



# Developing Entrepreneurial Graduates

Briefing Note 3  
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NESTA



## Enterprise Development Good Practice in Universities

CIHE has recently partnered with NCGE and others (including the Higher Education Academy and the SBS) in conducting a review of Good Practice in Entrepreneurship Development in UK HEIs. This review was intended to identify to what extent the initiatives undertaken by HEIs in the UK were, or were likely to be effective in developing entrepreneurial graduates.

The review (the Botham and Mason Report) covered in detail 13 UK universities selected from a long list of over 50. Those selected for detailed study were chosen in order that the sample included a spread of research intensive and less research intensive universities, subject specialisations and entrepreneurship development activities. The latter ranged from entrepreneurship “challenge” (e.g. business plan competitions) and entrepreneurship mentoring and support for potential or intending student entrepreneurs to the incorporation of more formal enterprise development modules within the taught curricula. The relevance of extra-curricula experiences was also considered.

The report from the review is a key item of evidence which we would like the panel to consider. Panel members will be free to comment and make suggestions as to the interpretations and implications as seems appropriate. However there are a number of specific matters arising from the report which we would like to direct the panel's attention.

### Evaluation

Outwith the formal evaluation of student performance (e.g. for taught courses or dissertation work), few of the case study HEIs attempts to assess the impact of enterprise activity on participants. Furthermore the report states “*little is known about the effectiveness of HEI enterprise activities*”.

Given that (a) successful business start-ups by graduates may be a long term lagging indicator of performance and (b) business start-ups may not be the only desirable outcome of a successful learning experience (see the evidence below on creativity in established companies), how might the development of a framework for evaluation be best approached (e.g. by measuring the development of attitudes and aspiration)? In addition, how might feedback linked to the constituents of student learning opportunities be provided, whether or not it was tied into the learning outcomes suggested in the Gibb framework referenced in the Botham and Mason report? Is there a need to re-examine this outcomes framework for possible amendment or extension?

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## Taught curricula, activities and the balance

Section 7 of the report describes a number of types of activities identified from the case studies which are intended (although not explicitly) to deliver desirable outcomes and relates the activities to the outcomes. The panel is invited to review and makes comments upon these relationships.

The report describes from its cases a mix of different activities, in the form of taught curricula and in the form of experiential learning. For example, formal taught elements might be: -

- within the business school;
- subject specific within curricula for mainstream subjects;
- specialist cross-disciplinary courses.

Similarly, it describes a range of experiential learning and practical activities, which include: -

- entrepreneurship “clubs”;
- entrepreneurship support (e.g. start up support and incubation);
- business plan competitions;
- external mentors;
- placements.

Given that there has been no formal evaluation of the entrepreneurship education in the HEIs studied (or specific objectives set) the panel is invited to comment on how an effective balance might be achieved and what approach to formal curriculum development, delivery, and the development and practise of enterprise support might achieve the desired outcomes.

In the light of panel members' experience and the other evidence presented, (especially that related to effectuation which might *prima facie* appear to conflict or preferably provide complementarity with the learning process and enterprise related activity described in this section), what should determine the extent to which these aforementioned elements might feature in the entrepreneurship education specification that is to be developed in this project as our eventual output? What elements should be regarded as core and what as elective elements?

## Stakeholder relationships

Management of stakeholder relationships is an important area of competence which the report raises and which finds in concept at least, a direct match with the evidence presented concerning effectuation. However the report does not identify current practice in entrepreneurship education which is deliberately targeted at developing this area of competence. Hence ideas and suggestions from the panel as to how this might be addressed should form part of our considerations. However, the type of stakeholder relationship envisaged in the report might be very different from that envisaged in the effectuation literature, with a more transactional element in the former and relational/emergent in the latter.

