

Fostering a sense of belonging for staff and students: What works?

Innovation Fellowship Programme

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Warwick Enterprise, The Innovation Group, The University of Warwick

Project overview

The University of Warwick already have an engaged active 'community' invested in enterprise and innovation at Warwick (and beyond) including (research) staff, students, societies, and world leading departments, but we need to reach, inspire, educate and incubate more people/ideas, which is why we developed our Innovation Fellowship (IF) programme; ultimately to expand our reach and impact.

Our IF programme moves beyond an 'us/them' model; it is about fostering a sense of collective purpose and working towards this mutual goal through collaboration and exchanging knowledge, views, experience and skills.

Innovation Fellow's Role Overview

Academic year 2019/20 we recruited 6 IFs to support our strategic aims as both a Department and as a University. Our IFs have committed to activities that foster a student innovation culture across campus. Supported by the Warwick Enterprise team, our IFs have been given the autonomy to co-create/design and deliver a series of enterprise-related engagement activities. We seek to develop our students' confidence and inspire innovators, whilst supporting the development of key enterprise skills and an entrepreneurial mind-set.

Please visit our website to view our current offer/case studies:

warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/enterprise/

Advance HE project overview and audience

In order to share with the HEAdvance network (to inspire other Universities/HE staff) we have compiled an infographic and a suite of videos featuring our IFs who detail their fellowship experience and promote the benefits of giving them more autonomy and working with them as 'partners' rather than following an 'ambassadorial' model. This programme has helped foster a sense of community/belonging (from an enterprise perspective) amongst students and staff in our team (and beyond).

Project delivery

During these video interviews our IFs discussed the role, and what they got out of the experience, the impact it has had on them and whether it has made them feel more part of an enterprise 'community' on various levels (self, department, university, and beyond). The video content demonstrates how we're working with students as 'partners'; moving beyond more traditional roles that can often be seen to be 'ambassadorial'. We have deliberately sought to push that boundary, to work with students as partners, so that we are empowering and supporting them to deliver enterprise-related activities, such as: one-off workshops in areas of interest e.g. sustainable banking, hackathons, and ideas generation workshops.

Impact Evidence

Our aim is to equip Warwick students/graduates with the confidence, skills, knowledge, and experience that will enable them to be positive change makers. We initiated our Student IFs programme in 2018 and this academic year (2019/20) we have really have seen the benefits of this delivery model; within the first term we had already reached our annual targets in terms of inspiring students. We have been very fortunate to have recruited six proactive, bright, highly-engaged individuals that are extremely committed to enterprise and bringing about positive change. Our interdisciplinary IFs represent a very unique mix of faculties and departments from across the University including: philosophy, global sustainable development, business, liberal arts, computer science. The impact of having these Fellows supporting our activities has meant that we have been able to engage a higher number of people by offering more/varied events and by tapping into their networks.

We work as a team and the knowledge exchange that we've experienced between both parties has been extremely fruitful for our enterprise delivery/engagement within Warwick and beyond. The interdisciplinary nature of these students has brought a real richness to problem solving and idea generation. We have learnt so much from our IFs and in return we have imparted our knowledge and experience to them, creating a great working relationship. Within our team (staff and students) we have fostered a community of openness, trust and collaboration. Our sense of community is also fostered through our united aim of getting more students enthused and inspired about enterprise and taking these students on an enterprise journey.

Results

We interviewed all six of our IFs and the results were really interesting, please visit our [webpage](#) where you'll find all the videos associated with this project, including one video which highlights all the key points below and you will also find a video from each of our individual IFs' interviews for those of you who'd like to find out more.

Getting buy-in and sharing a common goal/vision is one of the best ways that we can foster a sense of belonging. Our Student Innovation Fellowship programme has supported us in our strategic aims of ultimately getting more University of Warwick students/staff interested and engaged in enterprise.

Ultimately, the benefits it has brought to IFs can be categorised into the following key themes:

Benefits to the IFs as individuals

Key words/themes that were highlighted throughout IF discussions about the role:

- 1 provided a supportive environment/experience – Empowerment, Autonomy/Freedom, Confidence building, and support to take risks/explore new ideas
- 2 varied enjoyable role (beyond ambassadorial)
- 3 great to work in an Interdisciplinary team and collaborate
- 4 provided insight into how the University operates/world of work
- 5 community building/networking
- 6 personal and Professional (skill) development
- 7 insight and exploration into the world of enterprise, entrepreneurship and innovation (with added value of societal impact).

Insight and exploration into the world of enterprise, entrepreneurship and innovation with added value of societal impact.

IFs have been able to explore this sector and be enthused by what they've seen/been involved in. It has provided a positive/exploratory experience, opened up new career possibilities and networks for many.

They've been able to share their thoughts on enterprise through various lenses e.g. through the medium of articles; with many of the IFs expressed how much they enjoyed being able to write about specific topics that resonated with them, a good way to develop their confidence in creating read-worthy content for specific audiences. Positive societal impact can be seen through Ceara's 'The Digital Environmental Art Project', and Luke and Ptolemy's 'World Innovation Challenge'.

Benefits to both our Department and University

As a department it has given us a great insight and links into both the student community and departments (as they're from 6 departments) and this has enabled us to have a greater impact in terms of increasing our engagement numbers, both in terms of depth and breadth. We have seen an increase in our overall engagement over this academic year. From a University and Warwick Enterprise perspective we have gained insight and higher levels of buy-in through peer-to-peer activity (providing greater confidence and relatability). We have hugely benefited from having such interdisciplinary IFs – all bringing their individual passions, knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm.

Conclusion

- + knowledge exchange and benefits for all
- + expanded Impact and Reach
- + has created more of an Enterprise Community on campus and beyond, not only for our IFs/WE staff, but amongst other stakeholders such as students, societies, groups.

Impact of the intervention(s): Expenditure – All expenditure covered Staff and IF time to input and deliver this project. We actually exceeded the project budget and therefore gave time-in-kind to this project.

Dissemination: This content has been disseminated through Social media and on our website.



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