Introduction
This case story describes how a module in Volunteering and Enterprise at Leeds University Business School was used to provide students with real life experience of the work of Fairtrade through developing and managing their own entrepreneurial projects. Through their learning on the module, the students developed their potential to create sustainable value for business and society (Principle 1), delivering initiatives based on the values of global social responsibility (Principle 2). This the case story presents an example of curriculum development based on Principle 3 of creating educational opportunities that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.

The module was designed as part of the social enterprise stream of the University’s modules in enterprise and students participating in the module came from a range of disciplines. The University’s Catering Manager had championed Fairtrade within the University for several years, converting hospitality and catering provision to Fairtrade sourced goods, but was keen to make the cross over from operational priorities into academic values by engaging students in Fairtrade initiatives. As such, the Business School was knocking at an open door when we approached her about building Fairtrade into a module.

Challenge
Firstly, we were asking students who had until that point worked largely, or even exclusively, with for-profit models of business to shift to a values-based paradigm. This was addressed by acknowledging up front the module leader’s own support for the Fairtrade mission and communicating to students that although they would have to engage in initiatives designed to promote Fairtrade values they were not expected to endorse them personally. In fact, as described below, many of the students did alter their values and attitudes as a result of taking the module.

Actions taken
The project brief tasked students with raising awareness about Fairtrade, and what it stands for, within the student population. Projects had to be self-sustaining and the remit we set was intentionally broad, because students had to assess ideas, find and talk to the relevant people and work on their enterprise skills. Initiatives included getting involved with the Fairtrade Leeds Fashion Show, liaising with Fairtrade suppliers, selling Fairtrade goods on campus, and writing proposals suggesting how Fairtrade could be incorporated into modules in different subjects. They even formed a Fairtrade Society.

The University’s Fairtrade Steering Group was so impressed with the projects that they sponsored an award enabling two students to visit Tanzania for a week. During the trip, the winners accompanied a Café Direct representative on a visit to a Fairtrade coffee plantation. They picked, ground, and drank their own coffee and met people who benefit from the Fairtrade system.
Wake up and smell the coffee: Developing students’ understanding of Fairtrade through experiential learning

“Being given the opportunity to travel to Tanzania was amazing. Meeting the farmers behind the coffee beans was a strong reminder of the often forgotten individuals behind the Fairtrade initiative – seeing the human side of coffee production as opposed to the competitive commercial aspect of it which is what we had previously studied.”

Results

Student feedback indicated that even those who were not lucky enough to go to Tanzania significantly changed their attitudes and values as a result of their learning to Fairtrade:

“A big change to me is that when I buy things, the first thing that I check is whether it is Fairtrade.”

“I encourage my friends to buy Fairtrade.”

Strikingly, this attitude and value change seems not to have been confined solely to Fairtrade, but the effects also spilled over to attitudes towards volunteering:

“Completing this module has altered my behaviour and my attitudes towards volunteering.”

“I will definitely continue volunteering. You get this sense of achievement which you can’t really get from other activities.”

And to longer term career ambitions:

“I realise that I don’t want to be a part of one of these profit organisations that are really working for themselves. I would like to help and do something [with social value].”

Looking forward, a rather more prosaic issue will be fitting the module’s novel structure (originally based on day long workshops with significant input from external stakeholders) into the University timetable. As such, we are having to compromise on structure when the module returns next year but hope that this will be worth by making it accessible to a greater number of students.

The role of PRME/sustainability principles

- **Principle 1** | Providing students with opportunities to develop their potential to create sustainable value for business and society through experiential learning via real life volunteering projects.
- **Principle 2** | Incorporating values of global social responsibility directly into the learning materials and giving students opportunities to live these values through their work.
- **Principle 3** | Designing the curriculum around real life volunteering and an explicit values set.