

Developing an Entrepreneurial Mindset – Practitioner Playbook

*Opening future pathways by building confidence,
creativity and opportunity awareness*

This Playbook and associated Toolkit are created by a Scottish Government-funded initiative delivered by Interface and Connect-Ed to support the implementation of the Entrepreneurial Campus Blueprint across Scotland's college sector.

With thanks to Entrepreneurs in Residence: Bayile Adeoti, Marisa Giannasi, Lee-Anne Gillie, Prof. Kirsty Thomson-Gillespie and Wendy White-Finnegan.

If you would like to explore how the resources can be deployed within your college, learn more about the approaches featured in the programme, connect with the creators of specific materials, or share feedback and examples from your own delivery, we would be delighted to hear from you.

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Introduction

Scotland's colleges play a vital role in developing the skills, confidence and adaptability needed for a rapidly changing economy. Through strong connections with communities, employers and regional economies, they provide pathways into employment, self-employment, further study and lifelong learning. However, entrepreneurial learning has often been seen as a specialist activity rather than an integral part of the wider college experience.

It is against this backdrop that the Scottish Government funded a coordinated, system-wide pilot to advance implementation of Scotland's Entrepreneurial Campus Blueprint (ECB) across the college sector for the first time. Over an eight-month period, led by Interface and supported by Connect-Ed, five Entrepreneurs in Residence (EiRs) worked across 13 colleges to test approaches that strengthen innovation, industry engagement and entrepreneurial activity. Acting as catalysts for change, the EiRs developed practical models for embedding entrepreneurial capability within existing college structures, teaching practices and partnerships. Their work focused on building on existing strengths and working within current frameworks and resources, demonstrating how entrepreneurial thinking can become an integral and highly valuable part of the college experience.



How to use this Playbook

This Playbook captures the practical lessons, approaches and case studies emerging from the Programme and offers guidance for colleges seeking to strengthen entrepreneurial learning in ways that are relevant, inclusive and impactful within their own contexts. It is supported by a companion Toolkit, signposted throughout as **Related Resources** and **Impact Case Studies** which contains the practical templates, frameworks, curriculum materials, workshop activities and delivery tools developed through the programme. Each Related Resource and Impact Case Study includes a direct link to the relevant page within the **CDN Insights & Innovation Hub**, making it easy for practitioners to access supporting materials, examples and guidance at the point of need.

Informed by collaboration with college staff, students and external partners, these resources have been shaped by real-world practice and are intended to help colleges translate ideas into action. Together, the Playbook and Toolkit provide a practical foundation for embedding entrepreneurial learning, strengthening partnerships and creating opportunities for learners, staff and communities.

This playbook is designed for:

- College leaders
- Curriculum managers
- Lecturers
- EiRs
- Enterprise and innovation leads
- Student experience teams

Neither this Playbook nor the accompanying Toolkit are intended to be exhaustive or offer a single model. Instead, they reflect the approaches, resources and learning developed, tested and refined through the eight-month pilot, providing a practical foundation that institutions can adapt and build upon to suit different institutional contexts and needs.

One of the most important insights from the programme was that entrepreneurial activity is already taking place throughout Scotland's colleges. Every day, staff help learners solve problems, build confidence, develop creative solutions, engage with employers and respond to real-world challenges. Likewise, students are frequently involved in freelance work, community projects, side hustles and innovation activities without necessarily recognising these experiences as entrepreneurial.

The opportunity for colleges is therefore not to introduce entrepreneurship as something entirely new. Rather, it is to make existing entrepreneurial practice more visible, more connected and more intentional. By recognising and building upon the strengths already present across institutions, colleges can create environments where entrepreneurial thinking becomes an integral part of learning, teaching, innovation and community engagement.

Recruiting & Embedding an Entrepreneur in Residence

What is an Entrepreneur in Residence?

An Entrepreneur in Residence (EiR) is an embedded practitioner who brings real-world entrepreneurial experience into a college to help strengthen innovation, industry engagement and entrepreneurial learning.

Unlike a traditional adviser or lecturer, an EiR works through practical engagement, relationship-building and ecosystem connectivity to create opportunities, support culture change and help translate ideas into action.

The role is most effective when operating across three interconnected functions:

- **Embedded Practitioner**

The EiR becomes part of the institution's day-to-day activity rather than operating as an external consultant. They bring current entrepreneurial knowledge, lived experience and practical insight into opportunity creation, innovation and business development.

By working directly with learners and staff, the EiR helps translate entrepreneurial concepts into real-world practice and acts as a critical friend to institutional leadership.

- **Culture Builder**

The EiR helps embed entrepreneurial thinking across the institution by encouraging innovation, experimentation and problem solving.

They support staff confidence, celebrate entrepreneurial success stories and help create an environment where entrepreneurial behaviour is recognised and valued.

Over time, entrepreneurial learning becomes less of a standalone activity and more fully integrated into the culture of the college.

- **Connector and Ecosystem Builder**

A distinctive feature of the EiR role is the ability to connect people, opportunities and resources across and beyond the college.

Acting as a bridge between education, industry and the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem, the EiR helps strengthen relationships that create value for learners, staff and external partners.

By connecting colleges to employers, entrepreneurs, community organisations, investors, support agencies and professional networks, the EiR helps create new pathways and opportunities while ensuring the college remains outward-facing, responsive and connected.

Why the Role Matters

Entrepreneurial activity already exists across colleges in many forms. The value of an EiR is not to create from scratch, but to help identify, connect and amplify existing activity.

By bringing external experience, networks and perspectives into the institution, the EiR helps make entrepreneurial opportunities more visible, strengthens connections between people and organisations, and supports the development of a more intentional entrepreneurial culture.

The role also provides access to contemporary entrepreneurial expertise and industry insight that may not naturally exist within the institution. This can strengthen innovation capacity, broaden external engagement and help colleges respond more effectively to emerging opportunities and regional priorities.

The EiR helps colleges promote a broader understanding of entrepreneurship that aligns with the approach set out throughout this Playbook. This includes supporting learners to develop creativity, problem solving, initiative, opportunity recognition and innovation skills, while building staff confidence and capability to embed entrepreneurial thinking within learning and teaching.

Assessing Readiness

Before recruiting an EiR, colleges should assess their institutional priorities, learner needs, regional opportunities and existing enterprise activity. This assessment should consider:

Institutional Priorities

- Strategic objectives the EiR will support
- Existing enterprise and innovation activity
- Gaps in provision
- Desired outcomes and impact measures

Local Ecosystem

- Key economic sectors
- Emerging opportunities and skills needs
- Existing entrepreneurial activity
- Business support organisations and networks
- Partnership opportunities

Learner Demographics and Needs

- Learner aspirations and motivations
- Barriers to participation
- Access to role models and networks
- Progression opportunities

The most effective EiRs are often those whose experience, expertise and networks align closely with institutional priorities, learner needs and regional opportunities.

Related Resource: College Entrepreneurship Capacity Baseline Assessment

A practical diagnostic tool to help colleges map existing enterprise activity, learner demographics, partnerships, curriculum strengths, operational considerations, opportunities and barriers. Designed to support readiness planning and provide a baseline for embedding entrepreneurial learning and innovation activity.

Assessment Outcome

The outcome of the readiness assessment should be a clear understanding of the type of entrepreneurial support most likely to create value within the college.

Rather than adopting a generic entrepreneurship model, colleges should use their institutional priorities, learner demographics and local ecosystem context to determine the profile, experience and networks most needed.

