

**Project Title:**

Engaging Students Engaging Industry Engaging Enterprise

**Project Team:**

Academic Clients and Project Holders – David Bassett and Jackie Mulligan Group supervisor – David Dewhurst Academic panel coaches – Professor Rhodri Thomas Dr Emma Wood Glenn Bowdin Dr David O'Brien Julia Tum Students running event - Becca Duckett Katie Jones Chris Ashcroft Rosalyn Cann Kirsty Marsden Cara Hale Helen Hiscocks Student panel – Elizabeth Willetts Megan Taffs Kate McNaboe Becky Hughes. Placement companies (involved in company set projects) – MotivAction Benchmark Communications Earls Court & Olympia Sheffield Comedy Festival The Children's Foundation Placement students – Elizabeth Willetts Emma Heslington Sean Langer Billy Heaton Hannah Jackson

**Abstract:**

A reflective piece on how a small team of students and academics gained more awareness of their own sense of enterprise and creativity. The case study examines the phases and crisis points of the whole event process and identifies some of the key learning outcomes for all involved.

**Project aims:**

To challenge the events management students to stage an event 'Making Events Sparkle' where the enterprising talents of students would be showcased in front of events tourism and hospitality companies through a 'future thinking' cross subject group / cross faculty student panel able to answer questions about the future for events and a launch of a case studies publication illustrating the enterprising responses of students to a range of 'company set projects'. The project would result in an event managed by students for industry an enterprise learning experience for a cross-subject/ cross-faculty team of at least six students and at least three academics and a new case studies publication – 'Student enterprise in the workplace' (working title)

**Process:**

The project process involved 3 key phases • Development of the event by the students • Development of the student panel by the academic staff and students • Development of the company set project by the students and academic staff The process was outlined in a poster presentation delivered on 20th January 2010 at an enterprise symposia See figure 1. Fig 1. Phase 1 : THE EVENT The event was included within the established Professional Events Solutions (PES) module. A brief was issued to a group of seven level 6 students stating the aims of Making Events Sparkle " to showcase the students and UK CEM's engagement with industry and acknowledge the support we receive from industry highlighting opportunities for further engagement including CPD taster sessions and networking." Detail was sparing in the brief to enable the students to fully engage their creativity to respond to how the aims of the event could be achieved. As PES is client-led some of the events tend to be more prescriptive and formalised from the outset we as clients were aware that the event was quite ambiguous in many areas and intentionally so. We wanted to test the students capacity to respond creatively to a number of challenges with very few parameters and to tolerate ambiguity a key component in entrepreneurial and creative thinking (Rae 2007 Burns 2005 et al). The parameters included

a budget and a wish to include a student expert panel and invite industry to the event. One of the group members reflected on this after the event describing "The outline of the event we were given was very brief this gave the group the chance to be creative with its concept" Whilst we saw this open brief as an exciting opportunity for the students it seemed from the start the ambiguity was a barrier for them. The pitch they produced following discussions with us as clients was focused on rather safe territories; venue theming and catering. It completely omitted the more challenging and we considered exciting components of developing CPD tasters considering ways the invitees might network and recruiting and selecting a panel to be student experts. We met with the students and found ourselves repeating to the students that we wanted them to come up with solutions of how we could deliver CPD taster sessions and networking and that the answer would not necessarily come from asking an academic on the team what they should do. We wanted them to come up with ideas. It was alarming to see that the students were gravitating towards asking what to do rather than considering how they might approach the problems within the brief. A concern when as Rae (2007) asserts there are clear connections between enterprise and employability. This would become our first crisis point in the process. One of three crisis points where we were both challenged to act intervene and consider how to progress. The crisis points were all the more complex due to our dual roles of academic staff and 'clients'. At each crisis point we would reflect on what we would do as clients in the 'real' world and what we needed to do as academics to extract the best performance and best learning for the group. "The issue for supervisors is often about when to intervene and when to allow students to learn through discovery" (Beatty 2000 p145). In the event process we made three interventions when the group and the event were in crisis. Each intervention was at a different level appropriate to ensure the most chance of success in encouraging the students to meet the challenge of the project. Crisis 1 The first came after three months when the students were continuing to fail to grasp the concept of creative solutions and were failing to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the event beyond sushi and star sparkling décor. They were advised that they would have five days to gather themselves together and convince us they were capable of producing the event. We informed them that as clients our confidence was 3 out of 10. If they could not walk us through the event come up with creative concepts around CPD that they had developed and an idea of how the event could be staged we would not do the event. It was clear that this paradigm shift was essential. In their eyes from that point we were not 'academics' but clients. And quite serious clients at that. "The teacher cannot do all the work if learning is to be the outcome. As designers of courses and as teachers if we want to produce graduates of Higher Education able to think act create and innovate at a relatively high level then we need to consider how we lead learners beyond being regurgitator copyist or operative" (Fry Ketteridge & Marshall 2000 p33) Five days later the students did a walk through of the event came up with some excellent ideas and we confirmed our confidence level had raised to 6 out of 10. One of the student reflects "I learnt from the event how to come up with creative CPD ideas it started off as a bit of a struggle because I was unsure of what they actually were or entailed! Once I had got my head around the subject I had great fun thinking of different activities for each topic." Whilst the student above clearly identifies the fun elements of the creative thinking to generate the ideas another in the group focuses on the creative problem solving elements of the task as well as noting how the client intervention had helped to re-focus the group "With support from the clients we were back on the right track. Working as a group we had to create a showcasing and networking event that was different concentrating mainly on the CPD activities we named our event 'Stars of the Future'. Creating CPD activities was new to the whole group it gave us the opportunity to use our imagination making the event interactive and selling the four courses. We had to take into account the floor space and how we would manoeuvre 80 delegates around the activities." Whilst the ideas had raised our confidence levels - Now we had to see action. Within days some of the group were working hard on

