

Partnerships for enterprise education in Europe: states of play and potentials to develop

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Introduction

Current policies across Europe stress the importance of developing enterprise – or entrepreneurship – education: it has a vital role to play in the creation of the next generation of entrepreneurs. Recognising this, the European Commission has recently called for a significant scaling up in the quantity and quality of entrepreneurship education as an important component of delivering the strategic long-term goals of the EU in terms of growth and competitiveness (McCoshan et al 2010). More than that, it has called for more *systematic* approaches to be developed by EU Member States.

Drawing on the findings of the research underpinning this development, this paper takes a closer look at key structural challenges likely to be encountered in attempting to scale up activity to the levels required and in particular the different positions in which Member States find themselves. Applying a theoretical framework based on the analysis of institutional regimes, it seeks to shed light on why some Member States are better positioned to respond to the challenges than others. The paper provides a context within which activity in the UK can be better understood and reflected upon.

The need for entrepreneurship education

The need to develop entrepreneurship education is now a major concern across Europe. Compared to their international competitors, European countries lag some way behind in terms of the start-up rate of businesses. This deficit is attributed to a variety of factors, including a lack of venture capital, too much 'red tape', punitive bankruptcy laws, time consuming and expensive patent systems and a lack of incentives in the tax system. But along with these hard, physical and practical constraints, Europe is also seen to suffer from an attitudinal deficit in the form of negative perceptions of entrepreneurship: as one indication of this, in a recent survey some 30% of Europeans regarded it as desirable to become self-employed in the near future compared to 42% of US citizens (European Commission, 2007). This is a complex area. Probing deeper on why people are reluctant to consider running their own business, we meet a variety of perceptual, psychological and cognitive issues: e.g. lack of self-confidence, doubts about whether they have the right skills, fear of failure, perceptions of a poor rate of return for the risk and long hours involved, and a straightforward lack of business ideas.

In response to these issues, an increasing emphasis is being placed in EU policy on equipping people with the right knowledge, skills and attitudes to become entrepreneurial. In 2005 the European Commission recommended the adoption of a set of key lifelong learning competences including 'a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship' (European Commission, 2005); and the following year published *Fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning* (European Commission, 2006) which called for the development of more systematic approaches and the establishment of cooperation between different ministries at national and regional levels. In October of the same year, the Oslo Conference on the theme of developing entrepreneurial mindsets led to the Oslo Agenda which provides a detailed menu of initiatives and good practices. However, in the absence of concerted action on the part of EU Member States, in 2009 the Commission launched a set of four workshops with policy-makers organised regionally

across Europe to gather information on the current state of play, and to formulate forward strategies. The outcome from this was the 2010 call to step-up entrepreneurship activity.

What is the state of readiness across Europe for these changes and how well positioned are individual Member States to respond to the challenge?

European state of play

It is evident that, with the exception of a few islands of excellence, entrepreneurship education in general is highly under-developed across Europe. In 2007, only 34% of respondents from EU countries said they had participated in a course at school or university concerned with entrepreneurship or setting up a business (European Commission, 2007). In addition, there is huge variation in practice.

The form and function of entrepreneurship education are set by a number of mutually reinforcing characteristics.

- It tends to be defined by the practice of doing it (and the resources etc available) rather than strategically, making use of what is available
- It is overwhelmingly teacher- or school-led, relying on the enthusiasm of individuals
- Private businesses and/or non-profit organisations play an important role in developing teaching and learning resources
- It tends to be about 'how to run a business' or 'understanding the world of work' rather than as a set of competences about creativity, risk-taking etc.
- Hence it consists mainly of providing opportunities to interact with businesses
- It sits outside mainstream assessment and qualifications: prizes and awards tend to be used instead, e.g. from Junior Achievement – Young Enterprise
- It has tended to take place in upper secondary education, either as an optional (elective) component of a separate subject (e.g. business or economics) and/or as an extra-curricula activity
- In school-based initial vocational education and training (IVET) it is often incorporated via economics, business studies etc.
- In primary and general lower secondary education it has tended to take place in the margins of the curriculum, as a 'bolt-on', and is highly vulnerable to being squeezed by other issues (curriculum reforms etc) or lack of resources. It is very rare in the primary phase.

Where practice is most highly developed, the interaction between education and business has become well structured, formalised and systematic, with schools forming education-business partnerships perhaps under the leadership of municipalities and involving local business organisations like chambers of commerce.

Changes envisaged by the EC and their implications

In such a context, the EC has called for nothing short of a sea change in practice: not simply an expansion in current types of activity, but a paradigm shift in the practice of entrepreneurship education, moving it from an extra-curricular activity to being embedded in the mainstream curriculum, concerned with the development of entrepreneurial competences for all. The EC calls for action at all levels, from teachers in the classroom to national governments to bring about a significant shift in the quantity and quality of entrepreneurship education.

