Chapter 1

GEOGRAPHY AND THE ENTERPRISE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INITIATIVE: PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

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Background to the EHE initiative

The Government launched the Enterprise in Higher Education (EHE) initiative in December 1987 but it was not until September 1988 that Lancaster University became the first institution of higher education to sign an EHE contract. The EHE scheme was initially run by the Training Agency (and its predecessors) and is now managed by the Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate of the Employment Department. The conference held in Lancaster on 15 and 16 April 1991 set out to explore the ramifications of the scheme by drawing on the experiences of the pioneer institutions and airing the concerns of the newcomers to the scheme.

Forty-one institutions of higher education are formally in the scheme and a further fifteen are negotiating their contracts (Employment Department, 1991 p.1). It is intended that all institutions will be participating shortly. Each could receive up to £1 million over five years to help fund the initiative.

One feature of EHE is the strong reactions which have been generated both for and against it, and these will be examined later. However, it is necessary first to outline the nature of the EHE scheme so that the controversy can understood more readily.

The EHE scheme

Enterprise in Higher Education aims to alter the way subjects are taught and by implication what is taught. It seeks to change the educational experience of students and by implication the way staff teach. The scheme tries to 'encourage the development of qualities of enterprise amongst those seeking higher education' (Employment Department, 1991 p.1) and it 'aims to develop students better prepared for the needs of working life' (ibid. p.2). The intention is to meet the social and economic needs of the country by producing better managers and leaders for the future. Such intentions have strong parallels in secondary schools where active and participative learning is one of the features of the national curriculum and the GCSE examinations. The Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI) has a similar emphasis on active learning through independent study, experience and exploration. Specific skills such as those related to information technology are now a feature of attainment targets in schools.

The EHE scheme does not formally define what is meant by 'enterprise' except by recourse to synonyms such as resourcefulness and initiative and a suggestion that project work is one way to simulate in a subject-based course the experiences of personal responsibility, planning, liaising with others, team-work and the management of both risk and time which are deemed to be the key features of enterprise. There is also a facet of the scheme which requires students to be better prepared for the world of work because they have acquired 'the qualities and skills which enable people to succeed in business enterprises' (ibid. p.3).

Consequently the scheme emphasises 'personal transferable skills' which is another idea not fully defined. However, institutions in the scheme and the Government seem to have reached a consensus over what these skills comprise:

- group-work skills;
- oral and written communication;
- numeracy and computer proficiency;
- solving problems;
- managing oneself and others.

In Chapter 12 McClatchey, Cubitt and Passmore review a survey of over 20 years of geography graduates from Portsmouth Polytechnic. They focus on exactly which aspects of their geographical education the graduates had found of value in their subsequent careers. Interestingly the aspects which were highlighted were those dealing with statistics, computing and other aspects of skills training. The areas of which the graduates would have liked to have had more experience at university were oral presentations, foreign languages and work placements. Clearly the

'personal transferable skills' element of EHE is well directed in terms of what past graduates believe will be needed after graduation (cf. Unwin, 1986; Healey, 1989).

The EHE scheme does not specify how these skills are to be implanted or cultivated. Each institution has to have a plan to ensure that most staff have been trained in Enterprise and that most students have at least one part of their degree assessment from an Enterprise course. This is a sufficiently large departure from current practice to make the strong reactions to the scheme understandable.

Reactions to the scheme

Opponents of the EHE scheme have adopted various stances. Some seized on the word 'enterprise' and saw EHE as a Thatcherite plot to undermine liberal education (with its sceptical questioning of opposing positions) and replace it with an uncritical espousal of commercial profit-making behaviour and the tactics necessary for this in the real world. Others drew a sharp distinction between lecturing in an academic discipline and skills training which, however handled, was someone else's job. A third group justified their lack of reaction to EHE by arguing that they already taught enterprise skills. No expansion of this was necessary or possible, they argued, without sacrificing subject content which is the top priority of university education. Another group pointed to the lack of resources (e.g. time, computers or their skills) as a barrier to implementing EHE.

While opposition along these lines was reported by all the participants in the conference, there have also been keen supporters of EHE. The Tavistock Institute's evaluation report suggested that institutions could be classified as either 'enthusiastic', 'emergent' or 'unwilling' depending on their approach to the changes needed to embrace Enterprise (Employment Department, 1991 p.6). A similar classification of individual members of staff was proposed in an internal report on Lancaster's experience of the scheme. The enthusiasts seized on EHE to intensify or justify changes in methods of teaching and assessment which they had already thought about or had experimented with. Some people used the EHE money to overcome constraints to such developments which had held them back. Identifying the principal motivating force for these eager modernisers is more difficult - it could be for income generation, attracting students, to make research contacts, a high respect for students' abilities, a desire for a partnership with students or a clear preference for experiential learning. The balance of these motives amongst staff has not yet been measured.

