

# London South Bank University

## Women In Enterprise – summary of workshop findings

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Report compiled by Market Research and Insight Team

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### Background

As part of the Women in Enterprise Research project into male and female use of Student Enterprise services, two focus groups and an in-depth interview were carried out.

The research approach differed from the initial proposal. This is because of recruitment challenges. The original plan had been to talk to female students only, those who were engaged in student enterprise and those who weren't. Accessing the non-engaged students was unsuccessful but the engaged students were able to participate. The first focus group was with four female students. The in-depth interview was with a female student who could not make it to the focus group. A subsequent focus group was run with two engaged males. Although the sample sizes are too small to draw conclusions about female and male differences in participation the findings provide useful insight into student perception of student enterprise and ideas have been gathered that can shape the content and communications of student enterprise in the future.

### Conclusions

A number of themes emerged during the discussions which may be used in designing and planning student enterprise workshops, promotions and communications. Five key themes or findings are listed below:

- Student Enterprise services need to differentiate themselves from student's courses to boost their appeal, students are looking for a break from the norm. This can be achieved by being interactive, workshop based and discursive.
- Student Enterprise is an attractive proposition because it teaches transferable skills, new skills and could make one more attractive to the job market or crucially enable you to set up your own business.
- Academics are respected by students and can influence students to participate in events or to raise awareness of services. In this way, academics can be seen to act as brokers between the university and students.

- All students attributed the word 'inspiring' when asked to define a role model. The females named someone known personally to them whereas the boys named people in the public domain.
- Confidence as a learning journey was discussed. Student Enterprise has facilitated this journey as some activities put one out of one's comfort zone in a 'safe place' enabling participants to experiment through trial and error to develop new skills.

## Recommendations

- Explore how to harness a relationship with academic staff as they can influence students and promote events/services and functions of the university. At the moment, this is underutilised.
- Develop word of mouth as a promotional tool, if emails are sent promoting events then ensure they are personalised.
- Make some student enterprise activities mandatory/part of the student's main academic programme – e.g. professional skills module so that all students have exposure to the services on offer
- The following were suggestions of activities:
  - Offer 1:1 sessions with an entrepreneur
  - Put on events that are around confidence building
  - Take students off campus for some activities, work with other HEIs more to deliver such activities
  - Women in Enterprise event
  - Juggling enterprise with family event
- Ensure sessions are clearly differentiated from academic studies when they are promoted
- Consider the approach for workshops to ensure they are interactive
- Similarly, promote that the skills learnt through Student Enterprise will be totally different to those learnt on the course
- Put students into mixed groups so they are not always with their course mates but with students from other Schools as this immediately puts them out of their comfort zone
- Consider timing of sessions, evening not always attractive due to having had a long day at University or for having evening commitments
- Incentivise students to attend events
- Utilise the concept of 'role model' work with Marketing and Student Services to develop this concept further
- Extend invitation to some events to non-LSBU students (e.g. so that our students can bring friends or family)

## Summary of discussion

### Attendees

In total 7 students participated in discussions, 5 were female and 2 were male. The conversations between the males and females took place independently of each other. The females shared several similarities:

- they had all participated in student enterprise activities
- all studied in the School of Engineering
- four said their family was an important part of their free time either helping out with their businesses or looking after them
- In the future each member of the group would like to run their own business because it would enable them to choose their working hours with such flexibility enabling them to balance work and family demands better
- Two of the participants felt their future business could be to support their current family's business or to be an off shoot of that business, another wanted to open an eatery and another wanted to have a consultancy. One stated they may wish to expand on their hobby or follow in their family's footsteps.

For the males they too were from the School of Engineering and had participated in student enterprise activities. Interestingly, family was not spoken about explicitly when asked how they spent their free time, instead a list of hobbies were presented.

### Perceptions of Student Enterprise

When asked what they thought Student Enterprise was about the following were agreed;

- generating income
- business start ups
- brushing up skills
- building on existing skills
- providing new skills (e.g. communication, writing)
- developing own business ideas
- combining creative ideas for/with a business idea
- providing leverage to get onto placements

One male participant stated that with the skills learnt it enables one to stand out in the job market:

*“ need to be as competitive as possible....make you more distinctive”*

- extra learning activities for students
- helps with what studying at the moment

- helps with CV
- enables you to decide pathway in life e.g. informs you about being an entrepreneur or freelancer
- hearing from others about how they made their decisions in life and learning from this

When asked about how they became aware of Student Enterprise the groups said they had vaguely heard about it in the first year but it was in the second year they had heard more after a lecturer promoted it to them. If they had heard about it in the first year the females said they would have engaged with it sooner. One of the participants reflected that they did not know what Student Enterprise was when they first saw it in the student handbook.

