**Self-selecting Entrepreneurial Students: Reflecting on a University Selection Event.**

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**Key Words: Student recruitment, retention, self-selection, student satisfaction, entrepreneurial**

**Abstract**

**Objectives: This case study examines the development, design and staff perspectives of selection events for an undergraduate degree in Entrepreneurial Business Management. Aspects of design and delivery promoting student self-selection and individual assessment of fit are described which are intended to have a positive impact on recruitment and retention.**

**Prior Work: This work-based programme is based on the Finnish ‘Team Academy’ model** (Tiimiakatemia, 2013) **where participants work in teams as business owners and learning takes place in the context of establishing and managing those businesses. It was introduced at Northumbria University in September 2013 and, since its introduction, events have been held to support the recruitment of three consecutive student cohorts. This study focuses on the most recent sets of two one-day events conducted in March 2014 and March 2015.**

**The selection events were developed to provide an immersive experience that informed, inspired and energised prospective candidates so as to increase ‘best-fit’ enrolment, optimise their course selection and career development decisions, and enable better informed self-selection.**

**Literature exploring the themes of the growth of entrepreneurial education, the importance of ‘fit’ between HE programmes and applicants, factors impacting enrolment and admission decisions and why UCAS points alone may not offer a satisfactory criteria for the selection of prospective entrepreneurial students have been reviewed.**

**Approach: A mixed method was adopted taking quantitative information from a brief applicant satisfaction questionnaire, and qualitative data drawn from the reflections of staff members involved in the selection events, including some of the authors.**

**Results: Applicant data indicated the events had been interesting, useful and enjoyable and offered several ways in which future events could be enhanced. From a staff member perspective, there were concerns about how well the team working and coaching aspects of the programme were conveyed.**

**Implications and Value: This case study will be of interest to those developing selection events for undergraduate programmes for which traditional academic performance and UCAS application forms serve as imperfect means of discriminating between applicants. Shifting the pressure of the selection decision from the programme team to the applicants may help to achieve a better student:programme fit, and it is likely that events which allow for two-way selection decisions will prove to be most operationally realistic.**

**This case study encapsulates the early research stage of a longitudinal study to track applicants through the selection process to eventual graduation and post-graduation. Although small-scale, the findings reported here would indicate that there may be merit in selection events which enable self-selection across a range of this type of non-traditional programmes.**

**Introduction**

**The objective of this case study is to share the development, design and staff perspectives on recent selection events for an undergraduate degree in Entrepreneurial Business Management. Reflecting on these events, the purpose of this paper is to communicate aspects of design and delivery which are likely to have a positive impact on recruitment and future retention rates.**

**BA (Hons) Entrepreneurial Business Management (EBM) is a three year undergraduate programme based on the Finnish ‘Team Academy’ model** (Tiimiakatemia, 2013) **where participants work in teams as business owners and learning takes place in the context of establishing and managing those businesses. It was introduced at Northumbria University in September 2013 and, since its introduction, events have been held to support the recruitment of three consecutive student cohorts. This study focuses on the most recent sets of two one-day events conducted in March 2014 and March 2015.**

**The selection events were developed to provide an immersive experience that informed, inspired and energised prospective candidates so as to increase ‘best-fit’ enrolment, optimise their course selection and career development decisions, and enable better informed self-selection.**

**This case study may be of value to those developing selection events for similar undergraduate programmes for which traditional academic performance and UCAS application forms serve as imperfect means of discriminating between applicants.**

**Results are based on a brief satisfaction questionnaire completed by the candidates, and the reflections of staff members involved in the selection events, including some of the authors. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four staff members, two of whom were directly involved in the development of the event as well as the delivery, and two who were not involved in the development of the events, but helped to facilitate them on the day.**

**Future work will track applicants through the selection process to eventual graduation and post-graduation enabling conclusions to be drawn regarding the success (or otherwise) of these events using a quantitative approach. The findings reported here in the meantime would indicate that there is merit in selection events which enable self-selection for this type of non-traditional entrepreneurial programme.**