## Issues arising in section 8 of the report

The report, in its conclusions, highlights the difficulties of scaling up activity in section 8.1, and also recommends in section 8.5 that priority should be given to embedding entrepreneurship in mainstream curricula. It also highlights the fragility of funding and the sustainability of enterprise support activities. To a large extent these activities often rely on external staff who are not tenured academics, and may lack esteem among their teaching and research focused colleagues. This raises two sets of issues:

Firstly, each is an individual problem which may be susceptible to a well-targeted solution, and the panel is invited to comment on potential solutions. This does raise the second further fundamental issue which is potentially of strategic importance and which may arguably influence

the effectiveness of individual initiatives or panel recommendations (such as embedding the fragile support elements or achieving a parity of esteem and tenure between teachers/researchers and mentors). This issue is the extent to which entrepreneurial values and behaviours are actually part of the institutional culture. Our final output will need to identify this as a key issue that will influence how the pilot project is embedded within the eventual host institution. Indeed, it could be argued that the existing culture of the organisation and its willingness to embrace the type of changes that are necessary should form part of the selection criteria for the pilot study.

## Other reports

The Botham and Mason Report was one of a number of papers presented at the NCGE International Conference in September 2006 at York, UK. The entire conference proceedings may be found online<sup>1</sup>. In particular, we would like to refer the expert panel to the proceedings of Session D – “Achieving Entrepreneurial Outcomes: UK and International Practice”, which the Botham and Mason Report introduced. These included:

- Good Practices - Paul Magelli (Kauffman Foundation)
- Entrepreneurship Education in India - Kavil Ramachandran (India School of Business)
- Entrepreneurship Education in South East Asia HEIs (Assumption University)
- Entrepreneurship Education in Ireland - Dr Thomas M. Cooney (Dublin Institute of Technology)
- Graduate Entrepreneurship Education in China (SIFT), which covered a number of different institutions, namely:
  - China Youth University of Political Sciences
  - Guangdong University of Foreign Studies
  - Shanghai University of Foreign Trade
  - Shanghai International Studies University
  - Shanghai Normal University
  - Tongji University
  - University of Science and Technology of China

A number of issues arise from taking this evidence together on which the panel may wish to pass comment. Firstly, there is a great deal of emphasis on formal structures in several of the cases presented, particularly the Chinese and Indian Cases. Whilst there is a balance of formal taught and experiential learning in the Chinese cases<sup>2</sup>, the formal structures apply just as much to the experiential learning as to the taught elements. See, for example, the pervasiveness of the “business plan”. Is such an organised approach for this element conducive to true entrepreneurship which, it might be argued, profits from challenging established structures and requires an individualistic approach? Note the comments “...most of the students tend to find jobs immediately after graduation instead of trying to set up their own businesses. That is the biggest challenge in entrepreneurship education...” in the report from Shanghai International Studies University. Is placing students in a formal competition organised by others likely to change this? The report from Ireland (Cooney) implicitly recognises the difference between education for employment in business and entrepreneurship but does not develop this theme. What, in the panel’s view, are the key differences which should be identified?

Secondly, given that entrepreneurship may be very much an individualistic pursuit, is there sufficient attention given generally in these curricula to the discovery and development of personal qualities through self-directed learning? This in itself might profit from the application of entrepreneurial characteristics such a modality of learning requires. (Such behaviours are, for example, included in the NVQ Level 4 and above Management Standards, and this level of qualification is equivalent to a Foundation Degree).

<sup>1</sup> NCGE conference proceedings at <http://www.ncge.com/communities/education/content/get/10>.

<sup>2</sup> See for example “The integrated entrepreneurship cultivation platform including contests, lectures and forums” in University of Science and Technology, China.

Thirdly, whilst there are a considerable number of desirable outcomes identified across the evidence<sup>3</sup> there is no organised attempt to define how these might be measured to judge the effectiveness of the educational practises adopted. Evaluation of entrepreneurship education seems to be described largely by reference to anecdotes. Whilst there is an approach to formal evaluation described in the Guandong University of Foreign Studies there is no development in the evidence of how this evaluation relates to the outcomes. Does this prevailing feature of the cases highlight the difficulty of formally “measuring” the concept of entrepreneurship development as a real outcome of a learning experience? And if so, what strategies are potential responses to this difficulty?

Finally, across the range of evidence presented here, are there features which provide ideas of a framework in which a specification might be developed or are there significant elements missing? What evidence is available which demonstrates that the practices described are in fact ‘good practice’?

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<sup>3</sup> See the range in the South East Asia summary –which vary from knowledge to behaviours.