There are three particularly important sets of changes entailed in the EC's proposals which deserve further attention. These centre around the curriculum and pedagogy, and the roles to be performed by teachers, schools and businesses. In each of these areas there are a range of issues that will need to be taken into account if progress is to be made. These can broadly be categorised as contingent, e.g. resource availability, improved teacher training etc., and structural, relating to more deep seated factors of the nature of practice in education and training. Our concern here is with the structural factors. We thus extend the analysis presented above to look at how the measures required to develop entrepreneurship education intersect with issues of current structure and policy.

Curriculum and pedagogy

The EC envisages a range of structural developments in the curriculum including pushing entrepreneurship education out of its confines within separate subjects so that it becomes a cross-curricular subject based on the development of a set of competences including creativity, risk-taking etc.; and extending entrepreneurship education out of upper secondary education into the primary and secondary phases.

The competence-based approach at the heart of the EC goals necessarily implies shifting to a learning outcomes approach. In this regard it chimes in with one of the major developments taking place across the EU. Stimulated by the advent of the European Qualifications Framework, each Member State is currently mapping its qualifications on to this common framework, based on eight levels, and defined (very broadly) in terms of the competences people are expected to have developed at each level. This process has proved more difficult in some systems than others. Some systems have had experience of learning outcomes approaches in the past, e.g. the UK with its National Vocational Qualifications. Others, however, which are strongly tied to institutions and content-based curricula, like Germany, have found it more challenging. In general, whilst the advent of learning outcomes approaches provide an opportunity for entrepreneurship education, there is also a risk of 'crowding out' in what is already a packed policy agenda in most countries.

The balance between VET and general education is also pertinent here. VET appears to face greater challenges in the implementation of transversal competences than general education. The EC's recent analysis of progress with respect to its long-term objectives in education and training drew attention to the fact that although VET has traditionally focused more on competences than general education, the full range of key competences is less systematically addressed by most countries' VET systems than it is by general education (European Commission (2010)). By implication, embedding entrepreneurship education competences also faces a greater challenge in VET and, ceteris paribus, will mean that achieving the goals may take longer where VET begins earlier in the school system and is most popular, as in Germany. In contrast, countries with a strong lifelong learning culture and where students receive a common general education till they are 15 or 16 probably stand the easiest chance of implementation as the transversal approach is more easily accommodated.

Teachers and schools

Teachers arguably have *the* pivotal role in the development of entrepreneurship education; they will need to be the bearers of change within schools, being required to implement outcomes-based approaches, to shift to learner-centred methods (an essential part of stimulating initiative-taking and independence in students) and to open up their classrooms and schools to the outside world in order to access practical, hands-on experiences for students. Research – though not extensive – suggests that teachers themselves tend to be averse to narrow definitions of entrepreneurship education which concern 'how to run a business', but are receptive to broader competence-based definitions related to creativity and innovation (e.g. Berglund and Holmgren, 2007); they are also virtually unanimous in seeing creativity as a fundamental skill to be developed in school (DG EAC, 2009).

To enable them to develop the role envisaged will require the incorporation of entrepreneurship education into teacher training, the provision of appropriate teaching resources and the establishment of support networks. Significant obstacles are likely to be encountered however in moving from the current situation which is based on individual teachers' enthusiasm and extra-curricular activities to formalised, systematised approaches.

One of the most significant structural issues will be the extent to which schools and teachers can exercise autonomy within education systems, especially in the primary and secondary phases which will be the focus of much activity. Teachers will need freedom to develop their own approaches to the development of competences like creativity and initiative; indeed, it has been said that in order to teach entrepreneurship teachers themselves have to become entrepreneurial. A corollary of this is a high level of autonomy for schools, needed, amongst other things, to enable schools to be effective in taking local action to open themselves up to the wider world.

As with learning outcomes, this need for autonomy fits with the current general trend across Europe which has seen an increase in the autonomy of teachers within schools (Eurydice/European Commission 2008). Nonetheless, differences remain in the degree of autonomy that teachers can exercise, as is discussed further below.

Businesses

It goes without saying that businesses are the other essential player in entrepreneurship education. Without them, teachers cannot develop the practical, hands-on experiences students need, or provide role models and real life examples. In some countries, like the UK, there is a now well-established tradition of local business involvement in schools, with not-for-profit organisations in existence to facilitate it if needed. But this is not true in many other parts of Europe where schools have little tradition of bringing businesses into the classroom and where businesses, for their part, do not have a strongly developed sense of corporate social responsibility. Paradoxically, whilst many countries have well-developed mechanisms for involving social partners in decision-making at national and regional levels, and whilst these have strengthened in the VET field in recent years (ECOTEC, 2008), there is little tradition of school-business partnerships. In such circumstances organisations like Junior Achievement – Young Enterprise (JA-YE) and EUROPEN have often filled the gap, although the strong social partner networks evidently have the potential to be developed to meet the needs of entrepreneurship education. Nonetheless, even in countries like the UK the significant challenge remains to upscale and make systematic an activity which companies take part in voluntarily, often motivated by personal local connections: finding and organising sufficient businesses whilst preserving goodwill constitutes a major structural obstacle to realising the EC's ambitions.

