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Using HEInnovate to identify strengths and weaknesses in developing an institutional strategy for entrepreneurship

Staff at Ghent University were inspired by HEInnovate to build on the University's existing range of initiatives to promote entrepreneurship and innovation. An exercise was initiated in 2016/17 to develop an institutional strategy for entrepreneurship and innovation, and to establish the necessary 'building blocks' to embed them within the institutional fabric. The HEInnovate self-assessment tool was used as a way to bring stakeholders together, and as a framework to develop the strategy.

Throughout the HEInnovate exercise, the project leaders placed a significant emphasis on community building through using the self-assessment tool. They brought together students, researchers and policy representatives that were dedicated to promoting innovation and entrepreneurship., and used the self-assessment tool to encourage reflection on good practice, strengths, weaknesses and opportunities to grow. Moving forward, this community was formalised by establishing a 'community of ambassadors', which would meet regularly, habitually exchange information and provide feedback during the development of the strategy. HEInnovate was also used to organise stakeholder discussions around key areas.

The leaders of the exercise at Ghent University realised that there was a close link between the results of the analysis of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, and reflection arising from the HEInnovate tool. One of the key ingredients for success in this consultative process was engaging 'critical' or 'uninterested' colleagues to strengthen priority-setting.

The project leaders subsequently used HEInnovate to support the process of moving beyond the analytical phase, through the identification of the key building blocks for the institution's entrepreneurial strategy. These building blocks were characterised as actors, tools, outcomes and institutional processes. A comprehensive mapping of all the possible instruments in the university was made to ensure that the strategy could be a success. It was suggested that many of the questions in the HEInnovate reflection tool led directly to these instruments, thus

aiding identification.

A key learning point from this exercise was that it is crucial to link the people, tools and outcomes in order to prepare a strategy. In this process, the project leaders identified two key groups of individuals: 'enablers' to move the process forward, and 'decision makers' across the university and other relevant stakeholders or representative bodies (e.g. the innovation council). The project leaders iteratively revisited these relevant actors, and also used this to identify 'secondary' stakeholders for the strategy, building out its reach.

This paper was prepared by Karen Vandevelde (ex-Policy Advisor), Steve Stevens (Manager of the Student-Entrepreneurship Centre Ugent ? DO!), and Jolien Coenraets (Manager of The Foundry and Ghent Design Factory) at Ghent University and edited by Martin Wain, Consultant at Technopolis Group.

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