

Winning Hearts and Minds

Introduction

Launching a new programme across three colleges is never straightforward. It takes more than a good idea - it demands trust, visibility, and a willingness to meet people where they are. This case study documents how Meta-Preneur was introduced into Edinburgh College, Forth Valley College, and West Lothian College, focusing on the approach taken to build early buy-in and lay the groundwork for sustainable delivery.

Meta-Preneur is an enterprise education programme built around the Skills Development Scotland META Skills 4.0 Framework. It helps learners in vocational and trade-based courses develop the higher-order, transferable skills employers increasingly value alongside technical ability - self-management, social intelligence, and innovation - by embedding them in contexts learners already inhabit: their trade, their college, their community.

The challenge was never persuading staff that these skills matter - most already believed that. It was helping them see Meta-Preneur as a practical, deliverable way to develop them, worth making space for in an already pressured curriculum.

Context and Starting Point

Before the programme could be delivered, it needed to exist in the minds and calendars of the people who would shape it - which meant going beyond emails or a programme outline. Staff in vocational departments - automotive, electrical, construction, and others - are practical people with busy timetables. A document landing in an inbox is easy to ignore. A conversation in a workshop is not.

The starting position at each college differed. Some departments had existing enterprise or employability activity to build on; others were starting from scratch. Some staff were immediately enthusiastic; others were cautious, unsure whether Meta-Preneur would add to workload or feel relevant to their learners. This range shaped the approach from the beginning.

Approach

- **Introductory Sessions Across Departments**

Rather than launching top-down, the first move was to go directly into departments and deliver short introductory sessions - not sales pitches, but a first-hand experience of the programme's approach: show rather than tell.

Staff were invited to engage with the same kinds of activities their learners would encounter - identifying real problems, linking them to skills, reflecting on their own practice. Seeing the content in action and recognising how naturally it connected to what they were already doing with learners, was far more persuasive than any written overview could have been.

- **Using Real Student Examples**

One of the most effective tools for building buy-in was evidence from learners themselves. Where pilot activity had taken place, student responses were used to demonstrate impact — staff could hear, in learners' own words, that the programme had prompted them to see their trade not just as a set of technical tasks but as a context for creativity, problem-solving, and enterprise.

This mattered because scepticism about enterprise education in vocational settings often centres on relevance. Staff want to know something will land with their particular group of learners, many of whom don't initially identify as entrepreneurial. Real examples from similar learners in similar contexts addressed this directly.

- **Early Formation of a Steering Group**

The steering group created a sense of shared ownership that proved important later. When delivery challenges arose, members were more likely to problem-solve collaboratively because they had invested in the programme from the start — and the programme, as it developed, stayed grounded in the realities of college delivery rather than being shaped entirely by an external framework.

Key Learning

- **Buy-In Is Built Through Experience, Not Explanation**

The most consistent lesson from the launch phase: no amount of explanation substitutes for direct experience. Staff who attended introductory sessions and engaged with the content first-hand were more likely to support it and advocate for it with colleagues. Those who only received written information stayed more ambivalent. Wherever possible, getting people into a room and giving them a taste of the content - even briefly - is worth the time it takes.

- **Relevance to Learners Is the Central Concern**

Staff engagement is closely tied to their sense of whether something will work for their learners. Generic arguments about the value of enterprise skills carry less weight than specific examples from comparable groups. Anchoring the programme firmly in trade contexts - using automotive and electrical examples, linking activities to workplace scenarios learners recognised - helped staff picture it working in their own classes.

- **Informal Conversations Are as Important as Formal Meetings**

Some of the most productive conversations happened in corridors, staffrooms, and workshops rather than scheduled meetings - space for staff to ask questions they might not raise in a group setting, share concerns without feeling exposed, and process what they'd heard in a more relaxed way.

Being present and available - not just appearing for formal presentations - signalled genuine commitment and built the kind of relational trust formal processes alone can't create.

Impact

Cross-department interest increased significantly, with staff from areas not initially targeted beginning to ask how they could get involved.

Staff in participating departments started identifying their own connections between Meta-Preneur and their teaching - noticing, for example, how the critical thinking in vehicle diagnostics or electrical fault-finding maps directly onto the framework's innovation cluster.

The steering group created a stronger foundation for sustainable delivery, with staff feeling shared responsibility rather than depending on a single external driver.

The informal networks built during launch continued to support the programme, with staff flagging timetabling opportunities, sharing resources, and encouraging colleagues to get involved.

Conclusion

The launch of Meta-Preneur across three colleges showed that the way a programme is introduced matters as much as the programme itself. A top-down rollout - however well-designed the content — would likely have produced compliance rather than commitment. Prioritising experience over explanation, involvement over instruction, and informal connection over formal process created the conditions for genuine engagement.

The lesson for future launches is straightforward: invest time at the beginning. Go into rooms. Have conversations. Let people experience what you're asking them to deliver. The returns - in buy-in, advocacy, and ultimately learner impact - are worth it.