**Student Higher Education Entry Decisions and Entrepreneurship Programmes**

The growing demand for more entrepreneurs has engendered a proliferation of entrepreneurship education programmes, which aim to assist aspiring entrepreneurs ‘learn’ entrepreneurship. According to some, the heightened need for flexibility and adaptability in a global economic environment creates a demand in the labour market for graduates with an innovative mind-set who are equipped to think on their feet (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2012, Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, 2013, and Volkmann, Wilson, Marlotti et al., 2009). If entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial approaches are the key to unlocking a vibrant and sustainable economy, then in turn, entrepreneurship education, which has expanded considerably over recent decades (Matlay & Carey, 2007), has an important role to perform. This section synthesises and updates some of our recent work (e.g. Pugalis, Round, Blackwood et al., 2015, Blackwood, Hatt, Pugalis et al., 2014)

Countering some popular (mis)conceptions, Drucker (1982, p. 143) contends that entrepreneurship is ‘not magic; it’s not mysterious; and it has nothing to do with genes. It’s a discipline and, like any discipline, it can be learned’. Demand has risen for training schemes and educational programmes to inspire and cultivate the next generation of entrepreneurs. Over recent decades and, particularly during the past five to ten years, new programmes and modes of learning have been pioneered with the goal of helping aspiring entrepreneurs to ‘learn’ entrepreneurship (Drucker, 1982 and Thompson, 2010) [[1]](#footnote-1) (Pugalis, Round, Blackwood et al., 2015). From this perspective, universities (as well as other educational providers amongst numerous others) could be viewed as, what Thompson (2010) refers to as, ‘entrepreneurship enablers’.

**Interpretations of ‘entrepreneurs’ are manifold, and definitions remain contested. Thus, any Higher Education selection event devised to identify potential applicants with entrepreneurial qualities, coupled with academic excellence is fraught with difficulties. To overcome this challenge, the programme has relied heavily on *self-selection* to recruit the next generation of entrepreneurs.**

Research into Higher Education and student retention tends to emphasise the student experience and quality of learning and teaching, rather than the effectiveness of selection processes. The value of organisational gains from improved selection methods can be significant (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998) . O'Neill, Christensen, Vonsild et al., (2014) acknowledge a pressing need for more research on effective practice which promotes student retention, including admission procedures and the importance of ‘fit’ i.e. a sufficient match between applicants and programs or institutions.

Changes in Western European societies in recent years have witnessed an increasingly market-based, consumerist ideology in relation to Higher Education entry (Clarke, 2007, McLaughlin, 2009, and Brown, 2013). Nevertheless, financial gain is not the only, or even the preeminent, motive for entrepreneurs’ decisions to start new ventures (Amit, MacCrimmon, Zietsma et al., 2001); nor should it be assumed that it is central to the decision to enrol on a relevant entrepreneurship degree programmes.

The literature on students’ decisions about whether, what and where to study in Higher Education confirms that these are highly complex and, that even when economic rationality does play a part, it is heavily mediated by social context (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). For example, Kember, Ho & Hong (2010) found six ‘clusters’ of motivation for university entry; ‘compliance’ (a belief that university entry is ‘normal’ or expected), individual goals, a desire to experience the university lifestyle, seeking a sense of belonging through Higher Education (within the family, peer group or educational setting), career reasons (including both financial gain and interest in a particular type of work) and subject interest. None of these corresponds to a straightforward rational economic approach and, while most students, in the study by Kember and colleagues, were predisposed towards one type or another, few could be positioned unequivocally in one ‘cluster’. This was particularly marked in the relationship between subject interest and financial outcomes:

‘*All 36… had one or more comments coded as career or financial. Yet 28 of them also made statements coded in the ‘interest’ category. It was clear that enrolers wanted both good career prospects and a field of study that interested them. There were clear cases of the two mutually reinforcing one another*’ (Kember, Ho & Hong, 2010, p. 273).

