focuses on creative arts, we ran a workshop that made students think about how to turn their creativity into a business, with heavy themes of Social Enterprise running throughout. Targeted events like these are so well received as it actually gives something specific for students to relate to. Compared to more generic Social Enterprise events we have run the student engagement and retention in engagement in these targeted events has been considerably greater.

Students’ Ideas – Supporting, Funding, Increasing

As well as starting up our own Social Enterprises from our Students’ Green Fund money we created a pot to fund new Students’ Social Enterprise ideas. We saw this as a really important thing to allow Students to come up with ideas for themselves rather than work within our enterprises, if that is what they wanted. Also it means that our delivery on courses has a lot more weight behind it because we can say that we have funding for students to come along and actually try out their ideas.

The way it works here is that we follow a very similar model to Unltd. We have two pots of money. The first, for amounts up to £500, involves students submitting a form to the funding panel, made up of a Full Time Officer, three members of SU Staff and one University Staff member. The form is reviewed and if the panel believes it to be necessary the student is interviewed. After this is all satisfied the money is released to the student and monitored by our Social Enterprise Coordinator. The second pot of money, for amounts between £501 and £2000, involves all of the above but includes a business plan and presentation to the funding panel. Again once money is released the students are monitored by the Social Enterprise Coordinator.

Support for our new Student Social Enterprises comes in a variety of different ways. We have a lot of the in house expertise relating to finance and web design here in the SU. We are also lucky enough to have a member of staff who has worked in business development for many years meaning that we have a bank of mentors willing to get involved in these Social Enterprises. The best support comes from people with experience of doing it already. There are also some really big supporters within the University who have agreed to mentor enterprising students in the past.

On top of the business support, we also support the students in any other way we can. If the Enterprises are product based then we make every effort to provide them a platform to sell in our SU outlets. The visibility of these products also works as great promotion for the fund as students can actually see that it has been possible for another student to get their t-shirts (for example) actually on sale in a shop.

Academic year 2013-14 saw us fund around £10,000 of new students businesses. So far in 2014-15 we have had even more applications in and are looking to fund around the same, if not more. GameDay Apparel became one of our most well know student Social Enterprises. It is a business that sells bamboo cotton sports training t-shirts and uses the profits to put on easy and accessible health, fitness and wellbeing workshops within the community. GameDay received lots of acclaim within local media and the University community, cementing that what we are doing is working and is seen as a really good thing.

Future plans for funding will be to focus on a crowdfunding site that all students can use to raise their own money to start up their enterprises. Any percentage of money made from this service on the SU's part will go back into a fund to allow us to still provide grant funding, albeit much less regularly.

Since the University has begun investing less in Enterprise (a bit of a blow) we have really taken on the role of being the primary enterprise delivery at a startup level within the Institution. Our own enterprises are growing and we are continually engaging more and more students with lots of hard work. These initiatives, now nationally recognized have enough behind them to continue long after the Students' Green Fund has finished.