

Engaging students in entrepreneurship education: Thoughts on the present context and future challenges

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1. The growth of entrepreneurship education

Entrepreneurship education has grown in recent years. In part, this is due to debates regarding the employability of graduates, with enterprise and entrepreneurship being seen as a key route to securing future jobs, either by the graduates creating jobs themselves or applying entrepreneurial skills to employment opportunities¹.

Universities are increasingly expected to contribute to wider society, and the transition towards the 'entrepreneurial university' has been translated into strategies and policies which aim to promote entrepreneurship and impact². A key aspect of this is the supply of entrepreneurship education, not only within Business Schools but across campus. In many universities, entrepreneurship topics are now mandatory or at least available to all students regardless of the degree discipline.

Advocates of this expansion of entrepreneurship education state that students are increasingly interested in self-employment as a career option, and that careers are nowadays flexible and changing – people move between jobs more readily. As such, entrepreneurship education is required not simply to assist those in navigating the business start-up process, but also to provide them with creative skills that can be applied in a number of contexts. Universities can, therefore, provide their students with employability and entrepreneurial skills so that they can manage their careers in a changing landscape³.

The wide-ranging case studies presented in the Higher Education Academy's report on enterprise education good practice in higher education demonstrate how widely embedded such provision has become, as well as the range of different approaches to delivering it⁴.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's report on 'Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education' is clear about the potential benefits of enterprise and

¹ BS, QAA and CMI. 2014. 21st Century Leaders: building practice into the curriculum to boost employability. Available at: http://charteredabs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/21st_century_leaders_june2014_-_final_report.pdf

² Hytti, U. (2018) Critical entrepreneurship education: a form of resistance to McEducation? Revitalizing entrepreneurship education: Adopting a critical approach in the classroom, Edited by Karin Berglund and Karen Verduyn, Routledge, pp. 228-234.

³ Sewell, P., & Dacre Pool, L. (2010). Moving from conceptual ambiguity to operational clarity: employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship in higher education. *Education+ Training*, 52(1), 89-94.

⁴ HEA (2014) Enhancing employability through enterprise education: Examples of good practice in higher education. Available at: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/enhancing-employability-through-enterprise-education>

entrepreneurship education⁵. It also makes clear that approaches are wide-ranging and is often not badged as ‘enterprise or entrepreneurship’ learning:

Entrepreneurial learning often takes place within institutions without bearing the ‘label’ of enterprise or entrepreneurship ... More important than a label are the approaches taken to learning and collaboration and the resulting behaviours, attributes and competencies that are developed (QAA, 2018, p. 7)

While traditionally falling within the scope of provision provided by Business Schools and for Business School students, such education has become more widely embedded, with students from across all departments within an institution often able to access entrepreneurial learning opportunities. Although entrepreneurship education has often been developed within a single faculty or department this is changing. Yet outreach to other departments is not without its challenges. There are challenges of engaging staff in enterprise and entrepreneurship education as well as students who view it as being ‘outside’ their specific course of study.

This short report sets out some of the key challenges in moving enterprise and entrepreneurship education forward, in order to ensure that it is appropriately embedded across institutions and that there is engagement in it across Departments and Faculties. This is not to suggest that a blanket approach to the supply of enterprise education for all is correct, but the key is finding solutions for students who would benefit from such courses and modules.

⁵ QAA (2018) *Enterprise and entrepreneurship education: Guidance for UK higher education providers* [online]. Gloucester: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. Available at: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/enterprise-entrepreneurship-guidance.pdf>

2. Definitions

The QAA frameworks which have provided guidance to UK higher education institutions are underpinned by a distinction between enterprise and entrepreneurship education, and it is important at this stage to clarify this difference:

Enterprise

Enterprise can be defined as a set of abilities, skills and behaviours possessed by an individual that can be used in a variety of different contexts to make a difference and add value. These include coping with uncertainty, identifying opportunities, actively making things happen, managing risk, networking, creative problem solving, being strategically aware and acting independently. Enterprise education aims to produce learners with the mindset and skills to come up with ideas that make a difference in response to identified needs and shortfalls, and the ability to act on them. Therefore, enterprise education is about facilitating learners in moving from ideas to action and, in so doing, supports and aligns with a broader approach to developing employability amongst learners.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is the application of enterprising abilities and skills to the act of creating a new venture. Entrepreneurship education focuses on the development and application of an enterprising mindset and skills in the context of creating a new venture and managing entrepreneurial episodes required to develop and grow a business.

