

Entrepreneurial Case Studies

Case Study 1: Barking and Dagenham College



Key feature

An Enterprise Academy that provides ‘real work’ opportunities for learners in a range of internal and external environments. “Students have business units within their courses so they are taught about business and enterprise but the Academy gives them the real experience” (Enterprise Academy Manager).

Background Information

Barking & Dagenham College won the 2011 TES FE Award for Outstanding Entrepreneurship in Learning and Skills. It is a general further education college, with an established Higher Education programme, whose main site is on the eastern boundary of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. The College is located in a borough that has one of the highest rates of unemployment and teen pregnancies in London, with the second highest NEET population and the fewest people per borough with Level 4 and above qualifications. It has some of the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy in the country and has three generations of unemployment in many households, following the closure of Ford Motors and many smaller, surrounding manufacturing industries, thus resulting in high levels of child poverty.

Instilling enterprise and entrepreneurship across the organisation

Within this context, one of the college’s strategic objectives is to transform learning, including motivating and inspiring learners. It has a rich technical and vocational curriculum on offer that is work focused. Three of the core values of the college are Enterprise, Innovation and Creativity. Their Personal Coaches (tutors) and Opportunities Coaches are trained in Motivational Dialogue to inspire learners to become motivated, take responsibility for their own learning and development, and develop their own personal effectiveness skills. Whilst their focus is on progression, they have an holistic approach to developing personalised learner experiences. This means helping students to acquire a full set of skills which contribute to making them well rounded individuals, such as enterprise skills, people skills, and employability skills.

The college understands, through listening to students, that getting a job at the end of their studies is their main priority. Thus the college works to help students

stand out to potential employers by giving them access to “real work” projects alongside their studies, commissioned by employer clients and also the college, and ensures enterprise and entrepreneurial talents are nurtured, encouraged and supported.

Within its specific context, the college has recognised the importance of marketing – both to increase numbers of learners but also to build the profile of the college in the local community. The college is building the relationship between the needs of the local employers and training provision within which enterprise is seen to be crucial to the dynamics of the local economy. A key feature of the college’s approach, reflected throughout this case study, is that it is trying to use in-house talent wherever possible rather than bringing in external contractors or consultancies – creating entrepreneurial students may be creating new employers in the local community which might, in turn, lead to more jobs.

The college has an holistic approach to learning and learners – not only giving learners the skills required to get good jobs, but also, those vital employability competencies. Being surrounded by an enterprising ethos raises aspirations and enables learners to think outside the box and helps them to realise that starting their own business is a tangible, achievement goal.

Enterprising approaches to business development and income generation

The distinctive feature of the college’s approach, highlighted in its submission to the TES, is its Enterprise Academy. The Academy provides ‘real work’ opportunities for learners in a range of internal and external environments, for some as part of their studies/portfolio development, for others, in addition to their studies. For all, it is paid work.

The basic concept was that an Enterprise Academy would allow businesses to tap into the varied skills of the College’s talented learners. Operating exactly like a real business, learners would take the client’s brief, issue a professional quote and await the client’s purchasing decision. Customers would expect a professional, high-quality service. Learners would get a unique and innovative learning experience that could really set them apart from others when they leave college and enter the highly competitive job market.

With the help of staff and learners in the Graphic Design department, the Enterprise Academy was trialed in 2009; their first pitch was to provide design services to the College’s own Communications & Marketing team. The College was changing name from Barking College to Barking & Dagenham College and needed a new logo/brand.

Along with several professional design companies, the Enterprise Academy was invited by the Communications & Marketing team to tender for the high-profile job. They submitted their designs and quote and waited for the verdict.

After much deliberation, the panel (made up of learners and staff) unanimously chose the winning design of one of the College's graphic design learners. Vicson Lopez, pictured below right, with Cathy Walsh, Principal and CEO (centre), and Jon Gay, Enterprise Academy Manager, is now one of the Academy's first three interns.

Vicson explains the significance of the opportunity he has been given, "Joining the Graphic Design course has changed my life. I tried other Colleges but they did not help me and were not interested in giving me time, when I needed help. The Lead Tutor (and Manager) of the Enterprise Academy really helps students all the time and he helped me to get where I am today... I live quite far away from the college but am prepared to travel to come here for such a unique learning experience."



