Introduction

In 2008, discussions in the University of New England’s (UNE) Graduate School of Business (GSB) turned to the MBA curriculum and the need to ensure it equipped its graduates with the skills and knowledge to address the current challenges facing managers. The value of embedding sustainability across the course was agreed. In line with this decision, UNE took the step of becoming a signatory to the United Nations Principles for Responsible Management Education in 2009 and embarked on a journey with the anticipated destination of embedding those principles, not only within the MBA, but across the wider undergraduate and postgraduate business curriculum. In pursuing this destination, UNE has found itself on another journey to a new programme, the International MBA in Social Entrepreneurship (IMBASE).

Through a collaborative relationship with the Open University of Catalonia, an opportunity arose to pursue funding for a join degree under the ICI Education Cooperation Programme with two other universities: ESC Rennes, France, and the University of Western Sydney, the International MBA in Social Entrepreneurship (IMBASE). The purpose of the cooperation programme was to achieve course learning outcomes and mobility through collaboration between the participating institutions. In the spirit of responsible management education and social entrepreneurship, we recognised that the old model of individual institutions developing academic programmes in isolation was not sustainable in an increasingly competitive and global higher education environment, or in the best interests of our students. Rather, we needed to exercise our own social entrepreneurial skills to build a jointly branded degree drawing on the strengths of the participating institutions to deliver a single programme awarded from the four institutions, where students study together across three countries. We were advised our application was successful in July 2012.

Challenges

Through a series of preliminary video conferences between the principal investigators at the participating institutions, a Joint Management Committee (JMC) was established to oversee the development and delivery of the jointly branded degree. The JMC is made up of two representatives from each University and we met face-to-face for the first time in November 2012.

Responsible Management Education was embodied in the spirit in which participating institutions entered discussions. Each took an egalitarian and collaborative approach from the outset and initial discussions took a “blue sky” approach to the curriculum. Potential structural impediments were ignored while exploring the possibilities of the programme. The JMC arrived at learning outcomes and a course structure that were exciting to all members.

More challenging is aligning or working with the structural constraints that come from the different regulatory environments and institutional, administrative, and academic governance constraints we operate under across three countries and four institutions. These include different:
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Unanticipated Journeys in Responsible Management Education

- Fee setting models;
- Teaching periods; and
- Student and learning management systems.

We do not underestimate the challenges we face in translating our ideas to action. Social entrepreneurship is being practised by our JMC itself.

**Actions taken**

To honour the spirit of Responsible Management Education and the vision we had set for the IMBASE, the JMC took the following actions:

1. At the outset, we articulated our commitment to the practise of the values expressed in our course learning outcomes. We are committed to "walking the talk," or knowledge by example.
2. Working collaboratively through a mixture of face-to-face and video interactions to resolve issues and develop common procedures to guide our programme.
3. Working with all relevant stakeholders to ensure our actions and processes align with institutional requirements and buy-in to the challenge of a jointly badged degree and the innovation that is required by the wider university communities in which we work.
4. Consulting with other programme directors of EU ICI ECP funded projects to avoid “reinventing the wheel.”

**Results**

We have articulated the mission for the IMBASE:

*The International MBA Social Entrepreneurship will develop entrepreneurs able to challenge humankind’s most pressing problems by identifying opportunities, generating solutions and delivering initiatives that create sustainable social value.*

The course learning outcomes have shaped the structure of the programme. These are:

“At the end of this programme, graduates will be able to:

- Recognise social problems and potential for social impact;
- Integrate multi-disciplinary skills, literacy and knowledge to solve complex social problems;
- Apply creative, reflective and critical thinking to transform ideas into effective social action;
- Interact ethically with different types of communities, including cultural, socio-demographic, and socio-economic groups;
- Negotiate with and influence key stakeholders to support social action;
- Develop the skills to effectively manage the growth of a social organisation; and
- Assess and critically evaluate the effectiveness of interventions in social problems.”
We have agreed on our marketing presence, enquiry management, and admission process and agreed to the principle that students should have a single learning management system to engage with.

The benefits realised at the outset have been the emergent creativity of the JMC working in a spirit of collaboration toward a common goal. We have created something that no one institution could have created on its own.

Our perspectives have been enriched by the cross-cultural experience of working with other institutions in our own context as well as in others. We have been challenged to consider alternative approaches, and this in turn is informing our own business curriculum.

The role of PRME/sustainability principles

1. Through the process of becoming a PRME signatory and embedding sustainability principles in our own MBA and other business courses, we identified the value of collaboration.

2. As a consequence of the above, we were open to exploring how to access content relevant to PRME in a sustainable way for our graduates. We were alert to opportunities for the UNE Business School and willing to pursue innovation through a jointly badged degree.

3. We practised social entrepreneurship by building this project; as such, we have drawn on our complementary pedagogy and research strengths, commitment to social innovation, international professional networks, and will to be major contributors to capacity building in this field to ensure our jointly-badged IMBASE will provide an example of a sustainable model for collaborative business models of the future.