Source: QAA, 2018

This short report considers both forms of education, the set of abilities, skills and behaviours that can be used in a variety of contexts, as well as the application of enterprising abilities for usage in the creation of new ventures.

3. The UK context: Enterprise and Entrepreneurship in Higher Education

Enterprise and entrepreneurship education has grown rapidly in the UK. As a subject it has moved on from narrow notions of business start-up and growth, to encompass a wide range of pedagogical activity⁶.

As part of this growth, there has been shifting policy emphasis, ranging from the 2014 study 'An Education System Fit for an Entrepreneur' and Lord Young's 'Enterprise for All' report. In addition, there have been calls for more entrepreneurship education for STEM undergraduates which, it was argued, would lead to more innovative, science-based companies being created, and the various Industrial Strategy reports have communicated government aims to support the next generation of entrepreneurs.

This policy emphasis has also occurred against the backdrop of the Teaching Excellence Framework launched in 2017, which was introduced to assess the quality of teaching at universities and colleges in ensuring excellent outcomes for students.⁷ The TEF provides the opportunity for higher education institutions to recognise the value of enterprise and entrepreneurship education and expand its scope to benefit students.

As the QAA states, progress has been made in improving the evidence base related to the impact of entrepreneurship education on jobs and the economy⁸, although obviously problems of measurement remain. Course-specific evaluations tend to measure immediate outputs and short term outcomes; future ambitions and planned actions following a course are not generally being measured⁹. While there has been a growth in academic literature which seeks to measure impacts, more research with robust data is required. The link between entrepreneurship education and business start-up, for example, is still not properly

⁶ Edwards, L. & Muir, E.J. (2012) "Evaluating enterprise education: why do it?", *Education + Training*, Vol. 54 Issue: 4, pp.278-290, <https://doi.org/10.1108/00400911211236136>

⁷ Office for Students (2018) The Teaching Excellent and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF): A short guide to the 2018 awards. Available at: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/5ff81204-14f4-4e71-8b48-91f46247c49b/tef_short_guide_2018.pdf

⁸ QAA (2018)

⁹ Department for Business Innovation & Skills (2013) Enterprise Education Impact in Higher Education and Further Education. Available at: https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/ENTERPRISE%20EDUCATION%20IMPACT%20IN%20HIGHER%20EDUCATION%20AND%20FURTHER%20EDUCATIONFull_Report.pdf

established¹⁰. If only 5% of graduates are starting their own businesses¹¹, why is this the case given the growth and prevalence of enterprise education in universities?

Of course, there are real barriers to being a graduate entrepreneur. It is challenging to start your own business, but also attending university is expensive, and having invested time and money in it, students can be risk averse when they graduate, and a well-paid graduate job may be much more appealing than developing your own start-up.

Taken together, a review of policy and practice of enterprise and entrepreneurship education leaves a key question: what next? Given that provision and approaches have grown in recent years, what challenges will such education face in the coming years? How can the expansion of provision be built on? And, importantly, how can engagement of students across universities be secured to ensure positive outcomes?

4. The UK context: Enterprise and Entrepreneurship in Higher Education

4.1 Engaging students across the university

A key challenge facing entrepreneurship education is the engagement of students outside of Business Schools. Despite the growth of entrepreneurship education courses, it has not been without some resistance. The resistance is often targeted at the narrow interpretation of entrepreneurship being about start-up ventures, as well as universities being seen as places of educational consumption with students as consumers¹².

Universities have begun to address this resistance, with more modules addressing intrapreneurship and corporate entrepreneurship, although there is still more to be done to ensure that these are seen as part of the suite of offerings associated with enterprise education. Indeed, given that many students will go on to work for other people rather than themselves (with graduate self-employment still very much in the minority), modules focused on working effectively within large organisations are likely to grow in popularity.