Some findings from the disciplinary perspectives of economics (Camerer, Loewenstein, & Rabin, 2003, Augier & Kreiner, 2000, and Menon, 2004) and economic sociology (Callon, 1998, Dobbin, 2004, and Barbalet, 2010) also suggest that economic rationality rarely provides sufficient explanation, and that both social and psychological factors perform a substantial role. Individuals, for example, may prioritise identity and interpersonal factors above material gain (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010), or base their calculations and decisions on social conventions rather than financial outcomes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, Favereau & Lazega, 2002). In addition, the inherent ‘openness’ of the future renders the calculation of ‘optimal choices’ impractical (Beckert, 2002, and Orléan, 2012). Less research is available on the impact of pedagogical style of the programme on application decisions, unsurprising given that the vast majority of Higher Educational programmes use similarly traditional pedagogical approaches.

To the extent that economic rationality does operate, students may act ‘rationally’ in order to satisfy their ‘tastes’ for particular kinds of programmes rather than to maximise their long-term income in the labour market (Morgan, Gelbgise, & Weeden, 2013, p. 1001, and Wright, 2014, p. 89). A programme and associated career path may be chosen partly because it is perceived to offer attractive remuneration and/or security, but these considerations are no more important than other factors, such as, perceived status, family and lifestyle preferences, and identity issues (Montmarquette, Cannings, & Mahseredjian, 2002, Germeijs, Luyckx, Notelaers et al., 2012, Hilmer & Hilmer, 2012, and Esbroeck, Tibos, & Zaman, 2005). Even writers such as Rothstein & Rouse (2011) or Arcidiacono, Hotz, & Kang (2012), who argue that economic rationality in relation to projected future earnings strongly influences selection of college major among US students, note that choices are based on knowledge gained and interpreted through specific social circumstances. It is such ‘filtering’ systems that explain why many university applicants are not drawn to corporate banking or similar courses affiliated with exceptionally high financially remunerated career paths.

Social factors and beliefs about the purpose and culture of Higher Education filter the range of programmes and institutions between which potential students choose (Archer, Leathwood, & Hutchings, 2002, Ball, Reay, & David, 2002, Bowde & Doughney, 2012, Brooks, 2003, Reay, David, & Ball, 2005, and Voigt, 2007). Even for highly vocational courses ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ motivations for course choice are both important (Byrne, Flood, Hassall et al., 2012, p. 136), as are the self-development and social opportunities offered by Higher Education (Byrne, Flood, Hassall et al., 2012, p. 140).

Beckert (2013, p. 236) suggests that to manage uncertainty and make decisions with an economic component (such as choosing a course or career), economic actors construct ‘imagined future states’ which ‘take narrative forms as stories, theories and discourses’, and influence both actions and decisions made in the ‘present’ . Particular types of ‘imagined futures’ may also act as a source of creativity in the economy (Beckert, 2013, p. 220) and entrepreneurship can be seen as residing in the freedom and uncertainty where choices are made between experiences which are as yet only imagined (Beckert, 2013, p. 232). The notion of an ‘imagined future’ is also used in research into educational and employment transitions and the decisions made during these periods (Ball, Reay & David, 1999), to explore the ways in which choices and plans are positioned by class and gender, located in particular places and times, and constrained by beliefs about what is possible and legitimate (Aynsley & Crossouard, 2010). Accounts of ‘imagined futures’ do not necessarily reflect concrete plans or determined pathways, but represent as ‘“questioning exploration[s]” which shed light on how these young people may make their way through the world’ (Lyon & Crow, 2012, p. 503). These ‘explorations’ are grounded in individual social contexts and experiences, which include ‘levelling’ commonalities (such as participation in a degree programme) but have also been shaped over previous years by the students’ experiences and backgrounds. Thus they express students’ ‘understanding of their present time worlds and the possibilities they see for [young people] like themselves’ (Sanders & Munford, 2008, p. 331).

Students’ social backgrounds, including categories such as class, gender, ethnicity as well as experiences outside university, shape both choices about university entry and postgraduate aspirations. Research suggests that these also strongly mediate the impact on future employment of Higher Education access and attainment (Little, 2001, Furlon & Cartmel, 2005, Power, Whitty, & Edwards, 2006, and Burke, 2013) and this effect may be particularly strong for men (Delaney, Harmon & Redmond, 2011, p. 1147). Such influences also apply to students who have thoroughly internalised the ‘individualised’ discourse of employability as a function of individual effort, attainment and skills (Hesketh, 2003), and who ‘echo [this] discourse with their emphasis on their own individual skills and personal qualities and attributes.’ (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006, p. 319).