Managing change

EHE presents any institution of higher education with a managerial challenge in how to ensure that Enterprise is adopted across the institution and is 'embedded' so that it will continue after the EHE funding has ceased. How is an institution, faced with numerous other pressures, to find the means of stimulating, controlling and diffusing EHE initiatives across the whole institution? In Chapter 2 McClatchey explores this issue from a management science perspective. He notes how EHE presents particular problems: it brings little extra money (particularly if it is to be divided between many departments); it necessarily requires many, if not all staff to change their teaching; and it must fit in with the many conflicting goals of the institution. suggests that helpful strategies ought to be to encourage a diversity of approaches to implementing EHE and adopting a 'bottom up' strategy as well as a 'top down' one. He notes also how success breeds success and therefore small initiatives are a good way to start. Their success will be the catalyst for the acceptance later of more ambitious measures.

However, this still leaves open the question of how to deal with those whose objections to EHE are based on principle rather than on resource inadequacy, lack of ideas or natural caution. Morphet argues in Chapter 3 that such objections on principle are usually based on a false dichotomy between the academic (i.e. education) and enterprise (which is training). His first contention is that current academic education can be less than satisfactory in meeting its professed objectives. Students may get by through good memorization of the received wisdom on a small number of topics within a fixed syllabus.

Scepticism and criticism can be notable for their absence. "Parrots know nothing" is his summary of academic education at its worst. He argues that Enterprise, however it is implemented, is likely to encourage effective communication with staff over the project, with fellow students in teamwork, and with 'clients' outside the institution. Compared with sitting in a lecture theatre, Enterprise will be more effective in promoting creativity in problem solving, resourcefulness rather than passivity, and in integrating theoretical and empirical work. The real-world element in Enterprise will require students to downplay the artificial barriers imposed on knowledge and understanding by conventional disciplinary divisions. Therefore EHE objectives can be seen to be consonant with

academic goals, complementary to them and indeed will reinforce them. Perhaps it is easier for geographers, with their field-science tradition of teaching and learning, to accept this line of argument than it would be for staff in some other disciplines.

Departmental experience

The discussion so far has stressed how EHE cannot be imposed successfully from the top in a uniform manner. Practicalities and internal politics both lead to encouraging departments and individual staff to devise their own solutions for meeting Enterprise objectives. Encouraging experimentation and diversity of approach may be the best strategy for accelerating the diffusion of the EHE scheme throughout an institution. It follows that it is important to establish a network of EHE participants who will compare their experiences. Problems can be identified or even predicted, tactics can be evaluated and successes can be cross-fertilized between institutions. During the conference at Lancaster a number of speakers described and commented on how EHE had been fostered in their department. Many of them showed clearly how their institutional context had moulded what they did as well as stressing the importance of the personal initiative of members of staff.

Project work

In four departments Enterprise has been implemented at least in part by some sort of project work. Hardman explains in Chapter 4 how at Manchester Polytechnic the Environmental Management degree has a client-oriented project for which groups of students can opt. Most of the projects are situated in the local area with a wide variety of client organisations. The initiative had benefited from a departmental tradition of external links and project work to which several staff were committed. His chapter has excellent advice on how to run such small-group projects successfully and he gives examples of actual projects. Some of his key issues are worth highlighting. The first is the need to get the correct staff input - enough to plan, liaise, negotiate, check on feasibility, safety and rigour, but not so much as to deny students the scope for creativity. His second point is about how to control the staff costs associated with preparing several such projects each year. As in most departments there is a core of skills training early in the degree scheme before the project work starts. The project is. however a time-consuming method of learning.

This issue is also highlighted by the experience in Geography at Salford University which is described by Harrison and Hindle in Chapter 5. Their scheme started as 'Education for Capability' before EHE had been established but its aims are very similar. The distinctive focus at Salford is on a very large compulsory project which has small groups of students tackling sub-topics within the main theme. Clearly when a project is compulsory for a whole cohort of students it has to be on a very large scale and the subject has to be chosen so as to provide scope for both physical and human sub-topics and this may be rather limiting. Each group elects a student leader, and has a budget of money and teaching time. After First Year, groups can demand short modules of techniques training from staff who must respond at short notice. Tough deadlines are set for the wide variety of forms of presentation which are required, and marking has an element of peer-group assessment. The authors note how some staff are very enthusiastic and others are less so. Such a system is not thought to be capable of dealing with numbers of students much greater than those currently in the Honours group at Salford. The Project is noted as being time-consuming for staff.

We hear again of the heavy demands made on staff time by well run 'realistic' projects in Alexander's account in Chapter 8 of how Chester College have developed their project work. Students there are given a consultancy budget - effectively time limits on the help they can expect to receive. Their scheme is also notable for its very precise enumeration of the criteria to be assessed - and by whom and how.