The male participants recalled a curriculum project which both the female and male students took part in. It was based on a case study from a business based in Technopark where students worked for 6 weeks in teams on the case study. The male students were part of the winning team and came to the Clarence Centre to pitch to the client and this may be why they could recall it whilst the females could not.

Having attended an event(s), most talked about their experiences with family or friends. One mentioned it to a non-LSBU friend who was interested in coming along to find out about Student Enterprise, others stated how it had encouraged them to think about their life after university, whilst another relayed what they had learnt to help their family business.

### **Boosting awareness and participation**

- make events mandatory
- make events fun
- promote by word of mouth, by students or academics as people do not check their emails
- incentivise attendance of events
- talk about how useful it could be for future career
- ensure timings do not clash with other academic/non-academic commitments
- offer 1:1 conversations (e.g. with an entrepreneur)
- Pitch the events so they are clearly differentiated from normal day to day lectures. Delivery by interactive workshops were more attractive to the group than lectures because they are:
  - a break from the norm but
  - confidence building
  - enables self-expression and try out what they were learning
- Eventbrite – to alert as to when certain events are happening because at the moment have to login, also clarify that events are interactive and not lectures
- explicitly state ‘this is not a lecture’!
- Provide refreshments at events

The participant who attended alone talked about the term ‘Student Enterprise’ as being a very unclear term, “heavy” and not exciting. And although this maybe personal to her, she did not like the choice of colour in the branding of Student Enterprise (yellow).

## **The role of academics**

When asked, the group agreed that when academics say something positive about an event they are more likely to attend, however, most often academics did not talk about other activities happening across the university (not just Student Enterprise but other types of events and services).

Students identified their strongest relationships at the university with being with academics and in this way, the academics have a crucial role in influencing students. The quote from a female below summarises the significance of the relationship with academics:

*“they are very positive with what they say, they motivate us to learn and continue with our studies and progress well”*

When prompted as to how best an academic could communicate with students it was felt face to face would have the greatest impact. So for example, if an academic were able to explain the event and how it could impact positively on the student, this would be the most effective means of delivering information and getting students to engage.

Later on in the discussion they were asked *‘who at LSBU they were positively influence by’*. A number of lecturers were put forward, Safia, Lucia, George, Maria, Phil Burrell and Martin as well as Linsey and also, the females mentioned the males on their course. The lecturers were suggested because they were inspiring, had great expertise in their field, were willing to listen, got people involved and motivated them to do well, and in the case of the boys because they completing work of a high standard on time, ahead of themselves.

Interestingly, one of the male participants put forward a part-time student who was *‘a few years older’*. This individual was cited as teaching him a lot for example in giving presentations and introduced the concept of *‘office politics’*.

## **Confidence**

A recurring theme throughout the discussion amongst the females was that of confidence. Most of the participants felt that at some point they lacked it and had been through some kind of a journey or process to realise it. Experience, familiarity (or conversely the fear of the unknown) would help participants feel more confident. Positive reinforcement also plays a big part.

Confidence could be addressed in the following ways:

- through an ‘Empowering Women’ event
- by getting an inspiring woman in e.g. having a 1:1 with a female entrepreneur

Workshops will help build on skills and confidence and running these with students from other courses would take away the over familiarity and take the students out of their comfort zone but in a ‘safe place’.

Confidence was talked about openly, unprompted and throughout the focus group by females but

was not a topic focussed on by the males particular except towards the end of the session where one male commented that Student Enterprise events were:

*“Good for being put on the spot, it’s good to be put under pressure so to overcome fear and gain confidence in speaking and presenting ideas as happens in the real world.”*

### **Role model**

The definitions were:

*“A role model is someone you aspire to look like, you like the way they do their things, their job their career, you aspire to be like them.”*

*“A role model is our ideal person who inspires us to look up to and motivates us to do well in our life and be successful at everything so not just academic or work but other roles in life as a person.” (f)*

*“a person in a position of power who is very inspiring” (f)*

*“Humble, modest, driven” (m)*

*“Inspiring, professional, charitable” (m)*

When asked to list role models the following were put forward:

<b>Group 1 (f)</b>	<b>Group 2 (f)</b>	<b>Group 3 (f)</b>	<b>Group 4 (m)</b>
Father	Richard Branson – for never giving up	Safia – because she really goes out of her way	Bill Gates
Mother – because she has been through so much	Steve Jobs – to be able to create a brand and product which has continuity and strength even after his death	Linsey – because the events have been so inspiring and have made a difference	Connor McGregor - hardworking, never backed out despite the tough odds
Uncle – because of what he has come from and what he has become,	Mother(s) – bought up the children and was positive role model, work hard, inspire in so many ways	Phil Burrell – for the type of work he carries out (research)	Alan Sugar – strict business man, very direct, prepares you for the real world, high expectations
Safia – like a mother, an inspiration for us	Ada Lovelace Day – for introducing the computer language	Father – because he has come from <i>“nothing to something”</i>	Ghandi - because he is Ghandi
Women	Mother Teresa	Mother – because he has come from <i>“nothing to something”</i>	Larry Ellison

It is interesting to note that 11 out of the 15 the females selected are people very familiar to the participants. Although a small and non-representative sample there is a clear bias towards selecting people very familiar to the female students. This could be because they are easier to identify with and their lives more closely resonate with the participants. For example, one participant remembered the LSBU graduate who was a single mother who did the lecture for 'patents'. She was regarded as inspirational because her circumstances were similar to that of one of the participants and she too started at LSBU, she gave the participant 'hope'.