An EiR profile should reflect local ecosystem needs rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Ecosystem Need	EiR Profile
Strong startup ecosystem	Growth entrepreneur
Social deprivation	Community entrepreneur
Manufacturing region	Industry innovator
Rural area	Rural enterprise specialist
Diverse population	Inclusive entrepreneurship specialist

Related Resource: College Enterprise Personas and Ecosystem Profiles

This resource groups Scotland's colleges into six ecosystem personas based on strategic priorities, regional context and areas of focus. It helps colleges explore how different environments may benefit from different entrepreneurial approaches, partnership models and Entrepreneur in Residence profiles, ensuring support is aligned with local needs and opportunities.

Choosing the Right EiR

Practitioner or Academic?

Practitioner-led EiRs bring entrepreneurial experience, established networks and credibility with both learners and external stakeholders. Both approaches offer strengths. However, practitioner-led EiRs often bring current entrepreneurial experience, established networks and a level of credibility that helps learners and staff connect entrepreneurial concepts to real-world practice.

There is a particular value in bringing people in from outside the educational sector. Institutions gain access to contemporary entrepreneurial expertise without requiring all staff to possess entrepreneurial backgrounds. The EiR creates social capital that strengthens the institution's innovation capacity, helping colleges become more connected, relevant and responsive to local economic needs.

Generalist or Specialist?

A generalist EiR is often most appropriate where entrepreneurial activity is still emerging and there is a need to build foundational awareness and engagement across the institution.

Specialist EiRs may be more appropriate where colleges have a strategic focus on specific sectors such as:

- Creative industries
- Social enterprise
- Digital and AI
- Sustainability and net zero
- Advanced manufacturing
- Community entrepreneurship

In such cases, specialist knowledge, networks, and industry expertise can help accelerate progress and strengthen outcomes.

Delivery or Influence?

Some EiRs focus primarily on direct delivery through workshops, mentoring and learner support. Others focus on partnership development, strategic change and ecosystem building. The strongest models combine both approaches, balancing direct engagement with learners and staff alongside strategic influence across the wider institution and ecosystem.

Ultimately, recruitment should begin with a clear understanding of the institution's strategic priorities, learner demographics and desired outcomes. The question is not, *"Who is the best entrepreneur?"* but rather, *"Who is the right fit for this institution?"*

Professional or Volunteer?

A key learning from the programme was the importance of treating the EiR as a professional role rather than a voluntary contribution.

While volunteers can provide valuable guest speaking and mentoring support, the responsibilities associated with an embedded EiR often include strategic engagement, partnership development, curriculum activity, ecosystem building and learner support.

For colleges seeking sustained impact, consideration should therefore be given to establishing a paid role with clearly defined responsibilities and outcomes.

Related Resource: Entrepreneur-in-Residence (EiR) Recruitment Framework

A practical recruitment toolkit designed to help colleges align EiR appointments with institutional priorities, learner demographics and ecosystem needs. Includes example college personas, EiR profiles, recruitment criteria, interview questions and assessment dimensions to support informed recruitment decisions and maximise impact.

Embedding an EiR Successfully

The effectiveness of an EiR depends as much on integration as recruitment. Colleges that achieve the greatest impact focused on early visibility, practical support and enabling access across the institution.

Create Visibility Early

Where possible, EiR appointments should align with the start of the academic year. Launching the role during induction activities or Freshers' Week can:

- Raise awareness early
- Capture student interest
- Create opportunities for relationship building
- Provide more time for learners to develop ideas

Provide the Right Tools

EiRs should be equipped to operate as fully embedded members of the college community. This may include:

- A college email account
- Microsoft 365 and systems access
- Internal communications channels
- Workspace or hot-desking facilities
- Access to staff directories and networks

Lack of access to institutional systems can create unnecessary barriers to communication, engagement and collaboration.

Enable Access Across the Institution

Colleges should actively facilitate introductions and relationship-building across departments, campuses and learner communities. Effective approaches include:

- Classroom visits
- Participation in staff meetings
- Attendance at learner events
- Inclusion in employer engagement activities
- Staff referrals of learners who may benefit from support

The more visible and accessible the EiR becomes, the easier it is to build trust, identify opportunities and support participation across the institution.

Mini Case Study: Building Student Confidence and Participation **Bayile Adeoti, Entrepreneur in Residence**

One of the biggest advantages of being embedded within the college for several days each week was the opportunity to build relationships with students across different departments and campuses. Being visible and accessible meant I could identify students with entrepreneurial potential, encourage them to explore opportunities and support them through the application process.

This contributed to strong engagement with programmes such as the Start-Up Factories competition, where students I worked closely with went on to secure first and third place nationally. I also supported learners to engage with the Converge College Creators Fund, giving them the opportunity to pitch for up to £2,500 to develop their ideas further.

What became clear very quickly was that many students did not lack ability or ambition, they lacked confidence. Often, they simply needed someone to listen, challenge their thinking and help them take the first step. Being present within the college allowed me to have those conversations at the right time.

Equally important was the support provided after applications were submitted. Whether students were successful or not, continuing the relationship helped build their resilience, maintain momentum and encourage them to pursue future opportunities.

Key Learning: *Students are more likely to engage with enterprise and innovation opportunities when there is a trusted, visible person helping them build confidence, navigate pathways and recognise their own potential.*

Delivery Models

Different models may be appropriate depending on institutional size and ambition.

Smaller colleges may benefit from a single EiR operating across the institution. Larger colleges may adopt a distributed model involving:

- A lead EiR supported by local champions
- Campus-based EiRs
- Theme or sector-specific EiRs

Entrepreneurial Champions can play an important role in identifying opportunities, supporting local activity and connecting colleagues to wider institutional objectives.

Regardless of structure, the most effective models combine strategic influence, relationship-building and direct engagement with staff and learners.

Measuring Success

Success measures should be established before recruitment and aligned with institutional priorities.

Learner Impact

- Student engagement
- Participation in enterprise and innovation activity
- Confidence and ambition
- Mentoring relationships

Institutional Impact

- Staff capability and confidence
- Curriculum integration
- New partnerships
- Increased visibility of entrepreneurial activity

Ecosystem Impact

- Employer engagement
- Community partnerships
- Collaborative activity
- Regional innovation and enterprise outcomes

The Importance of Continuity

The impact of an EiR grows significantly over time as relationships, trust and visibility develop across the institution.

During the first year, much of the work focuses on understanding institutional culture, establishing credibility and building relationships. As those relationships mature, opportunities for engagement expand significantly.

Benefits of continuity include:

- Greater awareness of the role among students
- Increased engagement from staff
- Stronger external partnerships
- More learner referrals
- Increased participation in enterprise and innovation programmes
- Greater ability to support long-term projects and initiatives

Entrepreneurial learning, innovation activity and culture change develop over multiple years rather than within a single academic cycle. Where possible, colleges should consider longer-term or recurring EiR models that allow relationships, networks and activity to mature and generate sustainable impact.

Practical Teaching & Learning Resources for Staff & Students

One of the strongest themes emerging from the programme was that entrepreneurial learning rarely begins with business plans, pitching competitions or venture creation. Instead, learners engage most successfully when entrepreneurial learning is introduced through confidence building, self-awareness, creativity, problem solving and opportunity recognition.