With such a successful trial period behind them, the Enterprise Academy launched to external clients in January 2010. In 2009/10 the college designated a role (as part of the curriculum team leader role) to drive forward the colleges' enterprise academy work. This role was formally established in 2010/11 due to the volume of commissions the college was receiving from external employers and other organisations. Also in 2011/12 the College employed initially two interns and this has been increased to a third intern from January 2012.

The primary aim of *The Enterprise Academy* is to develop a fully embedded business unit and future social enterprise, capable of providing 'real live,' commercial and paid work experience for College learners studying across 11

Vocational Sector Areas (a total of over 1700 courses.) The objectives of the Academy are to:

- prepare and equip college learners to enter a competitive employment marketplace;
- create commercial opportunities for learners to undertake real live, paid work commissions;
- match learner skills/talents with business and community needs, to mutual advantage;
- empower learners to deliver to high commercial standards in client driven commissions;
- support learners to develop robust portfolios of evidence to be marketed to employers;
- measure the wider benefits for the College and local/regional/international communities; and
- disseminate/transfer 'Know How' and best practice, to create the 'Multiplier Effect.'

Examples of client commissioned work include a re-designed logo for a Regional Chamber of Commerce (presented at the Houses of Parliament and adopted within 5 days); support services (Travel & Tourism, Hospitality, Public Services) for a one day Business To Business Regional *Expo Event*; and Horticulture landscape design for a centrally located urban development site.

A construction firm commissioned two websites to promote redevelopment sites. The commissioner of the work said "The team of learners who were assigned to our website projects were both informed and creative. We had regular meetings with them at the briefing stage and during the development of the project. We also found the Enterprise Academy to be competitively priced when compared to other suppliers. We are very pleased with the results."

A construction company commissioned a mural/hoarding around a development site. The Managing Director of the construction firm said of the project "The artwork will be a drive-by experience, so we were looking for something that creates an immediate impact – this design delivers through its bright colours and stunning fish, reflecting its riverside location."

The Metropolitan Police commissioned the college to produce a range of eye-catching artwork for their newly opened patrol and custody base in Barking. Students from 3D Design, Fashion, Art & Design and Photography attended the official unveiling of their work with Lesley Graham, Vice Principal for Curriculum and the Learner Experience (fourth from left) and Borough Commander, Chief Superintendent Matt Bell.



The college sees this as a radically different approach from other further education colleges who often use simulated work experience approaches instead. The college chose to expose its learners to the professional client/supplier relationship and move them away from the usual 'safe' tutor/student dynamic they are used to.

Part of the Academy Manager's role is to network to generate external clients, supported by the Marketing and Communications Manager. Sometimes the Academy is involved even though there is no immediate commercial benefit. For example an approach from a local hospice for the college to have fund raising tins led to the request to design a T-shirt – one design was chosen for the shirts and another used for the design of a fundraising medal. In this instance there was no immediate financial benefit to the college but the approach was seen to be good community engagement. The Communications & Marketing Manager sees the benefit in that she can now say 'what else can we do for you?'

In just a short time, the Enterprise Academy has helped to embed an entrepreneurial ethos into the fabric of the College. No learner, department or member of staff is left out; anyone can come up with an idea of something to market to local businesses.

In September 2012 the College will be opening a new Technical Skills Academy offering further high quality education and training in real-work environments. The Academy commissioned by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham will be offering subjects carefully chosen to match the current and future job markets in the locality and offering further potential for the development of enterprise and entrepreneurship across the college.

Enterprise in the Curriculum

The college is currently one of three pilot FE colleges being supported through the National Consortium of University Entrepreneurs (NACUE) to extend the network of Enterprise Societies across the FE sector.

The NACUE network is a grassroots collection of over 70 enterprise societies and 40,000 enterprising students in Higher and Further Education Institutions across the UK.

NACUE supports the sustainable development of societies with the vision that by 2015 there will be a thriving network of student-led groups in every University and the majority of FE Colleges in the country, providing the essential informal peer-to-peer support and inspiration needed by young entrepreneurs to succeed.

NACUE offers unique expertise and resources to both existing societies and to staff and students looking to get societies started. Through their support, the aim is to nurture societies year on year as they grow, helping them become hubs of enterprise and entrepreneurial activity within their institution and wider community.