Employability is nowadays a common performance measure for universities. Entrepreneurship education is seen to fit within the scope of increasing graduates'

¹⁰ Smith, K. (2015) Measuring the Impact of Enterprise Education and Entrepreneurship Support in Higher Education: Can Routinely Collected Data Be of Use? *Industry and Higher Education*, 29 (6). pp. 493-503

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/dec/14/why-do-so-few-university-graduates-start-their-own-businesses>

¹² Hytti (2018)

employability – with students across the university seen as having the right to education which improves their appeal to employers. This has created increased demand for entrepreneurship courses, with many universities explicitly identifying entrepreneurship as a strategic pillar. Thus they aim to appeal to enterprising school-age students when they are deciding where to go to university.

The university responds by offering entrepreneurship courses across campus. In doing so, they do not typically value academic achievement and theoretical abilities for entrepreneurship but emphasise practical competencies and skills¹³. Consequently, there is bias towards learning from experience and practice as more important than theory and is emphasised by the primacy of learning through/for approaches as opposed to learning about¹⁴.

Students often call for more ‘practical’ elements within courses and cite them as the highlights of their course (for example, pop-up stalls, consultancy projects). Yet there must be a balance between the practical and theory so that the academic rigour of courses can be maintained.

An overemphasis on the practical element has led to much standardised and uniform provision. Courses are typically run as venture creation programmes and represent practically-focused courses run in a similar way across all universities. Students are taught how to write a business plan, going through numerous steps from developing the idea, through to market research, marketing, finances and leading to an exit plan. While business plans are still very popular, there has been some diversification of approaches. For example, business model generation or lean start-up models, which are supported by pitching exercises and competitions. This gives rise to the view that higher education has become a mechanism for capital reproduction rather than a tool of human emancipation¹⁵.

Hytti (2018) states that this expansion and uniformity has led to a McDonaldisation of entrepreneurship courses, with one-size-fits-all approaches being offered campus-wide. However, inclusion is not necessarily achieved simply by increasing the supply of courses and modules. The traditional focus on new venture creation means that students in, for example, the humanities may become excluded. The one-size-fits-all approach also fails to

¹³ Komulainen, K., Naskali, P., Korhonen, M., & Keskitalo-Foley, S. (2014). Internal Entrepreneurship—a Trojan horse of the neoliberal governance of education? Finnish pre-and in-service teachers’ implementation of and resistance towards entrepreneurship education. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 9(1).

¹⁴ Lackéus, M., & Williams Middleton, K. (2015). Venture creation programs: bridging entrepreneurship education and technology transfer. *Education+ Training*, 57(1), 48-73.

¹⁵ Da Costa, A. D. S. M., & Silva Saraiva, L. A. (2012). Hegemonic discourses on entrepreneurship as an ideological mechanism for the reproduction of capital. *Organization*, 19(5), 587-614.

take into account issues of gender, class or ethnicity¹⁶. The reliance on standardised content means there is little diversity in what is being offered and little reflexivity or criticality.

Clearly, it is important for those involved in the provision of entrepreneurship to reflect on what works as well as what does not. Indeed, reflexivity is a necessary condition in furthering entrepreneurship education¹⁷. Increasing the McDonaldisation of education is not a guarantee of success for embedding and improving entrepreneurship education. On the contrary, it has the risk of becoming a functionalist pervasive ideology¹⁸. Instead, entrepreneurship education will develop by focusing on what should and should not be included, as well as how approaches are welcoming some but excluding others. In addition, one-size-fits-all approaches should be questioned so that different learning approaches and practices can develop.

4.2 Measuring impacts

A present and future challenge for entrepreneurship education is in the measurement of its impacts. Of course, measuring the impacts of any form of education is problematic, but given the claims that entrepreneurship education to have on student employability, it is incumbent on those supporting its provision to measure impact.