The programme highlighted the importance of understanding entrepreneurship as a set of transferable behaviours rather than a specific career destination. While some learners may go on to establish businesses, others will apply entrepreneurial thinking within employment, public services, community projects or further study. The common thread is the ability to identify opportunities, take initiative and create value for others.

This broader interpretation creates a more accessible and inclusive starting point for learners across all curriculum areas. Entrepreneurial capability therefore becomes the practical application of wider meta-skills such as creativity, communication, resilience, collaboration and critical thinking in real-world situations.

The resources developed through the programme reflect this philosophy. Each provides a different route into entrepreneurial learning, but all share a common approach:

- Start with mindset before methodology.
- Prioritise application over theory.
- Use real-world problems and challenges.
- Connect learning directly to vocational practice.
- Build entrepreneurial capability through reflection and experience.

Together, these resources provide flexible approaches that can be adapted across different subject areas, learner groups and college contexts.

Additional Learning from Resource Development and Delivery

A key learning from the programme was that different approaches to engagement produced different outcomes. Whilst activity was undertaken with both staff and students, the most effective route to wider adoption was often learner-first. When staff saw students actively engaging with entrepreneurial learning, demonstrating increased confidence and responding positively to new approaches, they were more likely to recognise its relevance and consider how it could be integrated into their own practice.

This is particularly important within a college environment where staff are often balancing significant operational, curriculum and quality pressures. Rather than asking colleagues to adopt entirely new approaches from the outset, the programme found that demonstrating learner

engagement and impact first created the confidence, evidence and momentum needed to encourage wider staff participation.

As a result, many of the resources here are learner focused. However, the programme also began testing and developing staff-focused resources and continuing professional development (CPD) approaches designed to build staff confidence, capability and understanding of entrepreneurial learning across different curriculum areas.

The programme also recognised the realities of operating within an already stretched system. EiRs therefore focused on developing practical tools and activities that could be integrated into existing learning and teaching practice rather than requiring significant curriculum redesign. Wherever possible, resources were aligned with existing learning outcomes, curriculum structures and institutional priorities, making adoption easier for both staff and learners.

Across all student-facing activity, several common principles consistently emerged. The most effective approaches:

- Meet learners where they are.
- Start with mindset and meta-skills before entrepreneurship.
- Connect learning to learners' interests, aspirations and vocational identities.
- Prioritise participation, creativity and problem solving.
- Create inclusive and accessible entry points for engagement.
- Make learning practical, enjoyable and relevant.

These principles underpin the resources that follow and provide a practical foundation for embedding entrepreneurial learning in ways that are engaging, inclusive and achievable across a wide range of college contexts.

[Related Resource: Calibrate Your Compass: Innovation, Enterprise and Growth](#)

Starting point: Self-awareness and reflection

Calibrate Your Compass uses self-awareness as an accessible entry point to entrepreneurial learning. Built around the SQA Personal Development: Self-Awareness (H18X46) unit, it provides a practical, plug-and-play resource that can be readily adapted across NC and NQ programmes, subject areas and varying semester or term lengths. Rather than introducing entrepreneurship as a standalone topic, it helps learners explore their strengths, interests, values and motivations while developing confidence, reflection and opportunity awareness.

By connecting personal development with entrepreneurial capability, the resource demonstrates how entrepreneurial thinking can be integrated into existing curriculum structures with minimal additional delivery requirements. Flexible enough to be incorporated across different curriculum areas, it supports learners to develop a business or social enterprise concept while strengthening key meta-skills for learning, work and life. Learners are encouraged to reflect, evaluate and adapt their thinking, developing habits and behaviours that underpin innovation, employability and entrepreneurial mindsets.

The resource is supported by a lecturer teaching pack and curriculum mapping tool that align activities, assessments and learner outputs with the Personal Development: Self-Awareness learning outcomes and entrepreneurial meta-skills. It also includes a range of optional enhancement activities, including guest speakers, entrepreneur mentoring, resilience coaching, photography and social media workshops, and branding and design activities, enabling colleges to tailor delivery to their learners, curriculum and available resources.

Why This Approach Matters

Many learners engage more readily with discussions about themselves than with discussions about entrepreneurship. Starting with self-awareness creates an inclusive and low-risk route into entrepreneurial learning whilst making it easy for staff to embed within existing programmes and learning outcomes.

Suitable for:

- NC and NQ programmes across curriculum areas
- SCQF Levels 5 and 6
- Learners exploring future education, employment or self-employment pathways
- Colleges seeking a flexible, curriculum-integrated approach to entrepreneurial learning

[Related Resource: Meta-Preneur: Think Differently](#)

Starting point: Meta-skills and problem solving

Meta-Preneur was developed around the belief that entrepreneurial learning should be available to all learners, regardless of whether they ever start a business.

Grounded in the Skills Development Scotland Meta-Skills Framework, the programme focuses on developing the capabilities employers consistently value, including initiative, adaptability, communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking. Learners develop and apply these skills through practical challenges and real-world scenarios rather than learning about entrepreneurship in the abstract.

Whilst underpinned by a consistent framework and delivery model, Meta-Preneur has been adapted and delivered across a diverse range of learner groups, curriculum areas and SCQF levels, including Electrical Installation Level 5, Automotive Level 4, ESOL, HNC Engineering, and WorkStart programmes at SCQF Levels 4 and 5. These examples demonstrate the flexibility of the programme and how it can be tailored to different subjects, levels and learner groups whilst maintaining a consistent focus on Meta-Skills development, confidence building and real-world application. In doing so, they provide practical examples of how colleges can adapt the programme to their own curriculum and delivery contexts.

A distinctive feature of Meta-Preneur is its emphasis on intrapreneurship and social innovation alongside entrepreneurship. The focus is not solely on creating future business owners, but on developing learners who can solve problems, identify opportunities, improve workplaces and create value wherever they work.

Impact Case Study: The Student in a Suit

[A powerful example of a mindset shift in real time, moving from disengagement to confidence, ownership and entrepreneurial thinking within a single session.](#)

The resource is supported by a comprehensive suite of materials including session plans, learner guides, lecturer delivery packs and pre- and post-programme evaluation tools. Each session can be adapted to suit the language, vocational context and learning needs of different cohorts whilst maintaining alignment to the Meta-Skills Framework and core programme outcomes.

The programme also includes a dedicated Community Challenge framework, enabling learners to work with communities, charities, social enterprises and employers to tackle genuine problems, develop solutions and pitch their ideas in authentic contexts.

Why This Approach Matters

Meta-Preneur reframes entrepreneurship as a practical set of behaviours rather than a career choice. By focusing on Meta-Skills, intrapreneurship and real-world challenges, the programme helps learners develop the confidence, employability skills and problem-solving capabilities increasingly valued by employers, regardless of their chosen career pathway.

Suitable for:

- Vocational and technical programmes
- ESOL learners
- Employability programmes
- SCQF Levels 4-6
- Colleges seeking a structured Meta-Skills and challenge-based approach

[Related Resource: Eco-Preneur Pathways: Construction Crafts MA](#)

Starting Point: Industry Relevance

Developed as an enhancement to the SQA Construction Crafts unit for Modern Apprentices, the resource integrates entrepreneurship, Net Zero and artificial intelligence into existing learning and teaching activities. Designed to complement rather than add complexity to the qualification, it uses real-world construction examples to help learners understand how environmental, technological and commercial factors influence decision-making across the sector.

Through industry case studies, practical activities and reflective discussion, learners explore sustainability challenges, identify opportunities for innovation, and consider how entrepreneurial thinking can create value whilst addressing real-world problems. The resource also develops critical thinking, research skills and ethical awareness through topics such as AI, misinformation and responsible business practice.

