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University College Cork, Ireland



**CORK
UNIVERSITY
BUSINESS
SCHOOL**

Quality Review

November 2018

Food Marketing and Entrepreneurship Projects

Cork University Business School

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Cork University Business School Quality Review

Case Study: Food Marketing and Entrepreneurship Projects

1. Introduction and Background

Entrepreneurship is a key driver for innovation and economic development and a major source of employment. It is an integral part of a University's teaching and research mission and Irish Higher Education has a fundamental role to play in fostering entrepreneurial paths for students and graduates (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017). Access to entrepreneurship education for all students is central to developing entrepreneurial mind-sets for those who wish to become entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial managers. UCC's Strategic Plan (2017-2022) echoes the importance of entrepreneurship with an Action (Goal 2) that focuses on: *"Embedding entrepreneurship as an integral part of undergraduate and postgraduate education"* (University College Cork, 2017, p36).

The BSc Food Marketing and Entrepreneurship Programme is an inter-disciplinary programme with inputs from many units (College of Business and Law; College of Science Engineering and Food Science; and Blackstone LaunchPad at UCC). It provides students with theoretical and highly practical leading edge skills for an in-depth understanding of the processes and practices involved in successful entrepreneurship and innovation. Entrepreneurship education is heavily embedded in this Programme.

The Food Marketing and Entrepreneurship Module (FE4475) on the Programme links entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity within a group Project. Innovation is crucial to start-up and business success. Creativity itself is at the core of innovation and a key skill required by employers. It is also central to the entrepreneurial process. It is about the way new ideas and products are developed and is necessary across all disciplines and areas of employment. Creativity is important for entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial managers to identify solutions to complex problems and seek to overcome seemingly unsurmountable barriers to business and social challenges that can have a major societal impact.

2. Purpose: Can we Teach Entrepreneurship to Students at University?

A key question that is often raised in business education is whether entrepreneurship can be taught to students. The Food Marketing and Entrepreneurship Module places an emphasis on the application and practical aspects of innovation and creative thinking as the basis for new entrepreneurial ventures. It provides forward-thinking education for the next generation of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial thinkers, helps unlock their potential and allows participants work on ideas through active learning experiences. The Module provides practical skills for strategic roles in a wide range of professional disciplines and types of organisations and sectors (start-ups, SMEs, research and innovation departments, international corporations and support agencies) as well as entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial managers and the skills acquired are highly transferable. As Brush (2013) argued that in order to learn entrepreneurship, one must do entrepreneurship. It does not exclude theory but effective doing of entrepreneurship requires a set of practices (skills, knowledge and mind-set) and these practices are firmly grounded in theory.

3. Design: The Entrepreneurship and Creative Thinking NEXUS

The objective of the Food Marketing and Entrepreneurship Module is to provide an in-depth practical understanding of the important elements underpinning the development and marketing of successful new food products and business start-ups. The Module helps students explore their entrepreneurial and creative abilities, develop their own creativity and apply creative ideas to entrepreneurial ventures. It builds their knowledge of the important elements of entrepreneurship and provides students with a critical perspective of the major trends and opportunities currently emanating from the field of entrepreneurship. The Module also introduces students to the key components of the entrepreneurship ecosystem and the role of business networks for success, which develops their business confidence and enhances the quality of their learning experience. Many of these networks are sourced through CUBS Faculty.

The Project builds on the first three years of the Programme (e.g. Accounting that helps with the financial aspects of the business plan; the Food Science subjects that inform the product development process; and the Marketing modules that are the basis for the business and marketing plans). The output of the Project is an evidence-based business plan for a new business. Each group contains three to four self-selected members. The groups then brainstorm and develop their food business ideas. An idea must be a challenge in terms of the marketing aspects. In their Project, the students complete the secondary research around their topic, which is focused on: the market size; the drivers and dynamics; marketing segments; direct and indirect competitors; and innovation in the selected product category. The secondary research is part of the continuous assessment and it carries 10% of the overall mark. The marketing strategy in the Project is based on the knowledge gained from the secondary research and, more importantly, from the primary research that the students complete. Each group conducts a minimum of three focus groups and administers between 250 and 300 questionnaires. Some groups also conduct sensory analysis and undertake interviews with industry leaders as part of their research. Students pitch these new ideas over two sessions to a panel of experts.

