

University of the Highlands and Islands

Stimulating and Supporting Entrepreneurship in the Highlands and Islands

Stage in the typical student journey

Each year an institution and region-wide Business Idea Competition is run as a broad tool to stimulate and support entrepreneurship in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The competition promotes creative thinking and problem solving for learners at all stages of the learning journey, including upon graduation. The competition is supported across campus to significantly raise Enterprise Awareness (via induction, workshops, talks, e-comms), develop Entrepreneurial Mindset (through intensive engagement and support to submit entries to the competition with learners from all faculties) and for some students (who progress in the competition and beyond) to start to develop their Entrepreneurial Capabilities. We have examples of this being delivered as an extra-curricular workshop/activity and within the curriculum as a tool to aid experiential learning.

Context

The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) comprises a network of tertiary colleges and research centres, spread across the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The competition was devised and is organised by CREATE, an Enterprise and Innovation Learning centre based within Inverness College UHI, and delivered across UHI and all partner institutions including the surrounding Highlands and Islands community (subject to T&Cs).

Description/Process

The competition opens in August each year and is promoted widely across UHI, all colleges and research centres and in the local community. Lecture 'shouts' and workshops have proven to be the most effective technique to engage the broadest range of staff and learners. Short films are included on our website to give tips on entering. Online entries seek information on an idea, inspiration, resources, next steps rather than a business plan. It was inspired by the culturally popular 'Dragon's Den' but was dubbed the friendly 'Highland Dragon's Den'. Plenty of support is provided for developing application, pitching and presenting. Independent and experienced judges are engaged each year, and relevant follow-up support and advice is offered to all entrants. For winning entrants, start-up support is offered in addition to cash prizes.

Summary of impact

CREATE has worked closely with regional partners and the business community to ensure the competition reaches the maximum potential budding-entrepreneurs across the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The competition was launched in 2006 with 27 entrants and has grown significantly to 170 entrants in 2012 representing all industry sectors and parts of the region. In the last four years, Business Gateway Highland has confirmed 44 start-ups through this competition access point, a significant economic benefit to the region.

In addition to business start-up, it is considered that the competition also has two key impacts: it significantly enhances Enterprise Awareness across curricular areas (both academic/careers staff and students) and helps to encourage stronger working relationships with local business and enterprise support organisations.

Strengths

This activity shows how education for enterprise can successfully engage a wide-range of students, staff and members of the community, both within and outside the curriculum. Over the years, more teaching and career staff are building in this opportunity as an awareness-raising and experiential tool for learners at all levels. Those who participate are extremely positive about the experience and can articulate evidence of creative thinking, opportunity spotting, and business awareness and, for those who proceed in the competition, they are able to develop their presentation, commercial awareness and network-building skills. They talk of an increase in confidence and greater awareness of 'know who' and 'be known'. Through CPD sessions, more academic staff now have the confidence to introduce these concepts and encourage learners to try this opportunity 'to make something happen' which adds to a student's experience of how it feels to be enterprising, which is very much in tune with the philosophy of enterprise education.

Improvements

For 2013, we are offering additional support to raise the quality of pitches for the panel of judges. There is also an enhanced partnership between Inverness College UHI and Business Gateway Highland, in the creation of a business start-up support partnership involving learning resources, business mentoring and advice.

Partners

A critical success factor for this type of region-wide initiative is partnership working. Within the institution, we engage with deans, faculty and subject leaders as well as careers and student services areas.

Externally, this initiative has helped to build strong working partnerships which have grown year-on-year with local enterprise support organisations (Business Gateway, Prince's Trust Youth Business Scotland, HISEZ, FirstPort and SIE) together with an extensive range of regional businesses (large corporate and SMEs) who wish to be associated with helping to build a vibrant entrepreneurial culture.

Funding

The activity has been substantially funded by institutional funding with support in the early years from the local enterprise agency, latterly EU funding sources and local council funds. All prizes (£8,000 in 2013) are sourced via sponsorship from local business and enterprise support organisations which CREATE attracts each year.

Website link

www.createhighland.com

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