Aligned to existing learning outcomes, the resource provides a practical way of enhancing vocational delivery whilst connecting curriculum content to contemporary industry challenges and opportunities. It is supported by a lecturer guidance document, including a suggested session-by-session delivery structure for integrating Net Zero, entrepreneurship and AI into Construction Crafts learning.

Why This Approach Matters

Learners are far more likely to engage when entrepreneurial concepts are linked directly to their chosen profession. By connecting entrepreneurial thinking to current industry challenges and opportunities, the resource demonstrates that entrepreneurship is not separate from vocational practice but increasingly forms part of it.

Suitable for:

- Construction and trades programmes
- Modern Apprenticeships
- SCQF Level 6 learners
- Sustainability and Net Zero-focused learning
- Industry-facing curriculum activity

[Related Resource: Eco-Preneur Pathways: Train the Trainer](#)

Starting point: Building staff confidence

Entrepreneurial learning cannot be sustained through resources alone. Staff confidence and capability are equally important.

The Eco-Preneur Train the Trainer programme was developed as a peer-to-peer professional learning experience for college staff, helping participants explore entrepreneurial thinking through participation, reflection and practical application. Rather than focusing on theory or academic models, the programme encourages staff to experience entrepreneurial approaches first-hand before considering how they might be adapted within their own teaching and learning contexts.

Combining facilitated discussion, shared learning and practical activities, the programme explores themes including creativity, critical thinking, resilience, collaboration and problem solving. Participants are encouraged to reflect on their own practice, consider the development of entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial mindsets, and identify opportunities to embed these approaches within existing curriculum delivery.

The programme is supported by a seven-session delivery guide outlining the structure, learning intentions and progression of the programme from entrepreneurial mindset development through to applied business and industry challenges. A suite of supporting resources, including presentations, facilitator materials, handouts and participant playbooks, provides practical activities, discussion prompts and tools to support delivery and classroom application.

A key principle underpinning the programme is that lecturers do not need to become entrepreneurship specialists. Instead, they need confidence, practical tools and an understanding of how entrepreneurial capability can support learning within their subject area.

Why This Approach Matters

When staff have opportunities to explore and apply entrepreneurial approaches themselves, they are better placed to identify how entrepreneurial thinking can support learning, employability and skills development within their own curriculum areas.

Suitable for:

- Lecturers
- Curriculum managers
- Staff development teams
- Entrepreneurs in Residence
- Enterprise and innovation leads
- Staff involved in curriculum design or entrepreneurial learning initiatives

Common Principles Across All Resources

Whilst each resource takes a different approach, several principles underpin them all:

- Start with mindset before entrepreneurship.
- Link entrepreneurial learning to existing curriculum activity.
- Use real-world problems and authentic challenges.
- Prioritise reflection and discussion alongside action.
- Focus on entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial capability.
- Connect learning to employment, self-employment and community impact.
- Build confidence before complexity.

Most importantly, these resources demonstrate that entrepreneurial learning does not need to sit at the margins of the curriculum. When connected to learners' interests, vocational identities and future aspirations, it can become an integral part of the college experience.

Inclusive Entrepreneurial Learning

While the resources described in the previous section provide practical entry points, their effectiveness depends on how well they engage diverse learners. The programme highlighted the importance of inclusive entrepreneurial learning approaches that meet students where they are and connect entrepreneurial concepts to their interests, identities and aspirations.

Entrepreneurial potential exists across every curriculum area, yet many learners do not identify with the language of entrepreneurship. Students are often more likely to engage when entrepreneurial learning is framed through creativity, problem solving, future careers, personal interests and community impact rather than business ownership alone.

Entrepreneurial learning is most effective when learners engage with it without necessarily recognising it as entrepreneurship.

Inclusive entrepreneurial learning is therefore about creating accessible opportunities for all learners to develop confidence, creativity, initiative and problem-solving capability in ways that feel relevant to their own lives, interests and future pathways.

A key learning is that learner engagement often became a catalyst for wider staff engagement. When students responded positively to entrepreneurial learning activities, demonstrated increased confidence and actively participated in challenges and discussions, staff were more likely to recognise the value of these approaches and explore how they could be embedded within their own teaching practice.

Related Resource: Learner Personas and Inclusive Delivery Guide

[A practical resource that uses learner personas to help practitioners understand different motivations, barriers and strengths, supporting more inclusive and relevant entrepreneurial learning across curriculum areas.](#)

Meet Students Where They Are

One of the biggest barriers to entrepreneurial learning is language.

Many students quickly disengage if they believe enterprise activity is only relevant to people who want to launch a start-up, appear on Dragon's Den or become business owners.

In practice, engagement is often strongest when activities begin with students' interests, ambitions and challenges before introducing enterprise terminology.

Rather than asking learners whether they want to be entrepreneurs, it can be more effective to ask:

- What would you like to do in the future?
- What frustrates you about your industry?
- What would you change?
- What problem would you like to solve?
- What are you passionate about?

This shifts the conversation from business creation to opportunity creation.

For example, Construction students are interested in solving problems, improving processes and developing trade-related opportunities but did not identify with the term *entrepreneur*. Similarly, within Hair & Beauty, where students frequently aspire to become self-employed or build a personal brand while viewing entrepreneurship as something separate from their chosen profession.

One approach tested through the programme was to begin with learners' interests, strengths, aspirations and future lifestyles rather than asking them for a business idea. Learners explored what they enjoyed doing, what they were good at, the brands they admired, the improvements they would make and the types of careers and lifestyles they wanted in the future. Entrepreneurial thinking was then introduced as a way of connecting and developing these interests rather than as a separate topic. This helped make enterprise activity feel more personal, relevant and accessible, particularly for learners who did not initially identify with entrepreneurship.

Impact Case Study: Seeing Beyond the Salon

An example of how connecting entrepreneurial learning to learners' vocational identities, industry role models and real career pathways can increase engagement, confidence and participation.

The most successful activities created low-barrier entry points that allowed learners to participate without needing a business idea, prior enterprise knowledge or an entrepreneurial identity. Simplicity, accessibility and relevance were often more important than complexity.

Practical Tips

- Lead with ideas rather than business concepts.
- Use language that is familiar and relatable.
- Focus on opportunities, careers and problem solving.
- Avoid assuming learners are interested in starting a business.
- Introduce entrepreneurial terminology gradually and in context.

Related Resource: Enterprise Language Made Simple

A student-friendly glossary that translates enterprise, innovation, entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship and Meta-Skills terminology into clear and accessible language to support learner engagement and understanding.

Understand Different Learner Motivations

Different learner groups engage with entrepreneurial learning in different ways. Participation is strongest when activities are connected directly to learners' interests, aspirations, subject areas and future career pathways.

Curriculum Area	Learners May Engage Through
Hair and Beauty	• Self-employment • Personal branding • Building a client base • Freelance opportunities • Lifestyle and career flexibility
Construction	• Running a trade business • Managing projects • Winning contracts • Building a customer base • Leading teams
Sport	• Coaching • Personal training • Community programmes • Sports businesses • Personal brands
Catering and Hospitality	• Customer experience • Food concepts • Hospitality innovation • Pop-up events • Food businesses
Creative Industries	• Freelancing • Content creation • Selling creative products • Commissions • Building a portfolio career
Health and Social Care	• Social enterprise • Community impact • Service innovation • Solving local challenges • Improving outcomes for others

Learners engage most strongly when entrepreneurial learning is connected to identities they already recognise, such as apprentice, designer, coach, engineer, care practitioner, creator or community contributor. Positioning entrepreneurship as something that complements these identities, rather than replacing them, helps increase engagement and participation.