Unfortunately, robust studies of impact are largely absent¹⁹. Often impact is measured in terms of the number of students engaging in courses, rather than the outcome of those courses. Sometimes impact is measured by the number of start-up businesses launched by graduates, although the influence of the entrepreneurship education received by the students is obviously uncertain.

More needs to be done to objectively measure the impact of entrepreneurship education. This needs to be done by academics and others who are committed to self-criticality, who are seeking to improve on what they deliver. There have been increasing moves towards greater criticality in entrepreneurship research in general, and this needs to be more pervasive within entrepreneurship education too. To do so, research on impacts should not simply be carried out by those involved in its delivery. Otherwise, self-fulfilling positives will

¹⁶ Berglund, K., Lindgren, M., & Packendorff, J. (2017). Responsibilising the next generation: Fostering the enterprising self through de-mobilising gender. *Organization*, 24(6), 892-915.

¹⁷ Fayolle, A. (2013). Personal views on the future of entrepreneurship education. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 25(7-8), 692-701.

¹⁸ Hytti (2018)

¹⁹ Lackeus, M. (2018) Making enterprise education more relevant through mission creep. In Mullholland, G. & Turner, J. (Eds) *Enterprising Education in UK Higher Education: Challenges for Theory and Practice*, Routledge.

be the outcome. Instead, researchers can engage with other experts in education research outside of entrepreneurship studies to truly test the value of what is being delivered.

Furthermore, the value of not receiving enterprise education needs to be better understood. Can those who receive no enterprise education at University still go on to be tomorrow's entrepreneurs?

4.3 Online options

A potential growth area for entrepreneurship education is online courses. Such courses can be flexible, allowing students to access materials remotely. In particular business start-up courses can be delivered to a wide range of students with relative ease. Students can be guided through the process of completing a business plan, and many online courses already exist to do this. Such courses do not necessarily have to be delivered face-to-face.

Similarly, online courses can be used for the study of theory, where no real practical element is required. Such courses can introduce students to introductory and in-depth topics, for example examining entrepreneurship in different international contexts, whether entrepreneurs have specific personality traits, and the motivations of entrepreneurs.

Online education also offers universities to work more closely with businesses, offering professional development courses which can further the creative and intrapreneurial skills of staff.

4.4 Entrepreneurship as theory not just practice

Finally, it is important to remember that entrepreneurship is an academic subject in its own right. It is not simply a practical topic, a mechanism for potentially increasing the employability of students. Rather, it is a rich and varied subject. By recognising this it moves the focus on from, for example, start-ups. Entrepreneurship is much broader and within the academic literature, "entrepreneurship is like obscenity: nobody agrees what it is, but we all know it when we see it".²⁰ As such, it is important to note that not all entrepreneurship education is practically focused. In addition, valuable theoretical lessons should be delivered, including the role of the entrepreneur in the economy, critical perspectives on entrepreneurship and ethics of entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship education needs to better situate itself within academia so that it is not simply seen as the part of the university that delivers start-up modules. Research on entrepreneurship is much richer and has a much more valuable role to play.

²⁰ Shaver, K.G. and Scott, L.R. (1991) Person, process, choice: The psychology of new venture creation. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 16(2), 23-46.

5. Summary

Enterprise education has grown as an element of university provision. The majority of universities now have well-established courses and modules on offer to students from across subject disciplines. In addition, entrepreneurship societies have expanded, and there are more opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities such as boot camps, business plan competitions, mentoring and access to incubator space.

Yet only 5% of graduates are starting their own business.²¹ As such, the supply and demand of enterprise education needs to be examined. More reflection on the style and delivery of courses and modules is needed, as well as an understanding of who is benefitting from such education and who is not. Entrepreneurship is not for everybody and similarly neither is entrepreneurship education. Better examining the impacts of this education is required if provision is to move forward.

This short report has discussed some of the future challenges but is not exhaustive. It is to be hoped that UK universities can work with each other and their international collaborators, as well as government bodies and Advance HE to continue the conversation about how provision can be expanded and improved in the coming years.

²¹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/20-07-2017/graduates-employment>

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