developing the ideas and marketing the event... But not all. Crisis 2 Each PES group must assign roles to ensure responsibilities are clear from the outset. Each group also signs a group contract where disciplinary procedures are implemented and managed by the group. Work slowed after Christmas and in spite of the event being a few short weeks away there was little momentum. We called the group in and asked what we should do. Only five members of the team attended. They understood that we as clients should 'fire them'. We asked them why we should not. Each member of the team clearly wanted to continue – one said “this would be my chance to prove myself I have not had much practical experience and I really want this to work.” . However there was little sense of direction or idea of how they could resolve the situation. We listened to their responses and discussed and deliberated over the issues for 24 hours. As clients we wanted the event to go ahead but we had very little confidence in their ability to undertake the task. We were also frustrated that two members of the team appeared not to be contributing to the task and the was not dealing with this effectively thanks to informal friendships. It would have been easy to have stopped the event at this crisis point. If we had we may only have learnt that students can fail at events the students were failing but we wanted to help them to keep going and to succeed. We decided to intervene at a higher level and see how they would respond. We informed them on Friday that we would go ahead with their event for a later date that they would need to identify but did not wish to deal with the two absent members in the group any further as they had demonstrated to us as clients little commitment to the event. If they did not get back to us by Monday 12 noon we would begin following our contingency arrangements with other students managing the event. On Monday a response was hand delivered by the group leader. The group had united. The leader had activated verbal warnings within the group contract disciplinary procedure promised that everyone would be monitored closely that a new date had been secured and they would provide weekly updates on progress. They were committed to delivering the event and thanked us for the opportunity. The student leading the group reflects “The main thing learnt from this experience is how to work efficiently within a team in order for our event to be a success. After being nominated as the project manager I didn't think it would be too hard to lead our group however after a week or so it became clear to see the obvious different group dynamics. This immediately contributed to some of the problems we had when putting on our event; it may also be linked to our initial event being cancelled. As soon as I realised this I changed my management style in order to motivate my team and more importantly show our clients we were capable. Once we established new roles and motivational levels had been boosted we all knew our event would be a success.”

Crisis 3 The final crisis happened two weeks before the rescheduled event. The group had reformed were working harder than ever making sales calls organising panel meetings with the academics organising the CPD tasters. However the new date clashed with several corporate events in the same week and alas rsvps were too low for the event to go ahead. This time our intervention was a helping hand. We offered them an opportunity to showcase key aspects the CPD tasters the company set projects and the panel at another student – led event. After some deliberation after all not staging the event would only mean losing 10% of the overall mark they agreed to take the opportunity. Perhaps motivated by a need beyond an assessment mark a need for achievement – a key attribute for enterprising individuals (Burns 2007) Finally after a 6 month journey they produced an event which 'made them sparkle' within another student led PES event. One student reflects “I know if I had the chance to do the PES module again I would approach it completely different. It is an extremely long module as it runs through both semesters but it has been a complete learning curve and sometimes we could have given up quite easily but we pulled ourselves together and made sure the event did happen.” Another reflects “Even though the event was not initially what the brief set out some elements worked and we have the ability to overcome problematic situations. This is probably more than we could have learnt through theory taught during lectures!”

