

A pioneering approach to engaging students in enterprise

Karen O'Rourke with Leeds Met Student Enterprise Pioneers

The Institute for Enterprise Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) considers student engagement essential to the effective development of good teaching and learning practice. Students can offer up-to-date and honest insights into all issues surrounding university life. By welcoming the hands-on involvement of students in our enterprise activities at development, design and delivery stages (where appropriate) we hope to ensure that the student experience remains at the heart of all we do, that we are consistently responsive to the changing needs of our students and that we provide as many opportunities as possible, at all levels of study, for students to maximise their skills and achieve their goals.

It was with this in mind that the Institute for Enterprise approved a one-year pilot project that would enable the recruitment of a cross-institutional team of Student Enterprise Pioneers, who would act as ambassadors and advocates for enterprise, their main objectives being:

- to share and generate ideas on how to motivate other students to develop enterprise skills
- promotion of and support for the Institute's activities
- development of the Institute's student-facing web pages
- creation of student-friendly guides and resources
- feedback on enterprise in modules and courses
- networking with students and relevant external organisations
- contribution to formal meetings.

In 2009 we invited students to apply for these new posts. The eye-catching advertisement, itself designed by a Leeds Met student, attracted a pleasing number of applicants who were interviewed en masse in September 2009. The interview process was designed to offer the prospective Pioneers a flavour of what the role would entail. On arrival, each student chose a number from the hat and this denoted the running order for their first task – a two-minute 'elevator pitch' to sell themselves to the interview panel, and to some extent to each other! They were then divided into cross-Faculty teams and launched into a group task that required them to brainstorm ideas for the new student-facing area of the Institute's website. They were encouraged to be creative and innovative. After 20 minutes each team had to present their ideas to the whole group. This enabled the interviewers not only to gauge who might constitute a 'dream team',

but also provided us with a range of usable ideas for the website!

A team of 12 students was recruited, and on appointment offered the following comments about their expectations of the role:

"By joining the Student Pioneer team I hope to build a good social network with people involved in engaging students in enterprising activities. In addition, the experience of such a role will help me later on in life in terms of improving my talent management skills. I am really looking forward to the future activities. Because all the projects are done by students they are much more student-friendly and appeal to students."
(Varun Gupta, BA Business and Management)

"I was delighted to be selected as a Student Enterprise Pioneer! This is an opportunity to network and meet other students, make links within the business and university communities as well as hopefully learning new skills along the way. It's easy to sit back and complain about things that don't work, by being a Pioneer I'm hoping to come up with creative solutions and DO something in a positive way that will make a difference."
(Lisa Dickinson, BA Conference and Exhibition Management)

"I applied to be a Pioneer because I believe we should make the most of any opportunities we can whilst at university. I hope to be able to inspire other people to be involved with activities outside their course, with the aim of maximising not only their personal development but just to enjoy university life in general."
(Jonathan Excel, BA Sports Marketing and Public Relations)

"I applied to be a Student Pioneer because I wanted the chance to further develop my university experience. Too many students pass through university with their heads down in books; I fancied engaging with events, networking and working in a team."
(Paddy Doyle, BA Public Relations)

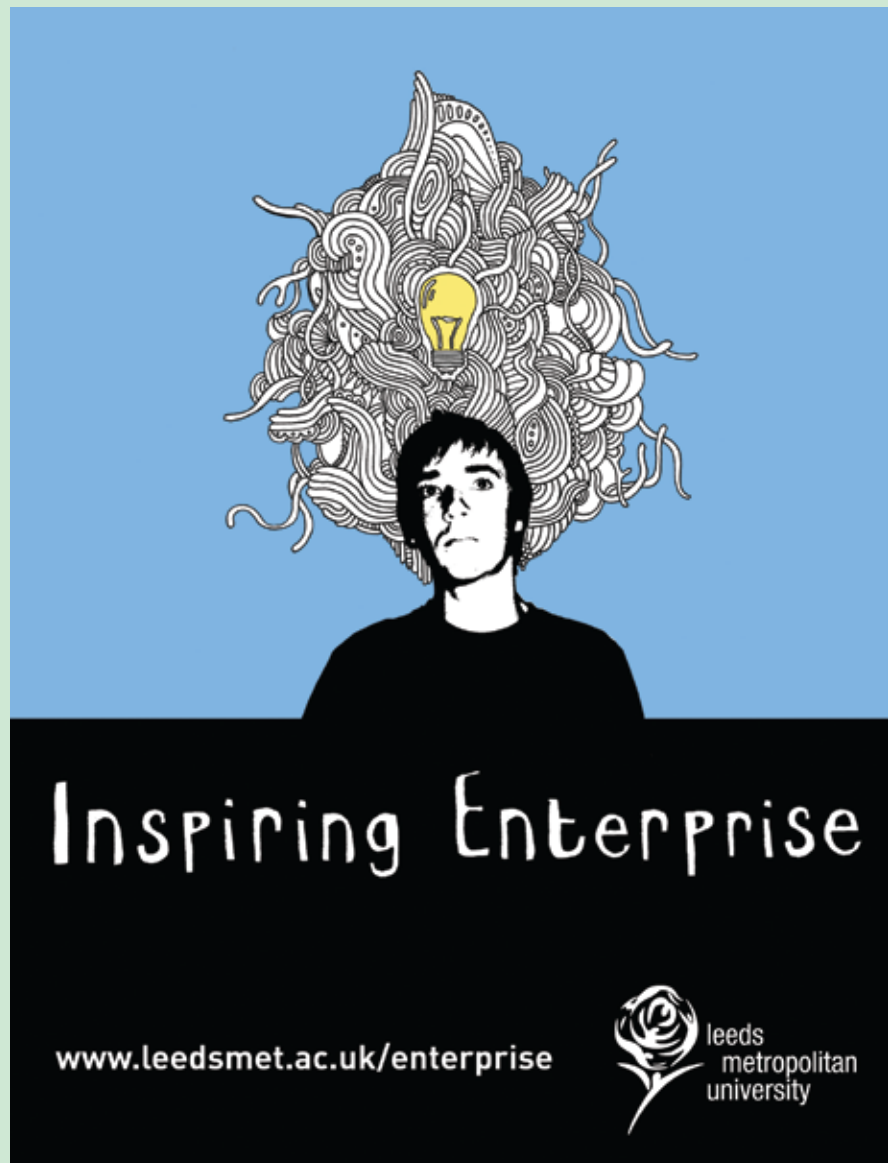
"I believe that by becoming a Student Pioneer I am taking one step closer to becoming the best version of myself. The role reminds me that I am capable of making change, whether it is simply to my life or potentially to other people's lives. I see the Pioneer role as a prime opportunity to motivate the students of this University to do something more than just attend lectures because they are paying for them. Our role as Student Pioneer is to forge new mindsets, that anything is possible – the potential to become the very best you can be is more accessible than previously thought."
(Laura Mason, BA Business Studies)