At Barking & Dagenham they are developing the Enterprise Club (Society) as an enterprise for students by students. The club is supported part-time by an Enterprise Champion, an enthusiastic Built Environment lecturer whose time is covered by the college. The focus in the college is to use pump-priming funding and the support of two NACUE consultants to create sustainability for the Club. The club started in September 2011 and membership is voluntary and open to all. There are currently 13 members (four women nine men with a good ethnic mix and range of learners and ages). The initial funding is being used in part to market the club within the college to engage with more students and to develop its own business plan. It is already beginning to explore some business ideas within the college, for example setting up and running a stationery shop, setting up a shop to sell student produce (photographs, art, web design, clothing, furniture, student hobbies) and ways of promoting students' music. The society has given a brief to the Academy for the design of its logo (not on a commercial basis but on the basis of a prize to the design winner, using part of the initial NACUE funding).

The college has also set aside an additional budget which gives it the flexibility to give students access to experiences and training to enhance their enterprise skills. This fund is available to any student who wishes to take part and is not restricted to Enterprise Club members. For example, the college is now a member of the Gazelle group and recently had the opportunity to send a group of 25 students and four staff to the Global Entrepreneurship Congress in Liverpool to hear from enterprise heavyweights such as Richard Branson and Martha Lane Fox. Whilst their accommodation and tickets were covered by Gazelle, the college funded travel and evening meals.

As part of OFSTED's annual programme of subject surveys of good and outstanding colleges, a 2 day visit in 2012 looked at the College's provision for

promoting the development of enterprise-related skills and entrepreneurial capabilities among 16 – 19 year old learners on full time vocational courses from foundation level through to advanced level. OFSTED's report is not due until the summer of 2012 but initial feedback confirmed, for example:

- the drive of the Principal to promote both internally and externally the vision for enterprise and entrepreneurialism and removing barriers, giving opportunities for students whenever possible;
- that the Enterprise Academy is a clear strength creating work that comes into the college through interns and facilitators, providing roles for them to put together quotes and bids and providing paid work for learners; and that there is
- good knowledge and recognition of what is happening in the local area – staff really know what is happening in the area helping them work with the students in developing their awareness of what is available and celebrating their success.

A lesson observed as part of the 2 day visit illustrates the whole College approach to enterprise through 'real-life' experiences. A group of 16-19 First Diploma Level 2 (Built Environment) students working in pairs were given a spec as part of owning a construction company to research into and design a new building as part of development within the existing college space. The spec required them to find a location fit for the purpose chosen that would be appropriate in terms of accessibility, sustainability and community access. Students were required to do their own surveys and data analysis, produce visual interpretations and graphs and then, as part of their assessment, do a presentation to a panel of 3 staff as if they were tendering for the actual work.

Impact

The college believes the results from the Enterprise Academy speak for themselves: "engaged, motivated and creative learners who have a head start when applying for jobs in this present economic downturn and competitive work environment"

Some headline facts and figures are:

- 120 varied projects have been commissioned (50 since September 2011), supplying low-cost, high quality work to local businesses and not-for-profit organisations;
- projects have been delivered, with a £7,000-8,000 surplus ploughed back into the business unit;
- 90 different learners across 11 vocational departments have had the opportunity of doing real, paid work on these projects since September 2011;
- internal commissions (such as the new logo, prospectus designs) saved the College an estimated £90,000 in the first year of the Academy.

The College believes the Academy approach:

- provides a strong Unique Selling Point and a new, cutting edge for the college;
- markets a customer driven, personalised, high quality, commercially advantageous College-wide service for local and regional businesses to tap into;
- resonates for community groups in that they can benefit from 'no cost' services during economically difficult times;
- delivers a cost effective and value for money service to the wider business community, building mutually beneficial and positive, robust relationships;
- realises significant cost savings for in-house college development work and initiatives;
- offers a new and innovative, experiential learning experience to learners of all abilities and backgrounds, including the disaffected;
- uses interesting, stimulating, challenging, commission specific work tasks for which college learners receive 'motivational' payments;
- measures increased learner confidence, peer to peer skills transfer and group mentoring empowerment;
- secures benchmarking of vocational skills and preparation for the world of work using job specific, commercially viable, employment skills; and
- includes comprehensive, 'work ready' learner portfolios that are marketable to prospective employers across sectors.

In November 2011 the college announced its first Enterprise Academy Learner of the Year – a student who has gone on to set up his own fashion business. Many of the students are now progressing into higher education (an achievement in itself) while there are other successful stories of new businesses being created – graphic design, promoting food through T-shirts, clothing and marketing.