The males did not select anyone immediately known by them, again it is too small a sample to draw and definitive conclusions but this difference is interesting to note. Both the females and the males used language such as;

*"came from nothing to something"*

The males commented that it was hard to identify a particular person per se but that they respected certain traits in a range of people, and also groups of people e.g. Honda Research Institute, a group of people who have been put together by a business were inspirational.

When the females were probed further on their choices, especially on whether they were able to name and female entrepreneurs the group paused for some time before admitting that it was difficult to name any. One participant reflected that you often hear about their businesses but you don't know the owner, male entrepreneurs are more in the limelight and get more attention.

### **Suggested activities and their delivery**

The groups were asked to suggest an ideal Student Enterprise Week and were asked to consider the type and delivery of activities. The following suggestions were made:

Extra support activities run in the afternoons, networking workshops, CV workshops, confidence building workshops e.g. for interviews and presentations, empowering women, challenges (complete with prizes), ability to learn skills totally different to course.

The time would be afternoon, e.g. lunchtime, not after 5pm due to other commitments or travel time, they should also ideally not clash with classes. It was suggested they would be part of the curriculum due to their importance as they are key transferable skills (e.g. how you present yourself to others impacts every interaction)

As previously stated, the workshop approach is engaging but whether the focus would be on skills and start-up would depend on the type of activity being run.

## Summary of key themes

		F	M
Family	Central to student's lives, helping out with their businesses or looking after them.	✓	
	Running their own business would enable them to have flexibility to support their family	✓	
Perceptions of SE	extra learning activities for students	✓	
	provides new skills (e.g. communication, writing)	✓	
	builds on existing skills	✓	✓
	helps with what studying at the moment	✓	
	helps with CV	✓	✓
	enables you to decide pathway in life e.g. informs you about being an entrepreneur or freelancer	✓	
	useful for when applying for placements		✓
	to make you more competitive and distinct in the market place		✓
	hearing from others about how they made their decisions in life	✓	
Boosting awareness and participation	make it compulsory to attend events	✓	✓
	word of mouth, by students or academics as people do not check their emails	✓	
	offer incentives to attend events e.g. amazon voucher	✓	✓
	talk about how useful it could be	✓	
	ensure timings do not class with other academic/non-academic commitments	✓	
	1:1 conversations (e.g. with an entrepreneur)	✓	
	Delivery by interactive workshops more attractive to the group than lectures as they are a break from the norm but are also confidence buildings as it enables self-expression and try out what they were learning		
	Pitch the events so they are clearly differentiated from normal day to day lectures.	✓	
	Eventbrite – to alert as to when certain events are happening because at the moment have to login, also clarify that events are interactive and not lectures (explicitly state 'this is not a lecture')	✓	
	Provide refreshments at events	✓	
	personalised emails		✓
	Consider branding of SE as 'Student Enterprise' as a name does not capture what it's about	✓	
Academics as brokers	Academics are key in getting student to events and services around LSBU	✓	✓
	Most academics do not talk about events and services taking place across LSBU	✓	✓
	tutors can be inspirational	✓	✓
	However, students listen to academics and are influenced by them	✓	✓
Confidence	Becoming confident is a journey	✓	
	When unconfident it can make you less flexible	✓	
	Being put out of one's comfort zone in a safe zone is a good way to build on self confidence	✓	✓
Role model	'Inspiring' was a common theme cited for why they chose a particular role model	✓	✓
	Struggled to name anyone specifically, more about traits seen in people		✓
	Mostly people cited those who they knew personally as a role model	✓	
	Struggled to name female entrepreneurs	✓	N/A
Suggested activities/timings	networking workshops	✓	
	CV workshops	✓	



	confidence building workshops e.g. for interviews and presentations	✓	
	empowering women	✓	
	challenges (complete with prizes)	✓	✓
	work with people from different courses	✓	✓
	events away from the university (e.g. London College of Fashion event)		✓
	ability to learn skills totally different to course	✓	
	lunchtime, not after 5pm due to other commitments or travel time	✓	
	exercises where one is put on the spot, to emulate real life situations		✓
	get a larger than life 'Wolf of Wall Street' type character in for a talk		✓
Running business in future	Concerned about the risk in running own business		✓
	unsure		✓
	yes, very likely	✓	✓