

An independent study of a collaboration between Middlesex University and The Wastepack Group Ltd has identified innovative approaches within the venture, which may be of benefit to similar projects in the future.

Wastepack, a recycling services business, has supported the creation of a new Certificate in Recycling for Sustainability at Middlesex University, which is the subject of a newly published case study by Dr Laurence Solkin of City University.

Dr Solkin said: “The study examines how the relationship was created and developed and describes how value is derived from the exchange (rather than simple one directional transfer) of skills, knowledge and understanding between industry and academia”. He points out that few if any case studies have been produced to explore how such business engagement operates and that this project offers a potential model for future collaborations.

The project originated in 2004 when the growth in importance of recycling and sustainability began to generate a major requirement for management skills in these areas. Wastepack believed that there was a need for an additional practical qualification at university level that could be available across the UK as an add-on to existing management capabilities.

Wastepack wrote to all UK universities inviting expressions of interest in submitting programmes that would help to increase the UK management skills base in recycling. There was a substantial response so a two-stage selection process was designed. Seventeen first stage outline programmes were submitted. A shortlist of three universities then submitted full detailed proposals to a selection panel of external experts assembled by Wastepack. Middlesex University was selected because of the quality of its proposal and its international reputation for innovation in work based learning.

Wastepack has invested around £200,000 in this project over five years and the project was completed within the agreed budget, with all defined deliverables fulfilled by Middlesex University.

Many facets of the partnership are analysed in the case study and factors referred to by Dr

Solkin include:

- It is unusual in this world of corporate sponsorship to find support for educational provision and examples of sponsored courses are extremely rare. (In comparison with corporate chairs, buildings and institutes.)
- The two stage selection process allowed both sponsors and providers to develop their ideas and the short initial proposals were easy to complete by universities
- Wastepack wanted to focus on delivery rather than risk avoidance in the contracting process and proposed a short simple contract which the university was able to use.
- An advisory board was established to oversee the project with members drawn from across British industry and government.
- The role of the advisory board broadened and it played an important part in contributing to and validating the educational materials. The external inputs at this early stage were invaluable.
- A further component of success was the role given by both sponsor and provider to their respective project managers. Whilst reporting to their organisations they were allowed autonomy within the project, which thus developed its own specific identity.
- Clarity of purpose was significant, but other factors including mutual respect, common interest and above all shared values led to the creation of a relationship which goes well beyond simple contract fulfilment and may indicate a longer term, and hence more sustainable, model for business engagement.

Dr Solkin goes on to analyse the business profile of participants in the programme so far, its impact on them and the effect on their organisations. Case studies from four organisations are included. Dr Solkin also identifies issues arising from this project for higher education and

business and describes some unexpected outcomes.

The Certificate programme is offered by The Centre for Environment & Safety Management for Business (CESMB) at Middlesex University and is focused on learning in the workplace through workbooks and practical projects. Around 250 students have so far registered for the Certificate.

The Certificate programme is available to anyone prepared to study at post-graduate level, irrespective of any previous university education. It attracts 40 University credits and is also accredited by the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management.

Wastepack continues to support the Certificate by providing bursaries for its customers and for other organisations.