Higher Education entry decisions are influenced by complex motivations dialectically related to social contexts, of which Kember, Ho, & Hong (2010) discern at least six interrelated ‘clusters’. Therefore, such literature challenges the supremacy of economic rationality accounts – reflecting a more nuanced socio-psychological reading of entry decision-making characteristics.

As documented by Musil, Garcia, Hudgins et al., (1999) university populations are growing more diverse (at least in the USA). This is likely to impact on the kind of attributes that might be taken into account in the selection of students for Higher Education, and predications of student success.

There are continuing issues with efforts to find a universal selection tool or collection of tools for Higher Education students. In the UK, the UCAS point system is widely relied on as an objective measure and is linked to university funding criteria. Beyond that there is some reference to personal statements and individual interview but this is patchy, highly subjective and it is difficult to see what criteria are being applied and how.

Sternberg (1985) and Sternberg & Wagner (1986) have suggested three kinds of intelligence which may be useful in this context. "Componential intelligence"; the ability to interpret information in a hierarchical and taxonomic fashion in a well-defined and unchanging context; "experiential intelligence"; the ability to interpret information in changing contexts, that is, to be creative; and "contextual intelligence,"; which is to do with the ability to adapt to a changing environment, that is, the ability to handle the system. The emphasis in admission to Higher Education seems to be on *componential intelligence*, which may provide less useful assessment for non-traditional individuals than for individuals with more traditional experiences in the system. So it may be concluded that UCAS points which arguably measure componential intelligence do not offer a satisfactory criteria for prospective students of the entrepreneurial business management programme. It is very unlikely that a single measure or even set of measures could possibly be developed that would be fair in any case (Sedlacek, 2003).

Componential intelligence may be important to non-traditional people, but experiential and contextual abilities may be prerequisites (Westbrook & Sedlacek, 1988). Students that may be struggling within the school system may not have the time and energy to show their componential talents (Sedlacek, 2003).

Extant literature on the topic of self-selection for education largely centres around questions of how students select higher education courses with reference to statistical norms (Venti & Wise, 1983; Willis & Rosen, 1979) , and what impact these processes have, for instance, on wage disparities in the labour market (Ordine & Rose, 2011). The term *self-selection* is described in the context of job application processes by Ryan, Sacco, McFarland & Kriska (2000) who use it to distinguish between the decision process from the perspective of the employer, which they call ‘selection’ and the decision process from the perspective of the applicant which they call ‘self-selection’. All of these uses of the term *self-selection* refer to the process whereby a potential student or job applicant opts for or against one education option or job option from among a range of possible choices. By contrast, in the current article, we develop a concept of self-selection which deliberately seeks to reverse this perspective. Rather than focusing on the candidate’s assessment of the desirability of one course among others, we focus on the candidate’s self-assessment of their own potential to succeed on one particular course, when considering themselves alongside other candidates for the course.

The above review of relevant literature provides a conceptual basis for the context of selecting for the EBM programme. In summary, there is little to suggest a satisfactory way of selecting students for non-traditional university programmes and much to suggest that students select university programmes based on a wide variety of factors which include social contexts. Therefore there is much to support an approach which places the emphasis firmly on self-selection.

**Research Context**

Not too dissimilar to numerous other educational institutions (James & Clark, 1998, Oatley, 1998, and Scott, 2009), the English university which provided the institutional setting for the research analysed in this paper is keen to contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of its region. Therefore, launching the EBM programme in 2013 was a key element of the university’s role as ‘entrepreneurship enabler’ (Thompson, 2010). EBM is intended to be innovative and is marketed externally and internally as employing a flexible, work-based, learning model designed to accelerate participants’ development of entrepreneurial and business management competencies.