Phase 2 –

**THE PANEL** The process for panel selection was undertaken by the students. Initially they approached students who they believed capable of being 'experts' on the evening but we requested they open up the selection process to enable students to apply. The panel members were from events and tourism subject groups. Over four weeks the members met with academic researchers professors and teaching fellows to gain the very best inspiration. It is not certain is the students were the high achievers on the course but they were clearly respected by their peers. The five students met with at least 3 academics on each occasion and engaged in intellectual discussion on complex issues. The academics involved as well as the students seemed to enjoy the process which for once took them out of the mass education approaches more usually adopted which "influence student learning by reducing direct contact with the staff who might have inspired them." Thanks to a lack of direct contact with enthusiastic tutors students often lose the chance "to take off with some personal inspiration ...(regarding) higher education as simply a stage towards the world of work." (Moon 1999 p128) The opportunity to work closely with a small group of students to coach them in preparation to answer questions that could cover any topic relating to events and to engage them in future thinking for the industry was invaluable for the students and the academic team. Discussions covered the value of their qualifications professionalisation of the industry sustainability travel and climate change social networking olympics recession and finance as well as the value of theory and practice. The students clearly found the discussions challenging as they were being asked to consider wider contexts at a deeper level and take a position on the topics. It was also interesting to see how some of the concepts raised such as 'in ten years there may be no air travel – how will you deal with this?' made them consider the challenges and their need to adapt and respond creatively to those potential scenarios. One of the panel members reflects on the experience "The opportunity to engage with academic and professional experts has greatly inspired creative thinking through challenging my opinions and knowledge of the industry. The student panel provides an invaluable opportunity to think outside of the usual academic or industry framework and creates a platform to develop opinions and knowledge of an enterprising nature." **Phase 3 – CASE STUDIES** The case studies were produced as a result of the academic team working together with the students (Innov8). Initially the academics were invited to select examples of 'best practice' company set projects. No specific selection criteria were set but academics were asked to identify projects showcasing the enterprising talents of students. The expectation being those projects selected would inspire future placement students and placement companies to engage with creative and challenging projects. The students (Innov8) were now challenged with developing a series of case studies for publication. Through negotiation with the academic team as well as the ALT publication team a suitable format was agreed. The case studies would be presented in Q&A format with questions directed to both the placement students and placement companies. Questions addressed a range of issues such as the project rationale research undertaken challenges faced skills developed outcomes etc. Drawing up a generic set of questions was clearly a challenge due to the diverse nature of the company set projects yet this is exactly what the students seemed adamant to do. It would have been easy to have intervened at this point but it was important for the group to take ownership of the case studies. From the responses provided six case studies were produced and displayed in poster format at the event. Three of the placement students whose projects were showcased attended the event and were able to discuss their projects with attendees (clients employers graduates etc.). A direct outcome being more placement opportunities were identified as a result of this engagement. Approval has now been received from the ALT team to proceed with case study publication. The existing case studies will be included as well as 4 new case studies with the aim to showcase the enterprising talents of students from across the Regional University Network. The publication would not have been possible without the efforts of the students (Innov8) who will be credited

alongside the academics for developing the publication.

**Outputs:**

Tangible outputs • Development of 3 CPD taster activities that can be used to engage students and industry in the future devised by the students • Creation of company set project cases / case studies for publication • Potential development of the panel discussion into curricula • Creation of some AV material on our students and why they chose Leeds Met and the benefits of placement • Engagement with companies for further placement opportunities

**Impact:**

There were several impacts on each element involved in the event and some unexpected outcomes. The students organising the event who named themselves Innov8 appeared to enhance their creative skills and develop an understanding of the importance of navigating more open and ambiguous challenges. Unexpectedly the students failed on several occasions to meet client expectations yet in spite of all the problems continued to progress. They appeared to learn how to accept responsibility for their actions and to try again. Key entrepreneurial attributes that ironically may not have been so obvious were it not for the crisis points in the event planning process (Rae 2007 Burns 2007). The student panel were probably the clearest beneficiaries of the event gaining direct contact with some of the Centre's leading academics and being coached to consider the future. They proved themselves adaptable. On the evening they clearly impressed the client audience. So much so that one of the panel members received two job offers. An unexpected outcome for the academic team undertaking the task was the realisation that this kind of contact is not in evidence on the current courses and needs to be. The panel activity will not be considered under some form of formative or summative assessment through all levels on the course. Approximately 80 clients attended the final event many stated they would like to engage more with Leeds Met – around 20 had been invited by Innov 8. More placement opportunities were identified as a result – enhancing the student opportunities in the future to engage with industry. Whilst the original event would have showcased the panel in front of industry the audience thanks to the new staging of the event within another student event was a mixture of academic staff graduates clients and students. Thus ensuring a wider range of people viewing the impressive work and performance of our enterprising events management students. We also hope that seeing the students facilitate CPD sessions and an impressive panel presenting their thoughts on the industry would have acted as a good motivation for the current second year students as they prepare to enter their final year.

