

Finalist's case study

The University of Worcester Enterprise Our Space Your Place

Section 1 About the project

Summary

Students at the University of Worcester were given a unique experiential learning opportunity—they put their innovative skills to the test and competed for the chance to win £2000 funding and shop space to enact their business plan for a sustainable localised enterprise. Students who entered were guided through the process of developing a sustainable business plan by University and local business experts. The top entrants were then invited to pitch their business ideas to a panel who chose the winner. The ground-breaking competition developed and enhanced University students' enterprising and entrepreneurial skills and built collaborative bridges between students and the community and encouraged sustainable business development.

Project partners

Thirty-two undergraduate students entered the competition. Industry experts from Barclays and Crown Gate Shopping Centre provided guidance and expertise to the student entrants as they developed their business plan.

The judging panel for the competition included many partners; among them was the Sustainability Manager for BCSC, a Member of Parliament, and university faculty.

The project was crowd-funded via Spacehive, with donations received from the British Council of Shopping Centres (BCSC), Cushman & Wakefield, Crown Gate Shopping Centre, Quatro, and Queensberry.

Section 2 The results

The problem

How can the University of Worcester encourage the next generation of business leaders to embrace sustainable business development? The project sought to find an effective, sustainable way to combine the creative ideas of budding student entrepreneurs and local enterprises. It looked at bridging the gap between learning in the classroom and real-world experience.

The approach

Students across the university were given the opportunity to enter business plans into the Our Space Your Place competition for a chance to win £2000 start-up funding and a free retail space/shop unit in the Worcester city centre to run their business and gain practical management and entrepreneurial experience during the summer of 2014. Students received advice and mentoring from the University, Barclays, and Crown



Profile

- A Higher Education Institution
- 10,000 students
- 1,000 staff
- Urban campus

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Gate Shopping Centre as they developed their ideas into sustainable business plans. The process advanced students' practical skills and gave them experience in the steps necessary to start a new enterprise. Students were free to work as closely with the experts as they chose; it was an opportunity to develop their self-determination and the entries were wholly driven by students' commitment.

The authors of the five best business plans were invited to pitch their ideas to a panel of industry experts who chose the winner, looking at aspects like sustainability, impact on community, and presentation skills. The competition advocated plans for a socially just, ethical and environmentally sustainable business and consideration for these aspects were given by judges. The winner was chosen and was guided through the process of setting up and running their business, utilizing an existing shop unit in the Crown Gate Shopping Centre.

Our goals

The University of Worcester's goal was to bring together local business experts with students to provide hands-on experience and opportunities to utilize existing shopping space to create a local venture that combined a solid business plan with local vendors to create a sustainable enterprise.

Obstacles and solutions

Turn a creative idea into a sustainable business plan	Students worked with University academics and business experts from Barclays and Crown Gate Shopping Centre to develop sound and sustainable business plans to submit to the competition.
Create opportunities for students without great environmental impact.	University of Worcester engaged with business to find a solution, utilizing existing unoccupied shop space.
Bridge the gap between the classroom and real-world experience	Project combined lessons on business plan development with real-life competition and business implementation

Performance and results

Thirty two undergraduate students entered the competition. Knowledge of sustainable development and entrepreneurialism was imparted upon all entrants, who emerged from the competition with a greater appreciation of and ability to apply innovative approaches to increase sustainability in business. Importantly, the competition encouraged interdisciplinary collaboration.

The winning entry was "Sling Prints", a provider of bespoke t-shirts designed in conjunction with local artists. The materials used for the inventory were locally and sustainably sourced.

Sling Prints opened their shop on July 17, 2014. The shop operated for six weeks. In addition, some of the applicants whose entries were not chosen are continuing to pursue the start-up of their businesses, having received the support and knowledge required to develop and realise their plans. The competition will be repeated next year.

Section 3 The future

Lessons learned

Students reported that, regardless of their place in the competition, participating in the process demystified the process of creating a sustainable entrepreneurial venture. They reported that knowing the process and learning firsthand how investors view and judge business plans gave them confidence to continue developing their creative business ideas.

Sharing our project

Press releases were distributed to local media. Social media was also used to share information about the competition. Two interviews were aired on BBC Hereford and Worcestershire. The shop unit operated by the winning team displayed information on the OSYP project for the public to view.

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

This award provides independent recognition of our collaborative approach bringing together local business experts and students to provide hands-on experience. It is particularly pleasing to have done so well in the Green Gown 10th anniversary year and at a point when the awards have gained greater international recognition. These awards are very significant in raising the profile of an approach that integrates entrepreneurialism, experiential learning and sustaining a vibrant high street.

Further information

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