Consistent with other ‘non-traditional’ entrepreneurship programmes, EBM seeks to break the mould of the more generic ‘text-book teaching’ business management courses available around the world. It takes inspiration from an approach developed at Finland’s Jyväskylä University of Applied Science’s ‘Team Academy’ in which participants work in teams to set up and manage businesses, whereby they are encouraged to ‘think and behave like entrepreneurs.’ (Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, 2016, p. 1) and learn together through identifying commercial opportunities, developing plans to exploit these, and managing the resulting activities. Although EBM is distinct from the Finnish model in several ways, each programme promotes the virtues of ‘learning by doing’. Indeed, they could be considered to adopt an ‘earn while you learn’ philosophy as participants are tasked with initiating and subsequently operating and diversifying *their* own business venture (by way of team-based collaboration).[[2]](#footnote-2)

Together with augmenting the university’s role as an ‘entrepreneurship enabler’, EBM was initiated as a direct response to the demand for entrepreneurship education to increase both the number of entrepreneurial start-ups, and entrepreneurial behaviour of employees and other economic actors (Anderson, Culkin, Penaluna et al., 2014, p. 8). Consequently, the programme is designed to appeal to those with aspirations to set up and run their own business, *or* those who wish to enhance their employability through developing knowledge and capabilities valued by graduate employers of all shapes, sizes and sectors.

To support a philosophy of ‘learning by doing’ and the principle of ‘earn why you learn’, programme participants establish businesses in teams and learning takes place in the context of managing those entrepreneurial activities. Team Companies are legally incorporated with all student members having an equal share ownership.[[3]](#footnote-3) The EBM programme also acknowledges the social nature of learning and there is much emphasis on working in teams as a means of enhancing learning through a shared approach, involving collaboration, relationship-building and networking. Each Team Company also has its own dedicated and self-managed business space, which is situated off-campus alongside other new start-up businesses.

Learning rather than teaching is emphasised and this is facilitated by a team coaching approach. Knowledge developed during the programme is applied in practice as a means of supporting business development as well as promoting deeper learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007). Work experience is gained through participants launching and managing *their* own team-based entrepreneurial endeavours, offering the potential to *earn while they learn*. Participants’ learning is summatively assessed using written assignments and oral presentations (both individual and team based), although it is worth stressing that the commercial success of the entrepreneurial endeavours of particular Team Companies is not a component of the assessment framework.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Designing the Selection Events**

**The research departed from the above review of relevant literature concerned with the utility of selection events, and collaboration by the programme management team with existing students to review the design of previous selection events. Volunteers from the current two cohorts of students on the EBM programme were sought using word of mouth and the programme’s Facebook page. A group of five students from both cohorts met twice with the Programme leader. At the first meeting, an informal review of previous selection events was conducted with students relating their personal experiences of what had worked and what had not. Clearly this group was biased in that all had ultimately applied, been accepted and had enrolled on the programme. Previous selection events had clearly ‘worked’ for them. Nevertheless there were aspects which they felt had been more helpful and aspects that had not.**

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| **Positive aspects from previous EBM selection events** | **Detrimental Aspects of previous EBM selection events** |
| **Seeing the business premises (studio space for student business projects)** | **The competitive atmosphere – participants felt they had been pitted against each other for limited places on the programme and this had constrained their behaviour** |
| **Watching a promotional Timiiakatemia video – “Team Academy Comes to the UK.”** | **Too much time waiting around, not enough to do** |
| **Meeting other prospective students of the programme** | **Lack of clarity around nature of the Team Company and the extent of team working on the programme** |

**In addition there were a number of ideas that the group felt would enhance the events and place further emphasis on self-selection. These were:**

* **Increased interaction with current students on the EBM programme**
* **Experience of collaborative team working**
* **Explicit description of the Team Company arrangements**
* **“a week in the life” to help prospective applicants appreciate the extent of the differences between this programme and more traditional programmes.**

**At the subsequent meeting, the proposed changes were shared and responsibilities for the facilitation of various aspects of the events were agreed.**