**Evaluation:**

The event evaluation has come in the form of reflections from the participants the business cards and contacts collected at the events and the feedback from panel members. One of the key aspects which links nearly all the reflections received from the Innov8 students on what they have learnt through the process is 'motivation' and 'creativity'. An example "One of the main things that I learnt was that it is important to maintain high motivation levels within a group so that everyone is focused and driven to make an event a success." For an event focused on enterprise the students running the event were able to learn to deal with failure effectively to respond creatively to ambiguous tasks to motivate themselves. Perhaps most importantly at the end of the process their desire to stage their event appeared to be as based on a need for achievement rather than a need for an assessment mark. Need for achievement is identified by several authors (Burns 2005 Rae 2007 Bolton & Thompson 2005) as a key attribute in

enterprising individuals / entrepreneurs.

### **What next?**

The academic team have learnt much from this process. We have gained a client perspective on PES which will result in some modifications to the module to ensure that our students do get an opportunity to engage their creativity motivation and leadership skills fully and that we appreciate the risks clients undertake to be part of the module. The exercise has also resulted in many team discussions on how we can ensure our student groups are able to recruit their teams and select their own briefs in the future. We are keen to embed the panel exercise in our delivery to ensure more students can benefit from the 'future thinking' exercises we engaged in as part of the process. We believe this will help to strengthen our graduates to meet the needs of the present and the future. We are hoping that elements of the event will be considered in the future in a much larger event.

### **General conclusions:**

As project holders we were able to consider our own approach to risk as much of the reputation of our centre and Leeds Met was at stake. We remained student centred and determined to gain the most benefit for our students throughout. At times we engaged in lengthy debates as to how 'real world' the opportunity became as we intervened rather than dismissed the group. Our actions were vindicated by the successful production of the event components by the group and their reflections on the learning that had taken place. The whole experience has enforced once again for us the importance of enterprise and creativity in our teaching. As an end note we include this video clip from the TED site – a presentation by Dr Ken Robinson. The aim of including this clip is to add to the sharing of great ideas and for us all to consider how we as academics can address the issues raised in the speech and truly prepare our students for the creative challenges of their (and our) futures...

[http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/ken\\_robinson\\_says\\_schools\\_kill\\_creativity.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html)

### **Keywords:**

Events  
creativity  
management  
intervention  
crisis



**500+ people  
engage with  
enterprise**

**=**

The company challenges are published and sent to over 350 companies ensuring the enterprising impact lasts long after the event concludes for hundreds of placement students

**2 academics** consider how students might create a special event for an audience of industry professionals and practitioners

One group of 7 students are challenged to come up with their own ideas for the event, including theme, venue, marketing, content, speakers ...

The group call themselves **Innov8**

Innov8 must devise and manage a networking session for about 100 event attendees

Innov8 are challenged to develop and produce creative CPD sessions to impress industry for at least 5 academics to deliver

The student group create a showcase of 10 student projects showing how companies can challenge Leeds Met students to encourage a more enterprising approach from placement companies

The student expert panel are coached by at least 3 academics – together they must consider the future of the events industry

Innov8 recruit a panel of 6 student experts who will answer questions from industry at the event



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**Engaging Students, Engaging  
Industry, Engaging Enterprise.**

**or alternatively...**



A white rectangular plate with rounded corners. In the center, there are two pieces of salmon sashimi, one slightly overlapping the other. To the left of the salmon is a small, round, green garnish, possibly a piece of wasabi or a small vegetable. To the right is a small, round, brown garnish, possibly a piece of soy sauce or a small vegetable. The background is a plain, light gray surface.

*Beyond Sushi*

**“This is probably more than we could have learnt through theory taught during lectures!”**

# What we learned



# What the group learned



***"...it has been a complete learning curve and sometimes we could have given up quite easily but we pulled ourselves together and made sure the event did happen."***



# What the student panel learned

***“The opportunity to engage with academic and professional experts has greatly inspired creative thinking through challenging my opinions and knowledge of the industry.***

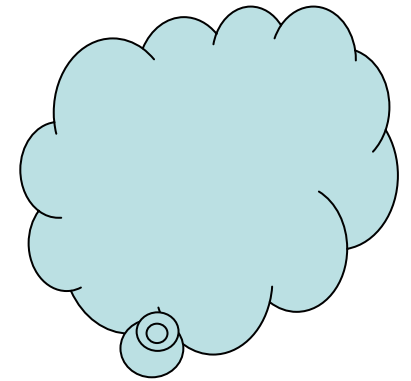
***The student panel provides an invaluable opportunity to think outside of the usual academic or industry framework ...”***

# What the wider team learned



How can we prepare our  
Leeds Met Graduates  
for the present and for the future?

*Challenge ourselves  
and our students  
to go.....*



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