**ABSTRACT**

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**Mind the Gap! Shifting Expectations Through**

**Entrepreneurship Education**

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**Mind the Gap! Shifting Expectations Through Entrepreneurship Education**

**ABSTRACT**

This workshop paper explores findings from a pilot, practice-based, programme that integrated a full time Masters in Entrepreneurship with an economic development-focused business incubation initiative.

The programme, which was supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) responds to the recognition that a small minority of high-growth businesses hold the key to job creation and wider prosperity (Nesta 2009) and the need for Universities to work more closely with businesses to equip graduates with entrepreneurship skills (Wilson, 2012; BIS, 2012).

In May 2015, 20 students were enrolled on the 1- year full time MA Entrepreneurship at Falmouth University. Drawing on the market-led business incubation process of the Alacrity Foundation (see <http://www.alacrityfoundation.co.uk/>) and the emancipatory pedagogical approach of Tiimiakatemia (Partanen, 2012; Pӧysӓ-Tarhonen *et al,* 2010; Tosey *et al*, 2013), the students were placed into teams of 4 from the outset, provided with market opportunities identified by industry partners, and supported through a team coaching pedagogical approach. All 20 students completed their Masters by May 2015 and by January 2016 the cohort had produced 6 incorporated businesses and attracted nearly £0.5M of private sector investment.

In recent years the label 'entrepreneur' has grown in both usage and status in the UK. Fuelled by television programmes such as 'The Apprentice' and 'Dragons' Den' , the popular imagination tends to cast the commercial entrepreneur as a lone hero(ine) who is highly competitive and ruthless in the pursuit of her/his big idea. The UK QAA (2012: 9) in its guidance on enterprise and entrepreneurship education suggests “An entrepreneur demonstrates enterprising approaches and attributes, such as creativity, vision, responsiveness to opportunity, and ambition for business growth, which are distinct from business skills and knowledge.” The academic literature (e.g. Casson, 2000; London and Morfopoulos, 2010; Malach-Pines *et al,* 2002; Mueller et al, 2012) suggests the construction of the concept of "entrepreneurship" is more complex and emergent. Bann (2009) also notes the desire to move towards self-actualisation, to share something with others and make a contribution and a sense of “ill-fitting” as common themes emerging from her research.

This paper explores some of the tensions, benefits and opportunities that exist for students, academic staff, industry mentors and investors when conflating a full-time degree and an economic driven incubation programme. It pays particular attention to if and how including formal academic accreditation alongside an intensive business incubator influences the development of entrepreneurial mind sets and capacities amongst the cohort.

Our research to date has included 9 mini focus groups conducted midway through the degree programme; a focus group with a member from each start-up conducted 6 months after programme completion; conversations with external stakeholders; and a series of reflective logs and conversations from the coaching team. A clear emerging theme is that formalising critical self-reflection through academic accreditation speeds their journey from student to effective, practicing entrepreneur. We suggest that our approach encourages the development not only of investable businesses, but also of resilient, investable management teams.

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