CASE STUDY 1

Title: Computing Science - Big Data Dragons' Den Event

Three key words Soft skills, Technology, Entrepreneurship

Transition(s) the practice supports: Transition out of the University ('Moving on from there'). This event was designed specifically for students on the MSc. in Big Data but the idea would be relevant to other masters programs in Computing Science and third or fourth year undergrads.

Abstract: Employers expect all computing graduates to have the relevant technical skills. What differentiates the best students are other soft skills. This event was designed to help students think about the business context of the technology they are learning about or, more simply, the business of turning code and data into money. After a series of informative and motivational talks, students were required to envisage a data related business plan and pitch their idea to a Dragons' Den style panel. The exercise encouraged them to consider how technology relates to customers, revenue streams, competitors and other areas of a business.

Description: The focus of a computing science degree is technical. Students learn how to design, program, test and analyse computer systems but there is little room for developing soft skills and a wider understanding of the business context of that process. This event was designed to give students an experience of business thinking relating to data and technology. The event was a day long and split into two parts. In the morning, there were a number of talks. One covered some aspects of business modelling and was delivered by a lecturer from the School of Management. Scottish Enterprise gave a talk about raising finance for a business and local technology businesses talked about their own work and the challenges they face.

In the afternoon, the students were split into groups and each group was given time to develop a business idea. As the students were on the Big Data MSc, the ideas had to be related to a data business. The students then pitched their ideas to a panel of experts including bankers, investors and tech-entrepreneurs who grilled the students on matters such as routes to customers, revenue models and funding. The students were forced to think on their feet and consider the human and financial aspects of their great technical ideas. The event finished with drinks and snacks, and a chance for the panel to chat informally with the students about their ideas, studies and career aspirations.

Recommendations - The event took quite a lot of organising as the panel and the speakers were all invited from outside the university. I think this was one of the most valuable aspects of the day though, so it was really worth it.

Contact details: Kevin Swingler, kms@cs.stir.ac.uk