On successful completion of this Module, students are able to: construct a business and marketing plan for a new food business; design a marketing strategy for a new food product; analyse the key factors underpinning new product success in competitive markets; and perform market research to evaluate the feasibility of a new product idea and design a launch strategy.

Topics covered in the Module

Introduction to Entrepreneurship and Innovation
Entrepreneurial Leadership and Delegation
Market Validation for New Products
Customer Needs and Value Proposition
Idea Generation Techniques and Creative Thinking
Design Thinking for Innovation
Market-oriented Design Techniques
Entrepreneurship and Innovation Bootcamps
Digital Marketing for New Products and Services

4. Implementation: Teaching Methods

Aside from in-class discussion and debate, students work in their groups and focus on the resolution of their distinct business challenge using innovation and creativity techniques. There are also Bootcamps that facilitate entrepreneurship, creativity and idea generation activities. CUBS Faculty, practitioners and sectoral experts provide practical advice to students on start-ups and success factors in business scale-ups. A final pitch of the students' business ideas during a Food Entrepreneurship Challenge concludes the Module. A sample of the NPD ideas can be seen in Figure 1.

Key aspects of this Module include:

- Introducing entrepreneurial thinking to a student's learning experience through Entrepreneurship and New Venture Projects with opportunities to work on new ideas to solve business problems;
- Teaching on the Module in relation to innovation techniques and consumer insights is very much research-based;
- Providing a unique blend of knowledge relevant to start-ups and established firms;
- Using leading edge innovation techniques;
- Introducing new teaching approaches such as focussed Bootcamps (which are intensive sessions designed to give potential entrepreneurs the tools they need to capitalise on an opportunity and turn it into a thriving business venture) and Hackathons (a platform for self-expression and creativity where people from different backgrounds come together, form teams around a problem or idea, and collaboratively identify a unique solution from scratch);
- Exposing students to digital marketing methods;
- Competing in entrepreneurship competitions: The Food Entrepreneurship Challenge, UCC's Entrepreneur of the Year Competition and Entrepreneurship Hackathons;
- Developing the students' pitching skills;
- Utilising University and CUBS entrepreneurship resources and industry networks.

Impact: External Examiner Review (2017)

“After the exam board I attended the showcase event for the final year Product Development Projects (FE4475). The presentations by the project teams and the ideas they presented were of a very high standard. Many of the proposed products had real market potential and the students should be congratulated for the excellence displayed both in terms of innovation but also in the underpinning evidence base and effective communication skills on show. The students were excellent ambassadors for the programme and I am sure will go on to very successful careers in the food industry”.



Figure 1. Examples of Student New Product Development Products (2013-2018).
Source: Authors' archive.

5. Student Engagement

Students engage with a wide variety of stakeholders during the Project and develop strong business networks. These can be internal stakeholders (CUBS, School of Food and Nutritional Sciences, Blackstone LaunchPad at UCC, IGNITE Graduate Business Programme, Gateway UCC) or external stakeholders (business mentors, Local Enterprise Offices, local food businesses and retail organisations such as Musgraves) (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Selected examples of internal and external stakeholders.
Source: Authors' archive.

6. Review: Assessment and Students' Reflective Learning Logs

The Module mark of 200 is divided as follows: a group mark of 160 and an individual mark of 40. The students' work is assessed in different ways.

Group Project

The Project is assessed on a set of fourteen criteria including: identification and clear articulation of an unfulfilled need in the market; proposition and clear explanation of a product that will solve the identified need; identification of potential competitors and presentation of a clear basis for competitive advantage; clarity of the new product's route to sales and market share; feasibility and viability of a new business; and the quality of the teamwork within the group.

Student feedback at key times is an essential component of the Project. In the first stage of formulating potential ideas, feedback serves to focus the students' minds on viable business propositions that have market potential. The next phase includes feedback on the qualitative and quantitative instruments and their appropriateness to gather relevant information from potential consumers. In the final phase, the feedback focuses on preparing students for their social media outreach and pitches. The feedback is organised by means of individual meetings with each group, to enable every member to actively discuss the group's progress.

