

Enterprise Bridge – Post-Prototype Workshop Report

What is Enterprise Bridge?

Enterprise Bridge is a career and employability themed one-day workshop for PGRs that enhances their enterprise and consulting skills. Uniquely, it combines the input of real businesses with that of small teams of PGRs acting as consultants. Business problems and challenges are donated by the companies who also give up their time to meet with the PGRs, describe their problem and then receive a short presentation. The presentation is researched, written and produced by a small PGR team addressing their specific challenge.



This innovative workshop was delivered on the 29th of July by Dr Richard Hinchcliffe (University of Liverpool), Mr Geoff Banks and Ms Fiona Geng (external consultants) at the University of Liverpool. Nine PGRs attended split into four teams who then considered the challenges donated by four local small to medium enterprises: [Iliad](#), [Hambleton UK Ltd](#), [The Art School Restaurant](#) and [Homecarers Liverpool](#).

Enterprise Bridge – the USP

Enterprise Bridge is a joint collaboration between the university and the business community. The success of the workshop derives from the professional partnership's desire to directly address the cultural, economic and conceptual gap that is commonly said to exist between the world of academia and the non-academic workplace. Hence *Enterprise Bridge* spans the infamous 'Valley of Death' that the UK Government sees as representing the failure of research ideas in the UK to transplant to the marketplace.



Why does it work?

The win-win is that postgraduate researchers want the experience of meeting employers to show them they are good at solving problems, good with ideas and are quick and efficient colleagues producing tangible outputs. Businesses are interested in fast, detailed and accurate information and data that addresses specific problems. They also appreciate the opportunity to meet talented potential employees and see their skills in action.

Feedback

The feedback on the event from all participants was highly encouraging and extremely positive with the employer rating the workshop eight or nine out of ten and all the PGRs rating the workshop ten out of ten. Employers said they valued the *'fresh outlook from the PGRs,'* the *'solutions they provided'* and *'the opportunity to think and bounce ideas - to network with the researchers and offer input.'*

Participants said they appreciated *'the opportunity to talk to company representatives'* and the *'teamwork and pitching for real life problems.'* *'Teamwork and consulting with real-world customers'*

was also re-iterated in the feedback. All of the employers considered it a worthwhile day. They were interested in 'Potential candidate's CVs' and 'internship and work experience opportunities.' One industry colleague commented: 'I feel the workshop was a fantastic opportunity to both empower students and the opportunity to discover new directions for our business expansion goals.'

What Next?

Enterprise Bridge is a collaborative venture between the University of Liverpool and Mr Geoff Banks and Ms Fiona Geng, external consultants representing the business community. It has always been envisaged that it can be flexibly delivered to service the needs of PGRs and local employers anywhere. However, more deliveries will be offered to the Liverpool Doctoral College through the PGR Development Programme in the academic year 16/17 for groups of interdisciplinary postgraduate researchers. It can also be delivered to Doctoral Training Centres (DTC) with the advantage that the preliminary recruitment and preparation of prospective business partners could include those already engaged with the DTC or assist to recruit others. In this case business challenges could cover areas within the research focus, although this is not essential.



For the full potential of *Enterprise Bridge* to be realised it is important that there is quick and effective follow-up to both the businesses and the participants as the event is likely to create opportunities for further consultation, networking and work experience. It is important therefore that there is close liaison with the Careers and Employability Service, the Liverpool Doctoral College and Business Gateway. It is also important that there is feedback regarding

individual PGR involvement to their supervisors who may be needed to authorise future consultation with the business and exploit any potential impact opportunities.

Liverpool Doctoral College PGR Placement Scheme

One proposal receiving confirmed interest is to use *Enterprise Bridge* as an introductory event for PGR placements. This would work for both the PGR and for employers. There are two ways in which the LDC scheme currently works:

1. Organisations can put an idea forward for a 15 day placement through an expression of interest form and which the LDC develops it and advertises it through the LDC intranet. The placement opportunities then go out to all our PGRs who apply and the partner organisation can be as involved as they like. The PGR's expenses are met through a bursary paid for by their School or Institute. There is no financial cost to the company.
2. The dual student/partner method of application is where students and external partners apply for the student to receive a placement bursary (again, provided by School or Institute) to carry out a 15 day placement.

Enterprise Bridge would ideally be a means by which the PGR and the project for the placement could be formed with the added benefit of the employer meeting the PGR and witnessing their skills and attributes.

Costs

This first event cost approximately £1500 for catering and the services of Mr Banks and Ms Geng. Dr Hinchcliffe's time or the development of the workshop by all three colleagues is not included. This first prototype demonstrates *Enterprise Bridge* as an effective model, valued by business and PGRs and is a unique venture. Part of its success lies with finding willing and enthusiastic small to medium businesses that understand the expectations of the event and are prepared to share their business problem with PGRs in return for their presentation. The addition of a short but considered report authored by the PGRs in the region of £500 may help to subsidise the cost.

If *Enterprise Bridge* were to be offered to another institution or to a Doctoral Training Entity an approximate fair price for the event would be £2000. This would not include the time involved in recruiting SMEs. For University of Liverpool the budgeted figure is approximately £1500 per event.

Institutional Support

For the course to meet its full potential it will need to be embraced by the wider stakeholders within the institution. In particular this would be the faculty Research and KE leads, Business Gateway, The Careers and Employability Service and the Liverpool Doctoral College. By supporting the event these stakeholders would stand to gain the following benefits:

- Increased connection with the broader business community
- Potential internship and work experience for PGRs
- Potential collaborations with employers and businesses leading to knowledge exchange possibilities
- Career and professional development for PGRs
- Ready-made workshop for Doctoral Training Centres and their industrial partners
- Potential high-profile event that enhances the reputation of the university

University Interest

If you are you would like to have a conversation about *Enterprise Bridge* please contact Dr Richard Hinchcliffe: rjh@liv.ac.uk Tel. 0151 794 3649.

Business Interest

There is already a short waiting list of businesses that would like to participate in *Enterprise Bridge*. There is also interest in both China and the United States to adapt the workshop to meet local needs and to help forge business relationships within the Liverpool area. If you are a business and you are interested in participating in *Enterprise Bridge* please contact Mr Geoff Banks: geoffbanks2298@gmail.com Tel. 07785 111513