Recognising Different Types of Entrepreneurial Learners

Entrepreneurial learners do not all look the same. Some arrive with a business idea already in mind, while others demonstrate entrepreneurial behaviours through side hustles, creativity, leadership, problem solving, innovation or community action.

Examples may include learners who:

- Already operate a small business
- Sell products or services informally
- Have strong creative ideas but limited confidence
- Enjoy solving problems
- Want to make a positive difference in their community
- Demonstrate leadership and initiative
- Thrive in collaborative projects
- Are interested in innovation rather than business ownership

Recognising these different starting points helps create more inclusive pathways into entrepreneurial learning.

Intrapreneurship Matters

A key learning is the importance of helping learners understand how entrepreneurial thinking applies within employment as well as self-employment. This theme was reflected throughout resources such as Meta-Preneur, where the emphasis was placed on applying creativity, initiative, problem solving and opportunity recognition within real-world settings rather than focusing solely on business creation.

Many learners will build successful careers within organisations rather than establish businesses of their own. Employers consistently highlighted the value of individuals who can identify opportunities, solve problems, improve processes, communicate effectively and take initiative.

These behaviours are often described as **intrapreneurship**: applying entrepreneurial thinking within an organisation to create value, drive innovation and improve outcomes. Framing entrepreneurship in this way helps learners recognise its relevance regardless of their chosen career pathway and ensures entrepreneurial learning remains aligned with employer needs and expectations.

Practical Approaches

Colleges can embed intrapreneurship by:

- Using real employer challenges.
- Encouraging workplace problem-solving projects.
- Involving businesses in classroom activities.
- Exploring examples of innovation within organisations.
- Highlighting entrepreneurial employees as well as business owners.
- Encouraging learners to identify improvements within workplaces, placements and communities.

This allows learners to see entrepreneurship as a way of thinking rather than simply a route into self-employment.

Use Storytelling, Humour and Relatable Role Models

Students consistently engage more with stories than theory. The most successful sessions were often conversational rather than instructional, allowing learners to hear authentic experiences from people they could relate to. The closer a role model feels to a learner's own experiences and aspirations, the greater the potential impact.

Effective role models are not always the most successful business owners. Learners often respond best to:

- Former students
- Local business owners
- Freelancers
- Entrepreneurs from similar backgrounds
- Individuals working within the learner's chosen sector
- People willing to discuss challenges as well as successes

When selecting speakers and mentors:

- Prioritise relevance over profile
- Include diverse backgrounds and experiences
- Showcase different career pathways
- Include examples of both employment and self-employment
- Create opportunities for conversation and questions

Creating Accessible Opportunities to Participate

Not every learner wants to start a business.

Inclusive entrepreneurial learning creates opportunities for participation without requiring learners to commit to entrepreneurship as a career choice. The aim is often confidence building, experimentation and exploration rather than immediate business creation.

Inclusion is not simply about who is invited to participate, but how opportunities are designed and delivered. Factors such as timing, location, accessibility, communication and delivery format can all influence who feels able to take part. Considerations such as transport, caring responsibilities, cultural factors, scheduling and communication methods can also shape participation and should be considered when planning activity. Small adjustments to how opportunities are designed and delivered can often make the difference between an opportunity being available and genuinely accessible to a broader range of learners.

Mini Case Study: Designing for Access: Small Changes, Wider Participation **Bayile Adeoti, Entrepreneur in Residence**

Whilst supporting the delivery of a no-code technology programme across the Glasgow colleges, it became clear to me that the original weekday format could unintentionally exclude some participants.

Drawing on my experience of working in inclusive entrepreneurship, I encouraged the organisers to consider alternative delivery options that would better accommodate people with work commitments, caring responsibilities and other barriers to participation. Rather than assuming low attendance reflected a lack of interest, we looked at whether the programme design itself was creating obstacles.

As a result, Glasgow Clyde College hosted a Saturday session alongside the weekday delivery. Whilst some participant drop-off is normal within any programme, attendance at the Saturday session exceeded expectations and demonstrated that a relatively small change could make a significant difference.

This reinforced an important lesson for me: inclusion is not simply about who is invited. It is about how opportunities are designed and delivered. Factors such as timing, location, accessibility, communication and delivery format can all influence who feels able to participate.

Key Learning: *Inclusive entrepreneurial learning starts with inclusive design. Small adjustments can significantly broaden participation and create more equitable access to opportunity.*

Sessions that encourage discussion, experimentation, teamwork and creativity are often more successful than those centred on business planning or enterprise theory. Learners are most likely to engage when activities feel interactive, relevant and enjoyable. Presenting ideas to external audiences can be a particularly powerful confidence-building experience. Learners have opportunities to communicate their thinking beyond the classroom, respond to questions and engage with people who bring real-world perspectives and experience.

Examples include:

- Idea generation workshops
- Team challenges
- Community problem-solving activities
- Innovation projects
- AI ideation workshops
- Networking opportunities
- Employer challenge programmes
- Enterprise competitions

Related Resource: One Hour AI - Ideas, You & AI Interactive Workshop

An interactive ideation workshop that helps learners generate ideas from their interests and experiences whilst building creativity, opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial thinking. Designed to engage learners across a wide range of curriculum areas, particularly those who do not initially identify with enterprise activity.

Practical Tip: Start with the Ingredients

One Hair & Beauty workshop used a simple analogy:

Ingredients → Recipe → Cake

Rather than asking learners to generate a business idea from the outset, the session focused first on identifying their interests, strengths, motivations, admired brands and future ambitions. Learners then used AI to combine these "ingredients" into potential business concepts and opportunities.

This approach reduced pressure, encouraged participation and demonstrated that entrepreneurial thinking can begin with self-awareness, curiosity and aspiration rather than a fully formed business idea. AI acted as a thinking partner to help develop ideas, not create them.

Competitions Are a Tool, Not the Outcome

Enterprise competitions can be highly effective engagement tools. A key lesson from the programme was that competitions often work best as an engagement mechanism rather than as the primary objective.

They can:

- Generate interest.
- Create momentum.
- Provide structure.
- Build confidence.
- Increase visibility of entrepreneurial activity.

However, the most significant benefits often come from the process surrounding participation rather than the competition itself. Longer-term value is frequently created through:

- Mentoring.
- Networking.
- Confidence building.
- Teamwork.
- Idea development.
- Exposure to new opportunities.

While funding and prizes can be attractive, they are rarely the sole reason learners engage. Colleges should therefore view competitions as one component within a broader entrepreneurial learning journey rather than an end goal.

Related Resource: Student Start-Up Competition Framework

A flexible collection of templates, guidance and tools to help colleges deliver accessible student enterprise competitions focused on participation, confidence building, creativity and idea development.

Internal Engagement & Uncovering Hidden Entrepreneurship

Why Internal Engagement Matters

Across colleges, lecturers are developing innovative teaching approaches, building industry partnerships, solving practical challenges, creating new learning resources, supporting community initiatives and introducing learners to real-world opportunities. Many are already helping students develop entrepreneurial skills and mindsets without necessarily describing their work as entrepreneurship.