Individual Learning Log

This learning log comprises of a 2-3 page essay detailing the students' contribution to the Project, what they learned from the process of developing a food business, and an identification of knowledge gaps in the Project.

Students' Peer-review

As the Food Marketing and Entrepreneurship Module consists of a group Project and individual reflective learning log assessments, the results of the peer-review are taken into account when deciding upon the individual grade and in this way provide an objective evaluation of efforts. The peer-review allows a student to write down any potential issues within the group. The aim of students' peer-review is to track students' activity in the group, to allow group members to express their views on the group's dynamic and to reinforce the importance of quality teamwork for this Project. The students are given a peer-review form to fill on two occasions during their Projects. The first peer-review takes place after the secondary research is completed (tentatively the end of Semester 1) and the second peer-review is conducted one month prior to submission of the Projects (near the end of Semester 2).

Entrepreneurship Competitions

There are two competitions relevant to the Food Marketing and Entrepreneurship Module: UCC's Entrepreneur of the Year Competition and The Food Entrepreneurship Challenge. In both cases, the students present their finalised business plans and pitch their concepts to a panel of industry experts. Students are assessed on their entrepreneurial skills and the commercial feasibility of their business plans.

Impact: Sample of Students' Reflective Learning Logs from the Projects (2013-2018)

- *I learned research and knowledge management skills through extensive secondary and primary research. This was achieved by gathering information that was necessary to particular sections of the project and identifying the key findings that were relevant. The project also taught me how to write well and how to portray the main message delivered in a concise manner. The writing of the project also displayed the skill of editing and proofreading other team members' work. (From a team that developed a charcoal charged beverage)*

- *Overall, I really enjoyed the process of the final year project and learned many invaluable skills. I realised the importance of in depth research to highlight the challenges and opportunities of a business proposition. I also learned the importance of needing a team to bounce ideas off each other and refine the business to achieve the best possible standard. (From a team that developed a cold soup)*

- *This final year project has provided me with invaluable and indelible experience and skills and has definitely been a year I will not forget! My business acumen and business awareness skills have dramatically improved since starting this project back in September. By starting from the very start of coming up with a product concept, carrying out primary and secondary research, to developing marketing strategies, commercial strategies and financial projections, it has shown me all the work, stamina, motivation, drive and skill needed to create and own a business. I have grown an appreciation and admiration for every entrepreneur as I now understand just how stressful and testing that starting and owning a business can be. (From a team that developed a Mexican ready-to-eat dish)*

- For me personally, the key learning was the improvement of my leadership skills. In the past I have led many sporting teams as captain. However, this was my first time leading a small group team over a prolonged period. Throughout the year I tried to lead by example, as a result, my organisational, communication and time management skills were greatly enhanced. In addition, my ability to work in a business environment and cross-functionally with various lecturers and other personalities improved. (From a team that developed a beverage for enhanced sleep)

- I found the project to be very eye-opening as to just how much work needs to be put into coming up with a novel food concept and bringing it to the market. While I found it to be very enjoyable, it was also very tough and challenging at times. I place great value in the work that I and my teammates have done to make this project a success and the networking which inevitably came with it. If I were to do the project again, the only thing that I would do differently is not be so hesitant to get in touch with various members of the food industry, because in the end those we encountered were sympathetic to our cause and wanted to lend a helping hand in any way that they could. (From a team that developed a ready seafood meal)

- The toughest part I found from the Final Year Project was the focus group. It highlighted a weakness in my ability to stand up in front of people and talk. But having the sessions on presentations and practicing has given me the skills that will allow me to improve on this area. By doing this final year project, it has given me an insight into the amount of hours you have to put into your business in order for it to be a success, and has allowed me to develop the necessary skills that are needed to start up a business in the future. (From a team that developed a fish taco kit)

- I was chosen as team leader for the project group. Although it was a challenging and high-pressured role throughout the year, it was one that I am happy to have taken on, and I can honestly say it has taught me so much more than I would have expected from working on a final year project. The dynamic of the group proved difficult and challenging at times. The team had varying levels of ability, varying levels of motivation among members towards the success of the project, and varying life experiences that contributed to how members felt the work should be completed. As a team, we succeeded in playing to each other's strengths and weaknesses, dividing the work accordingly. (From a team that developed falafel bombs)

