



Budding entrepreneurs get value-added business support from unique delivery partnership

To increase the business start-up rate in Harlow, Business Link Partnership Director Keith Hughes teamed up on a Harlow Renaissance led plan with Harlow Council, Harlow Education and Employer Partnership, Essex County Council and Essex Development and Regeneration Agency to create, fund and deliver an effective enterprise support package.

The Challenge

“Employment in Harlow has traditionally been dominated by a small number of very large employers, and research we commissioned showed that Harlow has a low business start-up rate compared to the rest of the region,” explains Julie Houston, Strategy and Infrastructure Manager at Harlow Council. “We’d already been working with Business Link, providing business advice clinics in the Civic Centre, so it made sense to talk to Keith about how we could widen the scheme and address the start-up issue.”

Andrew Bramidge, Chief Executive of regeneration agency Harlow Renaissance, also saw the need for increased enterprise activity in the town: “We’re tasked with the long-term development of Harlow, and in addition to housing and transport, we saw the opportunity for significant economic development.”



Harlow Renaissance also saw that the Harlow Education and Employer Partnership (HEEP) could play a vital role in delivery of any enterprise support scheme at the education level, and enlisted the support of HEEP’s Ellena Mould on the steering group. Ellena says: “We immediately saw that this was a great opportunity to access funding to deliver a strategy that could result in increasing the aspiration of young people to become entrepreneurs.”

The Solution

And so the Harlow Entrepreneurship Programme was born, a strategic partnership between key funding and delivery organisations designed to increase entrepreneurial activity and business growth in Harlow.

According to Keith (pictured above), the delivery of the programme would build on existing Business Link and HEEP activities. “The partnership – including Harlow Council, Essex Development and Regeneration

Agency, with enterprise agency NWES and led by Harlow Renaissance – had the opportunity to build a bid to put to the Essex County Council Economic Participation Programme for funding. A menu of enterprise activities was proposed, including marketing, workshops, clinics and HEEP’s engagement with education.”

The programme is an excellent example of value-added, multi-agency partnership working to foster an enterprise culture in Harlow

Ellena Mould, Harlow Education and Employer Partnership

Marketing of the scheme was intense, and used numerous channels, such as Business Link’s mobile marketing unit, adverts at train stations, events in the Civic Centre and even a Facebook page, initiated by NWES. HEEP also took on the role of promoting the scheme in

schools and colleges. Harlow Council handled ‘front of house’, taking bookings via the council’s call centre.

Business Link also increased the number of ‘downstream’ enterprise support services, by providing additional workshops on key topics such as tax, marketing and finance.

The Impact

“Start-up enquires in Harlow have increased by 113.8% year on year, doubling the number of people interested in starting their own business,” says Keith. This outstrips other locations in the region, which is outstanding, considering where we started from and the economic climate. It also shows the strength of effective partnerships.”

Julie is delighted with the results. “We’re benefiting hugely from the closer working relationships,” she says. “We all know what the other partners are doing and so together we are providing a wide diversity of choice as to how people choose to engage with enterprise support.”

“The consortium approach has resulted in significantly more synergy and a strong delivery partnership,” says Andrew. And, summing up the feelings of all four organisations, he concludes: “We are confident we will continue to work together and source further funding to continue supporting businesses and young people in Harlow.”

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