Mini Case Study: Recognising Hidden Entrepreneurship in Practice **Wendy White-Finnegan, Entrepreneur in Residence**

One of the strongest examples of hidden entrepreneurship I encountered came from Kieran, a Bricklaying Lecturer at Dumfries and Galloway College.

Through conversations about teaching practice, Kieran shared a challenge he had identified within his curriculum area. Students were not regularly accessing the college's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and were missing key learning resources and support materials.

Rather than accepting this as a learner issue, Kieran looked for a solution. Working independently and without additional resources, he developed a front-facing application that acted as a more accessible gateway to the VLE, making it easier and more appealing for students to access the content they needed.

What struck me was that Kieran did not describe this as entrepreneurship. He simply saw a problem affecting his learners and found a practical way to address it. However, from an entrepreneurial perspective, the example demonstrated many of the behaviours we were encouraging through the programme: creativity, initiative, problem solving, innovation and a clear focus on creating value for others.

As I met more staff across different curriculum areas, I found numerous examples like this. Lecturers were already applying entrepreneurial thinking in their day-to-day practice without recognising it as such. Sharing Kieran's example with colleagues helped demonstrate that entrepreneurship is not limited to business start-ups or enterprise programmes. It is often visible in the ways staff identify challenges, test solutions and improve outcomes for learners.

Key Learning: *Entrepreneurial practice is already happening across classrooms and curriculum teams. Recognising and celebrating this work builds staff confidence, shares good practice, and broadens understanding of entrepreneurship in education.*

Many staff associate entrepreneurship primarily with Business departments, enterprise programmes or start-up support. However, the programme identified entrepreneurial practice across a wide range of curriculum areas, including Construction, Hair & Beauty, Care, Hospitality and Engineering.

Examples included:

- Developing innovative teaching resources
- Creating new approaches to learner engagement
- Building relationships with employers
- Leading community projects
- Developing digital solutions
- Writing and publishing books
- Running businesses alongside teaching
- Creating products and services connected to professional expertise

In many cases, staff viewed these activities simply as part of their day-to-day role. Recognising and celebrating such practice can help broaden understanding of entrepreneurship, build staff confidence and demonstrate its relevance across all curriculum areas.

The focus of internal engagement should therefore be on identifying existing strengths, creating opportunities for connection and creating mechanisms that enable practice, knowledge and experience to be shared across the institution and beyond.

Related Resource: Entrepreneurial Activity Mapping Survey

[A practical survey designed to help colleges identify existing entrepreneurial, innovation, employability and enterprise activity across the institution.](#)

The programme found the survey was most effective when used as the starting point for conversations rather than as a standalone exercise. While surveys provided useful intelligence and ensured all staff had an opportunity to participate, the richest insights often emerged through classroom visits, informal discussions and relationship-building activities.

Only a small number of participants in the eventual cross-college entrepreneurial staff network were initially identified through the survey process. However, the survey remained valuable because it widened awareness of the initiative, provided a fair and open invitation to participate and helped connect with staff who may otherwise not have been identified through existing networks.

One EiR found that whilst an initial survey was distributed to hundreds of staff across multiple colleges, the majority of participants in the staff network were identified through introductions, classroom visits and informal conversations. Many of the most interesting examples of entrepreneurial practice emerged through these discussions, revealing innovative teaching approaches, employer partnerships and projects that had never previously been shared beyond individual departments.

Practical Tip

Do not rely solely on surveys to identify entrepreneurial activity. Staff are significantly more likely to engage following face-to-face introductions, conversations about their own teaching practice and opportunities to share what they were already doing.

Understanding Staff Perspectives

Staff begin from different starting points and levels of confidence when it comes to entrepreneurial learning. A recurring challenge during the programme was helping colleagues understand how entrepreneurial learning connected to their own curriculum areas, priorities and existing practice.

Common barriers include:

- Limited time and competing priorities
- Lack of confidence
- Uncertainty about relevance
- Change fatigue
- Misunderstanding programme objectives
- Concerns about additional workload

Many of these barriers reflect issues of capacity, clarity and confidence rather than resistance to entrepreneurial learning itself. Successful engagement focuses on listening, understanding local context, demonstrating relevance and building on existing practice. Informal conversations, classroom visits and practical examples are often more effective than introducing entirely new concepts or approaches.

Sustaining Engagement Through Networks and Champions

Whilst individual champions are important, sustainable culture change requires structures that support ongoing collaboration, visibility and knowledge sharing.

The programme found two particularly effective approaches: cross-college steering groups and communities of practice.

Cross-College Steering Groups

One of the strongest mechanisms for supporting delivery and embedding entrepreneurial learning was the establishment of a cross-college steering group.

The steering group brought together curriculum leads, senior managers, programme representatives and delivery staff from participating colleges to provide a shared space for collaboration, support and coordination. Its purpose was not to oversee or audit activity, but to help shape delivery, identify challenges and support progression across institutions.

A key learning was that effective steering groups operate as collaborative working groups rather than reporting structures. They provide opportunities to:

- Share delivery insights and learner feedback
- Identify and address barriers
- Coordinate activity across institutions
- Strengthen senior-level engagement and buy-in
- Shape programme development collectively

Successful steering groups typically:

- Meet regularly
- Include representation from leadership and delivery teams
- Focus on action as well as discussion
- Create opportunities for co-design
- Share learner impact
- Surface challenges honestly
- Follow up agreed actions

Alongside monthly steering group meetings, regular college-level catch-ups were often equally important in maintaining momentum, resolving practical issues and strengthening relationships. The combination of strategic oversight and local engagement proved particularly effective.

A related learning was the importance of programme identity. For initiatives operating across multiple institutions, a shared programme name, visual identity and consistent communications helped create visibility, credibility and a sense of collective ownership.

The key measure of success is simple: if the network or steering group stopped meeting tomorrow, would people notice?

Impact Case Study: Winning Hearts and Minds

[Demonstrates how early engagement, visibility and shared ownership create the conditions for participation and long-term commitment.](#)

Cross-College Communities of Practice

Alongside senior engagement, the programme sought to create opportunities for lecturers and practitioners to share entrepreneurial learning activity taking place across different colleges.

A cross-college entrepreneurial staff network was established using a simple online "show and tell" format. The objective was to surface hidden entrepreneurial practice, encourage peer learning and create connections between staff who may not otherwise have met.

The most effective recruitment method was personal introduction and conversation. Whilst the initial survey generated some participation, most active members joined following face-to-face engagement and recommendations from colleagues.

A one-hour online format proved particularly effective and typically included:

- Introductions
- Staff or student showcases
- Discussion and questions
- Sharing opportunities and resources
- Agreed follow-up actions

Different sessions focused on different themes, including:

- Staff sharing entrepreneurial classroom projects
- Students presenting entrepreneurial activity
- Collaborative feedback on emerging curriculum resources

The sessions created opportunities to share practical examples, discuss challenges, identify common barriers and learn from approaches being tested in different colleges. Staff frequently followed up with colleagues after meetings, leading to new connections, collaboration and the replication of successful practice.

Future iterations could focus on specific curriculum areas or themes, such as entrepreneurship in sport, hospitality, hair and beauty or engineering, creating opportunities for deeper exploration of sector-specific practice.

