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Universities and Social Enterprise

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St. SCHOLASTICA'S DAY



Anchor institutions

- “Sticky capital” – fixed investments in locations
- Major employers
- Student spend significant sums
- Funding partnerships attracting investment
- Knowledge transfer and innovation in local firms
- Community projects and development

(Ehlenz, 2015)



Universities and social enterprise: conscious strategy or making it up as we go along?

- In what activities is this interaction personified?
- To what extent do HEIs pursue conscious strategy of involvement with SE as opposed to relying on individual initiatives?



UK social enterprise vs Universities

- 100,000 SEs
- 2m employees
- £6bn contribution to economy
- Diverse leadership
- Based in areas of deprivation
- ~170 HEIs
- 2.3 million students
- 400,000 employees
- Turnover £38.2 bn
- Threats on horizon



HEI – SE interactions

1. Social enterprise modules
2. Work placements with social enterprises
3. Business development labs
4. Seed funding
5. Support for start-up businesses
6. Wider enterprise support
7. Extra-curricular lectures and support
8. Staff enterprise support
9. Partnerships with local business/community
10. Research

(UUK, 2012)



Constructivist approach

- Kirzen's (1973) ideas
- Wider, systematic view of local, regional problems
- Long-term approach based on scalable solutions to broader problems

Bricoleur approach

- Based on Hayek's (1945) work
- Markets are rational and predictable
- Requires local, tacit knowledge to be successful
- Social value creation, persuasion and stakeholder participation



HEIs in our study

- 22 HEIs from England and Wales, representing 10 regions/nations
- 11 are members of the national body – Social Enterprise UK
- 11 non-members
- Mixture of traditional and newer institutions



Our study

- Bibliographical research into HEI-industry and HEI-community interaction
- Systematic survey of university media with specific search terms
- Chiefly websites, also analysis of vision/mission statements, strategy documents (not always available), and annual report/accounts (legally have to publish)
- Map activity and give value against a range of headings

Findings (1)

- All universities (members/non-members) are active with SE at least in one category
- Overall, SEUK members are 45% more active with SE than non-members
- SE interventions more likely to be combined with entrepreneurship or wider third sector than uniquely SE
- Most likely to be: hubs/incubators; support for staff/student SE projects; research centres/publications

Findings (2)

- Courses for external organisations (CPD for SE) less prevalent than those aimed at staff and students
- Almost zero visibility of SE in official high level documentation
- Supports idea of bricolage > constructivist approach
- Ever-expanding options – from seed capital to festivals to procurement policies



Next stage

Interviews with social enterprise 'activists' at up to 12 HEIs from sample

1. Uncover history/origins of what happens
2. Extent it's embedded/supported by HEI leadership
3. Develop an updated typology of interventions to share with higher education sector, and with SEUK
4. Understand/disseminate the concept of university AS social enterprise not just FOR social enterprise