Impact: Good Practices

The Food Marketing and Entrepreneurship Project lessons on good practices:

- **Creative thinking:** students think creatively about how they can satisfy a gap in the market and identify a product that will address consumers' needs.
- **Entrepreneurial mind-set:** students are encouraged to try things that no one tried before, to travel the road less travelled, to fail or succeed and, most importantly, to learn from their experiences.
- **Problem solving:** students face many challenges throughout their Projects and engage in constructive problem solving in order to progress to the next phase of the task.
- **Teamwork:** the key to a successful Project is efficient work within the group, which includes delegation of tasks, frequent meetings, brainstorming and removal of obstacles.
- **Student-centred approach:** students are given support along their Project development journey through various seminars, guest lectures, one-to-one consultations and group progress meetings to ensure that they have access to all relevant information and facilities (the Library Creative Zone and Computer Laboratory).
- **Combination of academic, industry and practical knowledge:** this combination secures the width and depth of the Projects and provides a rich source of knowledge for the students to prepare them for the next step in their career whatever that might be.
- **Learning process:** the students engage in a unique learning process that replicates a real-life business situation from ideation to commercialisation of the idea - they are the entrepreneurs!
- **Innovation techniques:** students are enthusiastic learners when engaging in innovation techniques such as design thinking.
- **Pitching techniques:** students learn how to effectively communicate ideas to a diverse audience in their pitching sessions.

7. Key Challenges

One of the main challenges with the Food Marketing and Entrepreneurship Projects is the group work aspect of the task. The foundation for this group work component is laid in Year 3, where the students work on mini Projects with different classmates to see how they work together. The main challenge is to get all members participating and ensure that the workload is divided out equally. Some students request that they be allowed to complete individual Projects due to financial reasons, where they may have difficulty attending college due to work commitments or, in some cases, they may not know their classmates very well. It is stressed to all students that it is a group Project that simulates the NPD process in industry, which normally involves a team effort. In addition, it has been shown that entrepreneurship can be more successful when working in teams, where different members bring different skillsets to the group. The Marshmallow Challenge is used at the beginning of the Module to highlight the importance of teamwork and the many hidden assumptions in a business. The Challenge pitches the Project groups against each other, to work in their teams, to build the highest freestanding structure they can out of spaghetti, twine, tape and one marshmallow that goes on top. This Challenge requires planning, many iterations and excellent teamwork.

Another key issue is time management and the time spent in proportion to the marks allocated to the Project. This is an important issue, as the students must try to manage their time and the tasks to be completed, and balance this in relation to the overall workload of Year 4. They must work smart rather than work hard. To illustrate this, the students complete an activity on team leadership and the art of delegating tasks within their groups. This Challenge is completed without the team leader but based on delegated tasks by the other group members.

8. Conclusions

According to Bord Bia (2018), the Irish Food and Drink Industry recorded its eighth consecutive year of export growth in 2017 and reached €12.6 bn in export value. The key to Irish Food Sector competitiveness in future years will be in innovation and value addition. In order to keep up with the growing demand for innovative market-oriented Irish food and beverages across the world, graduate students must possess entrepreneurial mindsets, with strong marketing skillsets and an in-depth knowledge of business and markets.

The final year Project is a key part of the Food Marketing and Entrepreneurship Programme and brings together the various components of the degree. The Project is very popular with students as it incorporates all the learnings from their degree and allows the students to be the entrepreneurs. It does challenge the students to engage in problem solving and overcome obstacles in a creative way, which prepares them for real-life business situations. Through the various assessment methods, the impact of the Module can be seen through the different skillsets and knowledge that the students have acquired during their Project year. In addition, previous research has shown that the students' mindsets, in terms of entrepreneurship, changed over the course of the Module. CUBS is a key driver of teaching, learning and research in entrepreneurship across UCC and the benefits of embedding entrepreneurship in academic programmes are reflected in this Module.

Appendix 1: References

Bord Bia. (2018). Export Performance & Prospects.
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Appendix 2: Food Entrepreneurship Challenge 2018 and Selected Student Products

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ENTREPRENEURSHIP

CHALLENGE 2018

BSc Food Marketing & Entrepreneurship
FINAL YEAR PROJECTS
2-4PM THURSDAY MAY 17



Entrepreneurship at CUBS

