

International Innovation Hackathon: Hack the Waste 15 / 16 May 2020.

Prior to the COVID 19 pandemic it was estimated that 95% of students worldwide would not be able to undertake an international mobility as part of their studies. It is generally considered that an international experience, as part of a study programme, is very important, if not essential, helping prepare students for a world of “globalisation in business”. As only 5% of students are involved in “out of country” activities, a solution must be found to enable the remaining 95% to enjoy the same benefits. It was, therefore, essential that methods of providing an international experience be found for this part of the student body, and virtual projects are one of the ways that an experience can be provided.

Since the onset of the COVID 19 crisis, mobility has almost come to a standstill, so we are currently looking at a landscape where no physical international activities can take place. So virtual activities, providing international opportunities, have increased in value. They are a method of introducing cultural and practical differences and creating a sustainable network for the student body.

The role of Businet, as a network for Higher Education Institutes, is to assist member institutes with their internationalisation agenda by helping to provide opportunities for students and development opportunities for staff. Generally, this means taking the role of the facilitator, providing the opportunities for staff of different institutes to meet and develop ideas, as well as the sharing of good practice.

With the Hack the Waste project the originators of the event discussed the development of the project at Businet meetings before putting their plans into place. Now the project is well established, Businet will support the continuing development and growth of the event. The participating educational institutes are, with one exception, Businet members – so it is a matter of supporting the activities of member organisations. This is a privilege when working on projects like Hack the Waste.

An indication of thorough organisation is that at the event things look easy. The third edition of “Hack the Waste” appeared to run so smoothly, down to incredible organisation and the dedication of the organisers. An event that runs for 24 hours straight, is always going to present challenges, but they were met and passed unnoticed to the majority of participants.

The idea of working in teams with different nationalities, cultures and backgrounds is not new, but this project adds the new dimensions of time differences, fatigue and intensity. It appeared that the students coped and responded remarkably well with the challenges.

There was a good mix of nationalities, age and gender across the project, both in the student teams, and those helping to deliver (organisers, jury, coaches and mentors). This is the ideal scenario. Too often projects are dominated by one nationality, or one gender of student.

The output of the majority of groups, considering the tasks set and the time available, was remarkable. The presentation skills of individuals obviously varied, but the actual use of technology within the

presentations was superb. The results could only have been achieved with good team work. The role of the coaches and mentors in engendering cooperation and cohesion in the groups is vital.

The event lasts for 24 hours, but what was obvious was the amount of preparation that had been undertaken in advance. Post event analysis will highlight the positives, and provide alternative solutions to the challenges faced. This analysis will be taken forward and utilised in future activities.

I have nothing but admiration for the organisers and participants in this event. Great commitment was obvious, and there was a very positive spirit surrounding to the event. An amazing event and I felt privileged to be a part of it.

David Taylor, General Manager of Businet Network

President of the jury at Hack the Waste 2020