**The revised selection events were therefore developed as follows:**

* **Five current students volunteered and attended both days (held on the Monday and Friday of one week), they were paid the standard rate for University Open Day support. Throughout the days, current students played a much more prominent role than on previous events.**
* **Instructions for pre-work were more prescriptive and supportive (applicants were asked to submit an outline business plan for an original business idea). However, in contrast to previous events, this work was not used to evaluate the applicants, but will be used during the programme induction in September. This was explained to the candidates on the Selection Events. The purpose of this pre-work was to distinguish between the more ‘serious’ candidates and those just applying on a whim. Those failing to complete and submit the pre-work as instructed were essentially withdrawing their application for the programme – a negative form of self-selection. In addition it was hoped that those that completed and submitted their pre-work were deepening their psychological commitment to the programme and would be more likely to enrol.**
* **Applicants were also asked to complete the GETV2** (Caird, 2015) **test on line in advance of the days and to bring a print out of their results with them. Again this was not intend for use in evaluating the candidates, but to stimulate reflection, and encourage them to either withdraw their application should the test cause them to think that they perhaps were more suited to other programmes, or to deepen their resolve to enrol on the EBM programme. The test results are also potentially a source of useful research data for a future longitudinal study of students on the EBM programme.**
* **Meet and greet in the Business School with tea and coffee and a chance to chat informally to other applicants and staff and students from current two cohorts.**
* **Presentation in a lecture theatre. The purpose of this part of the days was to share information and also to contrast a typical business school learning environment with what they would experience later when they visited their prospective business studio project spaces. Presentations were made by the Programme Director and Programme Leader, and also two current students on the programme. Applicants also heard from a student on the original Team Academy programme in Finland who was visiting the UK at the time on an Erasmus programme.**
* **A tour of the university campus lead by current programme students, ending at the Northern Design Centre in Gateshead, the current home of the programme with lunch.**
* **Over lunch, prospective and current students completed a light-hearted quiz about Team Academy philosophy and the EBM programme. The questions were developed to encourage the exchange of information and general discussion.**
* **Following lunch, applicants participated in two concurrent activities – a group interview and a team exercise.**
* **A series of questions were developed in advance by the programme management team for the group interview. Interviews were conducted by a mixed panel consisting of programme staff members and current students of the programme. Interviewers and interviewees were arranged in a circle, so as to be as relaxed and informal as possible, with no clear demarcation between applicants and panel members. Despite this, some candidates were clearly nervous, so a further improvement to the days may be to remove the word “interview” and replace it with a less loaded alternative. Panel members took it in turns to ask the questions and an effort was made to hear from each applicant, encouraging the less forthcoming to speak and to take turns in giving the first response to a question. It was noted by some panel members that all applicants appeared to be highly influenced by the response of the first respondent – either voicing complete agreement, or (less often) voicing a completely opposing view.**
* **The group exercise consisted of the “marshmallow challenge”** (Wujec, 2010)**. I**n eighteen minutes, teams were asked to build the tallest free-standing structure out of 20 sticks of spaghetti, one metre of tape, metre yard of string, and one marshmallow (on the top). This exercise was chosen as it required teams of applicants to work together to achieve the task, the competitive element was between groups, not individuals and intended only to add more fun to the exercise. Members of the programme team observed the exercise but did not evaluate individual contribution or participation.
* The days ended with a large group facilitated discussion, where any remaining questions were answered and current students of the programme presented some of their ongoing business projects. Some video footage made by current students was also used with lively background music to maintain energy levels.
* After thefirst day a satisfaction questionnaire was developed and administrated on the second day to gauge opinion (See Appendix 1). Participants were asked how likely they would be to apply to the programme following the event. Of the 15 attendees, 14 responded to this question and of those; 13 indicated that they would definitely (73%) or probably (13%) apply. This question was asked not only for its face value, but also again to strengthen the psychological commitment of the prospective applicants to the programme, so that those who deemed the programme a good fit would also follow through with the application process, enrol on the programme and engage fully with it on commencement.
* It was stated repeatedly throughout the event that the applicants were the best people to decide their own suitability for the programme, the purpose of the event was primarily to give them a realistic programme overview to enable them to make a well informed application decision. Following these days, those eventually enrolling onto the EBM programme are more likely to be those applicants who were the most suitable for it, and who are likely to flourish.