The Role of Lecturer Champions

Entrepreneurial learning is often accelerated through enthusiastic staff champions. As trusted members of staff, lecturers frequently act as the bridge between entrepreneurial opportunities and student participation. Their understanding of learners' strengths, ambitions and support needs places them in a unique position to identify potential, encourage engagement and connect students to opportunities they may not otherwise consider. Students are often most likely to participate when a lecturer can clearly demonstrate the relevance of an activity to their aspirations, curriculum and future pathways.

These individuals help connect strategic ambitions with classroom delivery and often become some of the most credible advocates for entrepreneurial learning.

Champion roles may include:

- Sharing practice with colleagues
- Piloting new approaches
- Supporting curriculum development
- Promoting opportunities to learners
- Identifying entrepreneurial students
- Acting as advocates for entrepreneurial learning

Champion networks work best when they are built around collaboration rather than responsibility. Voluntary participation, peer support, practice-sharing opportunities and recognition of contribution all help sustain engagement over time.

Practical Tip:

Don't just look outside the college for speakers and role models. Spend time speaking to staff, understanding their interests and experiences. You may discover entrepreneurs, authors, innovators and community leaders already working within the institution. Their stories can be one of the most powerful and accessible ways of inspiring both students and colleagues.

Mini Case Study: How Trusted Lecturers Unlock Student Participation
Lee-Anne Gillie, Entrepreneur in Residence

Several examples from the programme highlighted the important role lecturers play in identifying opportunities and encouraging participation.

A Digital and Computing lecturer identified a student who was already developing ideas and projects independently. Because the lecturer understood the aims of the programme and had an established relationship with me, she encouraged the student to get involved in the college pitching competition. The student went on to enter and win first place in the local final.

Similarly, a Hairdressing student had a strong business idea but lacked confidence. By working alongside the student's lecturer, who had an established and trusted relationship with the learner, I was able to provide additional encouragement and support. The student entered the competition and achieved third place.

In another example, a Hairdressing lecturer requested support for a Level 6 group preparing to move into employment and self-employment. Working with South of Scotland Enterprise and Business Gateway, a session was developed focusing on confidence, self-belief, practical next steps and available support. Students explored AI tools, developed mood boards for their future careers and left what the lecturer later described as "buzzing".

Key Learning: *Students are more likely to engage with entrepreneurial opportunities when they are encouraged and supported by lecturers who understand their strengths, recognise their potential and have established relationships with them.*

External Engagement & Ecosystem Building

Why External Engagement Matters

Meaningful connections with employers, entrepreneurs, community organisations and support agencies can significantly strengthen entrepreneurial learning, innovation and employability. Done well, external engagement creates richer learning experiences, stronger progression pathways and greater exposure to opportunities beyond education.

Building on their connector role, EiRs can help colleges develop and sustain these relationships, creating value for learners, staff, employers and communities alike.

Understanding and Mapping Your Local Ecosystem

Effective engagement begins with understanding the ecosystem that already exists around the college.

Whilst local structures vary significantly, similar stakeholders were identified across participating regions. These organisations often play an active role in business support, employability, innovation and economic development and can provide valuable entry points into wider networks.

Typical ecosystem partners may include:

- Business Gateway
- Chambers of Commerce
- Local authority economic development teams
- Employability services
- Town fund managers and regeneration programmes
- Enterprise agencies
- Third-sector organisations
- Community planning partnerships
- Industry and sector networks
- Schools and universities

Building relationships with these organisations can provide access to employers, community groups, entrepreneurs and support programmes that may otherwise be difficult to reach.

Practical Tip: Start with Existing Connectors

Organisations such as local authorities, Business Gateway, Chambers of Commerce and voluntary sector networks are often the most effective routes into local business and community ecosystems. Whilst direct engagement with individual organisations can be successful, existing partners frequently provide introductions, context and credibility that accelerate relationship building.

Warm introductions often prove more effective than cold outreach. Working through trusted networks can help colleges establish credibility, access opportunities and build relationships more quickly.

Colleges should also look for opportunities to engage through existing meetings, newsletters, forums and partnership networks rather than approaching organisations individually. The programme found that participating in established business, community and voluntary sector networks often generated visibility, new contacts and partnership opportunities more efficiently than one-to-one outreach alone. Getting into existing networks, events and communications channels can be one of the fastest routes to wider ecosystem engagement.

Understanding Different Partners

External organisations engage for different reasons and require different approaches. Understanding their context, priorities and constraints is often the difference between successful engagement and unanswered emails.

- **SMEs: Time-Poor and Risk-Averse**

Small and medium-sized enterprises form the backbone of many local economies, yet they are often the hardest organisations to engage through traditional approaches.

Business owners are frequently balancing operations, sales, finance, staffing and customer relationships simultaneously. Even small requests can feel like an additional burden. Successful engagement often depends on reducing barriers and making participation as straightforward as possible.

- **Freelancers and Microbusinesses**

Freelancers, sole traders and microbusinesses are often amongst the most responsive external partners.

Many are close to their own entrepreneurial journey, willing to share their experiences openly and motivated by a desire to contribute to their local community or profession. They can provide highly relatable and authentic perspectives for learners and often require less formal engagement processes than larger organisations.

- **Third Sector and Community Organisations**

Community organisations frequently hold trusted relationships with individuals and groups that colleges may struggle to reach independently. They bring valuable insight into local needs, challenges, cultural contexts and barriers to participation, making them particularly effective partners when developing inclusive entrepreneurship and community-facing activity.

Community organisations can also act as valuable intermediaries, helping colleges engage learners and groups who may be less likely to access mainstream enterprise, employability or business support. Their deep understanding of the communities they serve can help institutions design opportunities that are more accessible, relevant and responsive to local needs.

The most effective partnerships are built on trust, reciprocity and shared value. Community organisations should not be viewed solely as recruitment channels. Sustainable relationships are strengthened through mutual benefit, shared objectives and recognition of the knowledge, relationships and expertise that community organisations bring.

Practical Tip: Small details matter. Considerations such as catering, dietary requirements and cultural needs can influence whether participants feel welcomed, included and able to engage fully in an activity.

Focus on Problems, Not Programmes

One of the most effective approaches identified during the programme was to focus conversations on challenges rather than programmes.

Instead of leading with:

"Can you support our students?"

More productive conversations often started with:

"What are the biggest challenges facing your organisation at the moment?"

This shifts the discussion from asking for support to exploring opportunities for mutual value.

The strongest partnerships emerged when organisations could see a clear benefit to participation. Successful engagement was rarely based on one-way support. Instead, colleges explored opportunities to address challenges, generate ideas, connect organisations to talent and strengthen links with local communities.

Practical Tip: Keep the Ask Light

Successful partnerships rarely start with major commitments.

Initial engagement may involve:

- A short introductory conversation
- A guest speaker session
- Providing feedback on student ideas
- Sharing a business challenge
- Attending an event or showcase

As trust develops, relationships often progress naturally into deeper forms of collaboration.

Using External Engagement to Enhance Learning

External engagement is most valuable when it contributes directly to student learning.

Employers, entrepreneurs, community organisations and industry professionals can help bring entrepreneurial learning to life by providing students with exposure to different perspectives, challenges and career pathways.

External partners can contribute through:

- Guest speaker sessions
- Live business challenges
- Industry visits
- Mentoring and coaching
- Enterprise competitions
- Judging panels
- Networking opportunities
- Curriculum co-design

These activities help students connect classroom learning to real-world contexts while developing confidence, communication skills and professional networks.

Connecting Learners to the Wider Ecosystem

The EiR can play an important role in connecting entrepreneurial learning activities together. For example, learners may initially engage through curriculum-based workshops such as *One Hour AI*, develop confidence through enterprise challenges and then progress into extracurricular competitions, mentoring opportunities or external programmes.