A different tactic has been used by Stanier (Chapter 9) in her medical-geography option at Derbyshire College of Higher Education where project work has been developed without EHE funding. She overcame some of the financial problems by getting the client (a Family Health Services Authority) to pay for the extra costs imposed on the College and students by the project. The Authority also provided staff to teach students about the background to the project which the Authority had devised with Stanier. Staff input has been controlled by trying to develop a new project each year with the same client. The idea is that once the ground rules have been established in the first year, less negotiation will be needed subsequently. On the other hand the work here is confined to one option class and there are issues of balancing the time demands on students throughout the year-group when there are also major simultaneous demands on their time (e.g. their dissertations).

The tradition of the dissertation in geography makes project work seem like a straightforward way of implementing

EHE. The four departmental case studies do however show up some recurring problems. If the projects are optional, it is unlikely that the take-up will be universal if less demanding options are available. If the project is compulsory for an option class then the self-selecting element (the types of students who take the option) will again be apparent. There will also be issues of equity in workload between students within the year-group. If the project work is compulsory for the whole year-group then EHE will be a universal educational experience, and yet staffing problems will be at their most acute. Projects with clients must be well managed, it is very destructive and embarrassing if they fail and projects are inevitably a resource-intensive way of teaching, however educationally valuable they may be. To some extent one large project is easier and cheaper to manage than several unconnected smaller ones, but the topic may be restricted if balance across all aspects of geography is needed. Using one client for 'repeat business' each year does cut staff costs but this is easiest to achieve in practice for an option class and most difficult for a whole year-group.

Alternatives to project work in EHE

At S. Martin's College, Lancaster, one alternative to project work was a compulsory careers and personal skills programme which extended through Years 1 to 3. Price and Cutler describe in Chapter 6 how some reasonably familiar elements of skills training (e.g. essay writing and organisational skills) have been embedded in the geography course in year 1 followed by a careers section which provided students with valuable job-hunting skills (e.g. mock interviews and better curricula vitae). Geography graduates from the college came back to give talks on their careers. One interesting and unusual feature was the stress laid on self-evaluation as a skill to be taught. Unfortunately some students wanted little more than details on specific careers such as might be found in any careers library. Others wanted experience of job placements, an issue which will be dealt with later in this chapter. The S. Martin's course, which was not funded through EHE, is still evolving and refinements are in train for the 1991-92 session.

In Coventry Polytechnic's Geography Department, Healey is experimenting in his final-year industrial-geography option with a course which is taught almost entirely without lectures (Chapter 7). At first sight this does not seem like an Enterprise course - there is no client and no skills training module - yet looked at more closely, it has several features which are in tune with Enterprise. Healey replaced most of his lectures with student-led seminars and tutorial discussion groups focused on directed reading. This system requires students to be much more active than in lectures - most of the students confirmed that the course made more demands on their time than other courses. Each student gives a seminar, they are all taught how to do this and there is peer-group assessment of each seminar's presentation. Students here are learning through discussion (as in the classic Oxbridge tutorial model) and since they have to articulate their thoughts (or their lack of them) the gaps in their understanding are immediately pinpointed. It is hoped that the course will nurture self-confidence. However, Healey also stresses how extensive and demanding are the changes which he has had to make in terms of teaching and course planning. Considerable professionalism is demanded of the member of staff to ensure that this type of course succeeds.

Healey's experiment at Coventry does lack one of the key features of EHE, namely the active involvement of an outside client. All the project work discussed earlier had a client organization participating to some extent. Two polytechnics, however, have explored the use of placements as a means of delivering Enterprise education. Such a system was pioneered in Geography by Coventry Polytechnic in the mid-1970s. McClatchey, Cubitt and Passmore identify placements as one area where past geography graduates would have welcomed more experience as undergraduates (Chapter 12).

At the Polytechnic of Huddersfield, the department wanted to build on an applied emphasis in its courses and to instigate a system of work placements for the students. Couch reminds us in Chapter 11 how common placements now are even in schools. He also notes that work placements can meet many of the aims of Enterprise in a very direct way: real-world application of geographical skills; acquiring new skills from the work place; learning from the inside how real organizations actually work; experience of serious team-work; handling responsibility; and self-evaluation. The difficulties, as always, are in the detailed implementation of a work placement scheme. How long should the placements be? Should they be optional or compulsory? Should they be assessed, and if so, how? How much staff time will it take to administer the scheme? How much subject content is lost, if any? How do you integrate the placement and the academic work at the polytechnic? Couch's chapter sets out how Huddersfield approached these questions and structured their scheme.

