

## Supporting Doctoral Researchers to be more enterprising

### Introduction:

Policy makers are increasingly viewing doctoral graduates as being a critical component in sustaining a knowledge economy. The European Research Area's Steering Group on Human Resources and Mobility has explicitly stated that:

“Doctoral education was traditionally geared towards the production of a new generation of scientists for universities and the public research system. Here a change has been taking place in recent years...[ ]...In Europe the number of doctoral candidates is increasing. It will probably continue to do so in the future, as the strategic goal of the EU to make all member states spend 3% of the GDP for research and development will, if achieved, increase the demand for well-trained researchers.”<sup>1</sup>

In recognition of this change in the destination of doctoral graduates the sector has increased focus on 'employability' training. Although it is important that doctoral graduates should be employable it is also important that they are capable of being employers. If they are to fulfil their role as drivers of the European knowledge economy they should be equipped to start businesses and create employment. In short they also need to be 'enterprising' and 'entrepreneurial'.

### Not just another enterprise project:

Although I had graduated with a PhD, I had elected not to pursue an academic career and had instead started a number of businesses before spending about 10 years as a Business Adviser and Trainer. The University of Sheffield offered me the opportunity to use my experience to set up and run a Research Enterprise project aimed at enhancing our support for enterprise skills amongst postgraduate researchers.

From my many years of working with business clients I knew two things:

#### 1. Anybody can start a business

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research\\_policies/SGHRM\\_IDTP\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/SGHRM_IDTP_Report_Final.pdf) p.3

2. You cannot just teach people to start a business, you need to inspire and enthuse them.

At the end of November 2011 the University of Sheffield launched the Research Enterprise Innovation Fund with the aim of supporting activities designed to help our PGRs and Early Career Researchers to become more enterprising.

The rationale behind this approach was that in order to encourage a culture of enterprise in our doctoral training the University should support bottom-up projects and ideas rather than impose top-down training and structure. In essence our approach to supporting the development of enterprising doctoral students should itself foster enterprise.

The fund accepted applications from Faculties, departments and other groups for activities around enterprise totalling £268,844. In total 22 projects were supported using EPSRC funding (see here for details: <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/ecr/reif>) specifically targeted at the enhancement of entrepreneurship transferable skills training.

The projects had a number of outputs:

1. They directly or indirectly led to transferable skills training in our doctoral and early career researchers.
2. They supported and fostered an enterprising approach to the delivery of entrepreneurship transferable skills training across the University.
3. They effected culture change in academic departments and faculties with respect to perspectives on enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Importantly the projects covered all five faculties and were not just restricted to the usual STEM areas, two examples of which were:

1. QCinema: A collaborative project between the local Showroom Cinema and The University of Sheffield's Humanities Research Institute, which combined technology and high quality academic research in order to generate additional economic value from the cinema's existing content and programming. Cinema patrons were invited to scan a QR code on their ticket/programme in order to have additional content

streamed to their mobile or tablet device in return for a micropayment. The additional content in question was often additional background information on a subject matter from researchers in the field.

2. Making Heritage Matter: A programme of short workshops was held led by professionals working in the heritage sector including; English Heritage, the National Trust and the Heritage Lottery Fund. These workshops led to a follow up online resource which helps researchers to see how they can apply their skills to this sector and even develop a 'heritage business' .

**Recommendation:**

The approach worked very well and has left a legacy of embedded enterprise activity and learning across the institution. It is important when using this approach to ask project proposers to consider the legacy of their projects and how they might be sustained after their funded period. It is just as important to ask them to reflect on the project at the finish and to write a report on its achievements. The temptation should be resisted, however, to takeover a project that won't be continued and run it from the centre i.e. top-down even if you can see the benefit. It is important when fostering an environment of enterprise that you accept that some ideas, even 'good' ideas, simply won't make it to sustainability.

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