**Findings**

**Of the 33 applicants attending the selection events, all were offered places and all accepted. 17 went on to achieve the pre-requisite UCAS tariff and enrolled on the programme, a further four who were unable to attend either event were enrolled, along with five students transferring into the programme having completed one year of another programme at the same university. It is too early to measure the success or otherwise of the emphasis on self-selection in terms of academic success or achievements post graduation (number of business start ups for example). The candidate views represented in the satisfaction survey are presented here, along with views of staff members involved on the day. These two perspectives are presented here in this case study.**

**Satisfaction Survey**

**15 candidates completed the Satisfaction Survey at the end of the second selection event (see Appendix 1). Candidates rated the group task as the most interesting, useful and enjoyable part of the day, with the group interview rated similarly. Clearly the interactive, participative events were valued the most highly. This is echoed in the qualitative feedback where the opportunity to meet and interact with existing students was highly appreciated. The opening and closing presentations, and lunch discussions and quiz achieved weighted averages of over 80% and the tour scored the lowest. It is not clear why this was the case as no further qualitative comments were made to explain the score. A possible explanation may be that many participants had already attended open-days for the University and the tour was an unnecessary repetition. Some candidates found the overall pace of the event too slow and would have liked to have replaced some of the presentations with more interactive activities.**

**The remainder of this section reflects staff members’ perspectives gathered by interview, following the selection events.**

**Potential candidates’ experience of the selection events**

**Staff reporting their reflections of the event believed that the experience of the candidates was felt to be positive and enjoyable. This was evidenced by the extent of participation and engagement. There was a comfortable high-energy atmosphere with candidates socialising well with each other and the existing students. There seemed to be a high level of curiosity about the programme as evidenced by the quantity of questions asked. This was regarded as not typical of other selection events where the atmosphere was described as a little intimidating and where candidates may have been reluctant to ask questions for fear of “looking stupid”. It is always challenging to get genuine opinion from candidates in a selection decision making situation and their answers must always be regarded with caution – candidates are likely to temper their behaviours according to what they think will be most likely to secure them an offer on the programme.**

**Aspects of the day that worked particularly well and areas for improvement**

**Candidates appeared to enjoy the team exercise most as it was the more participative and interactive element of the day. The fact that individuals were not competing with each other was felt to be a factor that enabled them to relax and have fun. Activities that allow applicants to develop relationships with each other are very important, as arguably enrolment decisions will be based on a number of objective and subjective factors, including the extent of a sense of ‘belonging’ with fellow programme applicants. Group interviews appeared to work well as they gave an insight into how applicants behaved interpersonally and also they allowed applicants to influence each other positively about the programme. The interview setting gave applicants a feeling of being ‘tested’ to some extent. Arguably participants are more likely to value an offer of a university place if they feel they have earned it.**

**There were some technological glitches which interrupted the smooth flow of events and added delays, for example the sound on a couple of videos had to be ultimately broadcast through separate PC speakers rather than the event space’s PA system. The information sharing sessions were still felt to be too long from both the perspective of the staff interviewed, and the satisfaction survey results, and risked over loading the applicants with data they were unable to take in. This seemed particularly true at the end of the day, when candidates were tired. Group interviews felt “interviewer-heavy” in relation to the number of candidates, without a clear plan for which questions or topics specific interviewers should raise. It was not wholly clear whether these were intended as round table discussions, or genuine group interviews.**

**Opportunities to further improve the selection event**

**In future, even better use could be made of current students on the programme as participants clearly valued the involvement of existing students as evidenced by their comments on the Satisfaction Surveys. Current students could take a lead on the design of the day and run the exercises themselves, taking more ownership for the events. The amount of time spent in small group sessions could be increased; giving control to the applicants would also counter some of the need to share unrequested information about the programme by encouraging questions about it. This aligns with one of the core elements of the pedagogic approach of the EBM programme in encouraging participants to take responsibility for their own learning. The importance of relationships is a crucial facet of entrepreneurial competency. Those relationships developed during the event were no exception. Indeed further changes could be incorporated to promote additional relationship building both pre and post selection event. The word “interview” appeared to have caused some applicants to be anxious according to some staff members on the day, and it may be appropriate to find a less nerve-inducing alternative.**