Creating multiple entry points helps ensure entrepreneurial learning remains accessible to a broad range of learners and enables participation at different levels of confidence and readiness.

As with learner engagement within the classroom, participation is often strongest when opportunities are introduced gradually. Learners who engage initially through curriculum activity can then progress into mentoring, competitions, networking events, employer projects or wider ecosystem opportunities as their confidence develops.

These connections help learners develop confidence, expand professional networks and gain access to opportunities that may otherwise remain inaccessible. Entrepreneurial learning becomes more meaningful when learners can see direct links between classroom activity and the wider world of work.

Using Real-World Challenges and Social Innovation

Many learners engage more readily with problem solving, community impact and creating positive change than with the language of entrepreneurship itself.

Real-world challenges provide authentic opportunities for learners to engage with external partners, explore genuine issues and develop practical solutions. This approach helps learners recognise the relevance of entrepreneurial thinking within their own disciplines and future careers.

Community challenge activities can simultaneously support learner development, strengthen external partnerships and demonstrate the value of entrepreneurial learning to wider

stakeholders. By requiring learners to engage with real organisations, gather evidence, develop responses and present their ideas, these activities create authentic learning experiences that often generate higher levels of motivation, confidence and skills development than classroom-only approaches.

Mini Case Study: Community Challenges as a Bridge Between Learning and Place **Prof. Kirsty Thomson-Gillespie, Entrepreneur in Residence**

One of the most effective mechanisms I found for building learner confidence, strengthening external relationships and demonstrating the value of entrepreneurial learning was the Meta-Preneur Community Challenge.

The challenge asks learners to identify a genuine problem within their community or industry, research it and develop a credible response. This is not a simulation exercise. Learners speak to real people, gather real evidence and present their ideas to real audiences. The authenticity of the task changes the quality of engagement.

Learners who may struggle to engage with more traditional classroom activity often respond positively to this format. Giving students ownership of a problem, the freedom to explore it and the possibility that someone might actually use their ideas creates a level of motivation that is difficult to replicate through classroom-based learning alone.

One of the most powerful elements is the opportunity to present to external audiences. Learners explain their thinking, respond to questions and communicate ideas to people beyond the classroom. For many, it is the first time they have been asked to speak authoritatively about an idea they have developed themselves.

The challenge also creates meaningful connections between colleges and external organisations. Businesses, charities, community groups and public sector organisations gain direct insight into what learners are capable of, whilst students gain exposure to people, networks and opportunities they might not otherwise encounter.

Over time, these interactions strengthen relationships between colleges and their communities. Organisations that initially engage as challenge partners often return and develop wider relationships with the college. The challenge therefore becomes more than a learning activity. It becomes a practical way of building connections, creating visibility and strengthening the college's role within its local ecosystem.

Key Learning: Real-world challenges make entrepreneurial learning more relevant, build confidence and strengthen connections between learners, organisations and communities.

Amplifying Existing Activity Through External Networks

Some of the most effective activity involved strengthening and connecting initiatives that were already taking place within colleges.

Examples included:

- Supporting International Women's Day events through external speakers
- Connecting students to competitions and funding opportunities
- Creating links between schools and colleges
- Introducing industry professionals into curriculum delivery
- Connecting learners to business networks and support organisations

These activities increased the visibility, reach and impact of entrepreneurial learning without requiring entirely new programmes.

Practical Tip

Look beyond entrepreneurship-specific programmes. Employability events, curriculum projects, industry weeks, student showcases, school engagement activities and community initiatives can all provide opportunities to introduce entrepreneurial learning and external partners.

Strengthening Ecosystems Through Collaboration

Colleges do not operate in isolation. As education providers, community anchors and local connectors, they are well placed to bring together learners, employers, public services, community organisations and wider partners. Their contribution to regional economic development, entrepreneurship and innovation is often strengthened when these relationships are actively developed and connected.

The programme demonstrated the value of connecting employers, entrepreneurs, community organisations, support agencies, local authorities, schools, universities and learners through shared activity and relationships. In many cases, colleges acted as conveners, bringing together individuals and organisations that might not otherwise have collaborated.

Examples included:

- Creating links between schools, colleges and employers
- Connecting learners to local business networks and support organisations
- Bringing community organisations into entrepreneurial learning activity
- Supporting collaborative events and sector engagement opportunities
- Sharing practice and opportunities across institutions

The strongest ecosystems are built through relationships rather than individual programmes. By connecting learners, staff, employers, community organisations and support agencies, colleges can create opportunities that extend beyond the classroom whilst strengthening their contribution to local economic and social development.

Mini Case Study: Connecting Colleges to Local Economic Priorities

Marisa Giannasi, Entrepreneur in Residence

As part of wider engagement with local businesses and organisations, I was introduced to Greenock's Town Fund Manager. During our discussions it became clear that opportunities existed to strengthen links between the college, local economic development activity and the town's emerging entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Initial introductions led to conversations around the college's relationship with the town centre, opportunities within the developing entrepreneurial hub and ways learners could become more involved in local economic activity.

Discussions explored the potential role of the college's waterfront campus within future entrepreneurial initiatives and identified opportunities for learners to access vacant retail units through flexible lease arrangements as potential pop-up enterprise spaces.

Further conversations also considered how entrepreneurial activity taking place in schools and colleges could be better connected through shared resources, curriculum collaboration and joint delivery.

Key Learning: *Some of the most valuable partnerships emerge when colleges connect with economic development and regeneration activity already taking place within their region. By acting as conveners and collaborators, colleges can create new opportunities for learners whilst strengthening their contribution to local economic and community development.*

Using This Playbook in Practice

Across all participating colleges, one message emerged consistently: entrepreneurship already exists throughout the college sector. The challenge is not creating entrepreneurial activity from scratch, but recognising, strengthening and connecting the activity that is already taking place.

1. Start with learners, not entrepreneurship

Engagement was strongest when entrepreneurial learning was introduced through confidence-building, creativity, problem solving, personal interests and vocational ambitions rather than business ownership.

2. Meet people where they are

Whether working with learners, lecturers, employers or community organisations, successful engagement started from existing motivations, priorities and challenges.

3. Build on existing practice

The most effective approaches amplified and connected existing activity rather than creating entirely new structures or programmes.

4. Relationships matter

Entrepreneurial learning, innovation and ecosystem development are built through trust, collaboration and sustained engagement over time.

5. Mindset comes before methodology

Confidence, curiosity, adaptability and opportunity recognition provide the foundations upon which entrepreneurial capability can be developed.

Colleges may wish to use this Playbook in different ways depending on their current priorities.

If your priority is learner engagement

- Explore the Practical Teaching and Learning Resources section.
- Review Inclusive Entrepreneurial Learning.
- Consider resources such as Calibrate Your Compass, Meta-Preneur and One Hour AI.

If your priority is staff engagement

- Explore Internal Engagement and Uncovering Hidden Entrepreneurship.
- Consider the Entrepreneurial Activity Mapping Survey.
- Review approaches to communities of practice and staff networks.

If your priority is employer and community engagement

- Explore External Engagement and Ecosystem Building.
- Consider how existing partnerships can support entrepreneurial learning.

If your priority is strategic development

- Explore Recruiting and Embedding an Entrepreneur in Residence.
- Review delivery models, champion networks and steering group approaches.