The Enterprising Road Ahead

Building upon 'Researchers at the Edge'

To follow on from the practice sharing and blossoming networks formed at the 'Researchers at the Edge' event in October 2012, various enterprise champions came together to discuss the 'Enterprising Road Ahead' as part of the VC's 'Celebration of Enterprise' week in April 2013.

April 2013 – enterprising ideas about enterprise

The event was an opportunity to exchange ideas and practice on the support of the development of enterprise skills among PhD students and to discuss strategies to move forward. Attendees participated in a conversation regarding the 'road ahead' for the provision and delivery of enterprise skills for PGR students at The University of Sheffield (TUoS).

The event summarised progress to date and reinforced the existence of an informal 'enterprise and entrepreneurship eco-system' at TUOS.

Questions that were considered

- What else could be done at departmental level?
- What else could be done centrally?
- Why don’t colleagues engage with enterprising activities?
- As people with a passion for enterprising activity, what can you do to encourage / support others?

June 2013 – ideas in to action

The purpose of this meeting was to initiate some planning based upon the ideas discussed in April. The desired outcome was a set of proposed plans that might be taken forward.

Various topics were covered

- Increasing PGR knowledge of IP and commercialisation
- Developing a university-wide culture of enterprise
- Engaging more academics in nurturing enterprising behaviours
- Improving systems and structures to encourage people to find out more

1st October 2013
Thoughts were shared and suggestions were made

- Having an annual Stakeholder Panel – to test ideas and development of research
- Incentives and training for supervisors
- Embed enterprise reps at department level
- Storytelling – case studies / events / practical, mentors etc.
- Improving communications across professional services of relevant activity
- Establish a ‘college’ of Post Docs / ECRs who have already done it.
- Use departmental seminar series and other existing mechanisms to communicate
- Make more use of Industrial mentors
- More flexibility around studentships
- All PGRs should develop enterprise skills, if courses cannot be made compulsory through DDP then need to ensure that such skills development is embedded in those aspects that are. These should be valuable and perceived to be valuable.
- Can we incorporate into teacher training?
- Should it be planned into the studentship – perhaps 6 months or 1 year in when the students are more likely to be aware of its worth.
- Links to the idea of a Civic University
- TUOS gives away IP for undergraduates, why not PGRs?
- If not giving it away could it be licensed for development?
- Should TUOS be providing grant / seed-corn funding to develop ideas (where more research is needed)?
- Need to provide support for exploitation of all IPR (including copyright, design rights etc.)
- Need to recognise the value of nascent ideas (those that may require further work before the University is either willing to invest resources in them or to give up on the possibility that they might be a viable commercial opportunity). They may provide useful training opportunities and add some regional value / impact to the local economy in terms of economic, social or cultural capital.
- DTC mini projects are well received by business, more of these would be welcome from partners and useful for training / developing students and engaging mentors.
- Need to understand that benefits to TUOS need not be financial. They may be cultural, educational and developmental.

What is the road ahead?

A group is currently looking at how TUOS can ensure that the momentum generated by the REIF projects is not lost to the University.

A proposal has been drawn up for approval by the PVC for Research & Innovation, Professor Richard Jones. In addition the suggestions of this group and the discussions held will inform the future strategy for Doctoral Development at TUoS.

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