The Pioneer team is supported from the CETL by Karen O'Rourke and Liz Carter, and fortnightly meetings are held to enable us to keep track of all the amazing ideas being generated. Already, many of the students have engaged in activities inside and outside Leeds Met. In October Jack Hobson attended the National Consortium of University Entrepreneurs (NACUE) training day in Manchester, where he gained presentation, networking, negotiation and pitching skills, and learned about branding and fundraising. Laura, Paddy, Anthony, Thabo, Varun and Jonny also travelled to Manchester to participate in the national Student Teaching and Learning Network conference in November, where they met students from other UK universities and shared ideas that they have subsequently brought back to this University:

"The event was a really positive opportunity for the Leeds Met Pioneers to network with other institutions and gain a better understanding of the role of students in developing learning and teaching. It was a useful experience and I do feel like I got a lot from it."
(Laura Mason)

"I learnt valuable skills from the Manchester conference which I can apply to my role as a Student Pioneer. For instance, I saw the 'Student Stories' website by the University of Reading and I am now designing something similar for the CETL website at Leeds Met."
(Varun Gupta)

Lisa represented our Student Pioneers at the 'Make Your Mark' challenge in Harrogate as part of Global Enterprise Week and saw how positively the concept of enterprise and environmental awareness is promoted and how important it is to encourage creative and ambitious ideas. Lisa said: "I wore my Pioneer



hoodie with pride!" Closer to home, the Institute for Enterprise contribution to Global Entrepreneurship Week was a spectacular event in Old Broadcasting House developed from an original idea by Paddy, who planned and co-delivered an afternoon of enterprising travel-related activities 'On the Road Less Travelled', full details of which can be found on our website.

"The Institute for Enterprise has allowed me to organise and host a headlining event regarding my passion in life, travelling. I came to Karen with an idea, and a few months later I was introducing the event in front of over 100 students and staff. These types of events have developed me as a student, professional and as a person."
(Paddy Doyle)

"Special guests came in to talk about their experiences in other countries, such as volunteering in Peru and climbing the Himalayas. It was a great event and we met lots of people swapping stories and getting ideas for future trips. For me, the event was particularly successful in that it highlighted the wide variety of things available for people to do both independently or with the University."

(Jonathan Excel)

Most of our Student Pioneers have instigated and are developing their own sub-projects, related to areas of specific interest to them. Laura's passion for 'making a difference' and the fact that she has lived in Nairobi made her a perfect candidate to meet with recent visitors to the Institute from universities in Kenya, and she impressed them with her knowledge of enterprise in their own context.

"The website is the main project I am involved with at the moment. It is a project that I really like since my mind is geared to IT and I am a creative person so I feel that I can put my skills to good use."

(Varun Gupta)

"As a mature student, I am hoping to utilise my experience as a Pioneer to assist future students returning to study from full-time employment to enjoy the full benefits of being a student at Leeds Met."

(Lisa Dickinson)

Hiba is spearheading the re-invigoration of the Leeds Met Enterprise Society and is recruiting a committee, raising awareness, organising activities and liaising closely with the Students' Union.

The fast pace continues into 2010 with presentations at the HEEG Conference 'Let's go Global! Developing a Global Mindset among Student Entrepreneurs' and the hosting of Business student visitors from Samford University, Alabama, USA, who enjoyed two days of Pioneer-planned activities at Leeds Met.

All our Pioneers have contributed to focus groups to support various evaluation processes, and will themselves be formally trained to lead their own focus groups, so if you are looking for enterprising ways to gather student feedback, they may be able to help.

If you recognise any of the names above, please do drop them a line and see if they'd be interested in working with you or your students. Their profiles and information relating to their projects can be found at www.leedsmet.ac.uk/enterprise

"I really recommend every student to engage with their time at university, perhaps joining a sports team is not the only answer. I regularly attend meetings and discuss matters surrounding the University, I have some big ideas and the Institute allows for development and management support so that these dreams can come true. If you find yourself wondering why your university experience might not be fulfilling as you previously thought, then look around you for inspiration, don't wait for it to find you!"

(Paddy Doyle)

Karen O'Rourke
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