At Polytechnic South West in Plymouth there has been a wide-ranging series of changes in response to EHE and Chalkley describes these in Chapter 10. At this point it is useful to focus on just one aspect of their programme

which is distinctive - staff placements. Several of the lecturing staff will spend about a week with an organisation in the area of their teaching or research. The benefits could take many forms: contacts for research, fieldwork, equipment, or consultancy; collecting up-to-date teaching material; learning new skills or imparting them to the host organisation; and better careers guidance. Staff go on a short course to learn how to get the most out of the placement. This very interesting experiment tackles an aspect of EHE to which other schemes have not given much overt attention. In order to prepare students for the world of work, and to raise their skills proficiency, staff themselves will have to be (re)trained in skills and brought more fully into contact with real-world organisations. It is arguable that many geographers in higher education have never worked outside that sector and so themselves need an insight into other parts of the world of work. Staff will have to be more enterprise-aware if their students are to be similarly sensitized.

Problems and potential

The Enterprise in Higher Education initiative has proved to be more benign than initial fears would have led us to suspect. Indeed the institutions participating in this conference had all found real benefits from the scheme and there were many experiments under way for modernizing geography teaching.

EHE has provided a stimulus to the teaching of skills in geography degrees; and not only the familiar ones of statistics and computer use but also oral and verbal presentation skills. Their legitimacy has been reinforced, the range of skills has been widened and their delivery has been better integrated into mainstream geography - always a problem with skills training. Perhaps the area of language acquisition is one where we need to think further although S. Martin's College have made a start here. There is still a nagging worry at the emphasis this training receives because of its career value. Even if the government, graduates and employers all agree that the skills we wish to teach for their geographical usefulness are also valuable for the world of work, it is a matter of concern that the rest of academic geography is not equally valued. Surely the national interest in publicly funded higher education also extends to graduates with powers of reflection, understanding and critical appraisal?

The other concern is, in Chalkley's words, how to teach personal transferable skills impersonally. Growing student numbers and deteriorating staff-student ratios will intensify what is already a real burden in most departments, namely the time it takes to run practical classes of whatever kind.

The frequent use of projects and/or enterprise dissertations testifies to the ease of squaring this approach to EHE with geography's traditions of fieldwork, the dissertation and an applied emphasis in teaching. There can be no doubt that the project - however organised - is an effective and legitimate way of approaching Enterprise. Its acceptability among geographers will speed the diffusion of EHE. Nevertheless, the chapters which follow provide ample evidence of the bottlenecks which projects can create. First, while one project may be beneficial for a student, this does not mean that two projects will be better still. Projects do place greater demands on students' time. The activities which risk being squeezed out are reading and reflection, and their loss would be a high price to pay. There is also plenty of testimony that however projects with outside clients are organised, they nearly always run into staffing problems. Because there are clients (even if for no other reason) projects have to be well run and that needs staff time in large quantities. Several of the authors are aware of this and steps to limit staff time have been made but no one seems to have devised a client-oriented project with a low staff input which can cope with large numbers of students each year.

The key question for the Government and for institutions of higher education is whether EHE can become so embedded in teaching and learning styles that it will survive the ending of EHE funding. In October 1991 Lancaster University will be starting the second-last year of its five-year contract, so the question is not premature. The early development of EHE at Lancaster which focused on 'enterprise dissertations' has been described elsewhere (Clark, 1990; Clark, 1991). Since these articles were written, the Geography Department at Lancaster has developed some new initiatives.

- A third-year option in environmental management has been converted to an Enterprise course by the addition of specific skills training, real-world case studies and outside speakers.
- An umbrella project comprising an environmental audit of the university (with numerous sub-projects for groups of students) has been launched. The client in this case is another part of the University.
- Funding has been secured for staff development courses on skills training, training postgraduates in how to be tutors, a re-evaluation of our fieldwork programme, and for industrial liaison costs. At Lancaster there was a commitment to get as much EHE money into departments as possible and that has been influential in how we

have proceeded.
- We are developing through EHE a set of computer-based tutorials in geography which can be self-accessed by our increasing numbers of students.
- EHE money is being used to develop a new self-paced course in regional geography which has no lectures and which will have a low staff input.

The general direction of our initiatives is clear: we are using EHE money to give us the resources now to free staff (or to employ new staff) who will prepare new courses and teaching styles which will be consonant with EHE and which will last us well beyond the end of the funding which derives from our EHE contract.

The EHE initiative inevitably touches on most aspects of geography in higher education. It forces us to reassess what we teach and how we teach it. The eleven chapters which follow explore the numerous problems and many opportunities presented by Enterprise in Higher Education. The reader may well conclude that Geography is better placed than many other disciplines to capitalise on the potentialities of EHE providing that we are not swept in other directions by expanding student numbers.

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