**Explicit nature of self-selective intent of the day**

**Members of the staff team that had been involved in the development of the design for the days were aware the self-selective intent; however those who did not contribute to their design, were not. It was widely known on the day, according to the staff members interviewed, that there was no real competition for places – but that could be explained by the fact that it was made it clear that the programme was unlikely to be oversubscribed rather than because the university was not making comparisons between candidates. This aspect is worthy of further consideration bearing in mind the part that competitive aggressiveness is believed to play in the success of new venture creation and Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) at both an individual and societal level** (Lee & Peterson, 2001)**. There was some concern from a member of staff, that this approach may not be sustainable, should the programme continue to grow in popularity as intended, and they also assumed that some selection on behalf of the university would therefore become essential beyond the usual UCAS point requirements..**

**In order for applicants to really self-select (rather than simply coming to a view about whether they like the course), they would need to be aware of the criteria for selection. So for instance, how important is an inclination towards competition, compared to co-operation? And what is the gender split here? Or, how might applicants assess their own suitability for team learning, compared to individual learning?**

**Overall staff views of the events**

**Although largely successful in giving potential applicants a taster of the programme and its distinctive pedagogy, there were concerns about how well the team working aspect of the programme was conveyed. It was felt that there was room for the selection events for this programme to be more distinctive still, and this might be achieved through further, more extensive involvement of current students of the programme. Selection events may be usefully supplemented with more advance ‘immersion’ in the pedagogical philosophy of the Team Academy approach, achieved by inviting applicants to visit the programme for a day and participate in routine events such as team meetings and coaching sessions. The emphasis on coaching in the programme needs to be made clearer before it can be argued that applicants are making truly well informed enrolment decisions.**

**Self-selection in this context appears to require a reflexive process of self-evaluation, and this is in itself an aspect of immersion in the context of a programme which requires continual reflexivity at both individual and team levels.**

**Implications**

**It is anticipated that the modified approach emphasising self-selection will help to ensure that future participants are better suited to what is a challenging learning environment. Shifting the pressure of the selection decision from the programme team to the applicants, may help to achieve a better student:programme fit, and consequently the need for an effective universal selection tool set may be reduced.**

**However, exclusive reliance on self-selection is unlikely to be sustainable should applicant numbers continue to rise and those meeting the minimum UCAS points requirement increase. In circumstances in which demand for the programme significantly exceeds the places available, events which allow for a two-way selection decision to be made are likely to be most operationally realistic, although this requires empirical substantiation.**

**Having reflected on the selection events, staff believed that future events should be designed to:**

* **Maximise involvement and ownership of current students of the programme**
* **Convey more fully the most distinctive aspects of the Team Academy pedagogical features including coaching and team working.**
* **Reduce the amount of time participants spend passively listening, and maximise opportunities for participation and involvement.**
* **Support the development of relationships between applicants, between applicants and current students, and between applicants and the programme management team.**
* **Reduce the risk of applicants perceiving competition between individuals as this was considered detrimental to the formation of constructive collaborative working relationships.**

**These factors will be taken into account when designing future events in order to help ensure that those joining the programme are best equipped to thrive in a learning environment which, while designed to enhance learning, is likely to be challenging for many.**

**Value**

The findings are of potential value to educational providers wishing to improve student satisfaction and retention rates, especially those managing recruitment to work-based and non-traditional programmes.

**Further Research**

**This case study encapsulates the early research stage of a longitudinal study to track applicants through the selection process to eventual graduation and post-graduation.**

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Appendix 1



1. The use of the term ‘aspiring entrepreneurs’ is applied in this paper to denote that programme participants have aspirations to be ‘entrepreneurs’ in the broadest sense (i.e. not necessarily confined to establishing/running their own business). However, it is not intended to downplay their existing entrepreneurship experience. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The term ‘earn while you learn’ was coined by the Student Start-up Scheme being jointly managed by the University of Dundee’s Enterprise Gym and its Student Association. The phrase is invoked in this case study to describe the notion of learning entrepreneurship by practising entrepreneurship. This should not be misinterpreted as an indication that EBM participants necessarily expect to generate enough profit from their enterprising activities during the three-year programme to off-set tuition fees, living costs and other expenses. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It is important to note that neither the university nor the coaches have any financial stake in Team Companies. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This section is adapted from prior published work of the authors, see Pugalis, Round, Blackwood et al., (2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)