



Knowledge imperatives

Keith Herrmann sets out how Britain can get ahead in the knowledge economy

The Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) agrees with recent government reports and statements that the future competitiveness of the UK rests on our ability as nations to innovate and be more entrepreneurial.

It is not enough for universities to develop employable graduates with the skills that businesses need. They also need to develop more enterprising graduates who can transform the organisations in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors that they join. Meeting the global challenges that face us will require an entrepreneurial response by universities, both in terms of preparing graduates for future global challenges and ensuring that universities fully engage in the co-creation and transfer of knowledge with businesses.

UK universities are increasingly teaching entrepreneurship and building enterprise skills and capabilities in their students. But more has to happen. The latest data from the National Centre for Graduate Entrepreneurship (NCGE) shows:

- The rate of student engagement has grown – it is now 11 per cent but still much too low.
- Business schools dominate provision – 61 per cent of all delivery, followed by engineering (nine per cent), creative (eight per cent) and health (one per cent). There has to be wider ownership across universities.
- More than 80 per cent of funding for extra-curricular activity is from the public purse, with strong reliance on short-term funding. This means initiatives are inherently fragile.
- Fewer than 50 per cent of universities display the range of entrepreneurial characteristics that are needed to radically transform the culture of higher education.

At present, entrepreneurship education in UK universities is operating on the margins, a peripheral activity with limited reach in the student base. How can the UK move forward?

Government policy: the Norwegian government has a national policy framework on entrepreneurship education for the entire education system. With the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform setting up a National Enterprise Academy and regional university enterprise centres, what policy pathway should the UK adopt?

Institutional support: the Kauffman Campus Initiative in the US shows that securing active leadership



from the vice-chancellor is crucial for embedding entrepreneurship education in non-business disciplines.

Engaging staff and students: ambitions to cover all subject disciplines are constrained not only by limited resources, but also lack of modes of engagement, especially for faculty staff in non-business disciplines who have to take the lead, design the courses and delivery to what may be a sceptical audience.

Fragility of funding: in England, funding is fragile. By contrast, the Scottish Institute for Enterprise is well funded to co-ordinate activity in Scottish universities. BERR has committed to support entrepreneurship education at a regional level in England but we need to ensure funding goes beyond the short term and ensures that enterprise is an embedded element of the student experience and not an 'add-on'.

Supporting entrepreneurship educators: skilled, talented and passionate entrepreneurship educators in universities are fundamental to success. Evidence from the US shows that direct institutional action is needed; training support for academic faculty, research grants for staff and students to undertake entrepreneurship research in their subject discipline, and actively rewarding entrepreneurship educators.

The challenges are substantial. The CIHE is developing with the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts and NCGE a framework within which universities can work, drawing on the expertise of a panel of worldwide experts. We hope to move this agenda forward in a way that will command widespread support. •

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