Member States' capacity to respond to the challenge

In light of these challenges, how well positioned are Member States to respond?

As we have already discussed, there is much variation across Europe in the extent to which entrepreneurship is part of education and the ways in which it is practiced: in some countries it is much more developed than others, although even within the most developed countries like the UK there is substantial variation in practice. In this very general sense, therefore, we can naturally say that some countries are better positioned to respond to the challenges posed by the EC. However, inter-countries differences are more substantial and complex than that and it is important to understand how and why some countries have a greater potential to respond faster and in a more thoroughgoing way than others, not least so that we can situate and better appreciate our own country or region.

In order to do this, we have to (a) understand the relationship between the education and training systems where the entrepreneurship education will be developed and implemented and wider society; and (b) have some means of accommodating the large number of education and training systems that exist in the EU.

This is a complex area. In general, there is an under-conceptualisation of the relationship between education and training and wider social and economic systems in a way that enables us to make sense of the enormous diversity across Europe. On the one hand, we might formulate the reasonable – if somewhat facile – working hypothesis that E&T systems are expressions of, but also reproduce, underlying social forces, which include such complex (and little understood) phenomena as the social value attached to different forms of knowledge and work. But on the other hand, this does not take us very far in understanding the complexity of these interactions, nor how they might vary from place to place.

To do this we need to understand how the institutions (the laws, policies, organisations and other structures) which exist to deliver education and training interact with other institutional regimes. Perhaps the most extensive literature to deal with this has been developed within economics and political economy. Within the last two decades a 'new institutional economics' or 'varieties of capitalism' school has sought to provide theoretical underpinnings to the major differences that can be observed between the operation of markets between individual (or groups of) countries (origins can be traced back to North (1990) and Esping-Anderson (1990) but for later elaborations see, for example, Hall and Soskice (2001), Fligstein (2001) and Amable (2003)). In order to do this a major role is assigned to national (and sub-national) state institutions. In this literature, there is a particular focus on skills formation and the role played by the interaction between E&T, labour market and welfare regimes. For entrepreneurship education, we might add business formation regimes, which would include the general panoply of rules and regulations which surround the setting up of new companies, as well as more specific interventions to stimulate and incentivise business start-ups such as the type of advice provided through English Business Links.

In summary, then we might identify three distinct but inter-penetrating sets of institutional regimes:

- Labour market, employment protection and social welfare
- Business formation
- Education and training.

Each of these regimes has a distinct contribution to make in the field of entrepreneurship. Labour market and welfare regimes help to shape the range of potential employment opportunities open to school leavers and the unemployed, making setting up in self-employment or running one's own business a more or less attractive proposition compared to the other options on offer. Business formation regimes can play a key role in the ease with which enterprises can be established; a positive correlation has been demonstrated between the ease with which businesses can be launched and the rate of business formation (e.g. World Bank Group, 2008). Education and training systems play the key role we have been discussing in shaping mindsets and developing both skills and knowledge.

Importantly, none of these regimes exists in isolation of the other; indeed, it is an argument of the institutional regimes approach that, within nation state (or regional) borders (depending on the degree of devolution of powers), these regimes collectively constitute inter-locking systems – or 'ecosystems' – in which the smooth functioning of one element depends on all the others (and which, quite often, do not achieve such smooth functioning) . But interactions are likely to be highly complex and we can only start to offer pointers here as our main focus is on the education and training systems themselves and their 'initial conditions' which are likely to shape their future development paths. The point here is that the different regimes are mutually coherent and reinforcing, one with another.

Different countries exhibit significant differences in the form and function of these regimes, reflecting deep-seated economic and social relationships. In entrepreneurship education, the potential for future development is likely to depend both on the nature of the education and training regime and the way in which it interacts with other parts of the enterprise 'ecosystem'.

In order to start to understand how this plays out across Europe, we can make use of a typology of countries based upon the three institutional regimes, and drawing on the literature mentioned above. This literature shows remarkable consistency in the types of systems identified, and we use as our base here the four 'social models' typically identified: Nordic countries, 'Anglo-Saxon' UK and Ireland, continental European and Mediterranean systems (see, for example, Sapir, 2005). Drawing on this, we have extended the classification to reflect the three regimes identified above, giving most prominence to the education and training regime since obviously this is the locus for entrepreneurship education implementation (Table 1).

The typical 'social models' typology focuses on what is called 'employment and social welfare' in the table. The typology developed here includes variables for each of the three regimes, focusing on the structural issues discussed above, plus what we have termed 'ecosystem outputs', i.e. the rate of business formation and the desirability of self-employment (although the latter is arguably less an output and more a 'system condition'). A mix of quantitative and qualitative data sources have been used, as indicated under *Sources* below Table 1. The typology covers only the EU-15 Member States since this is where most conceptual work has been undertaken; the 'New Member States' are not included as they continue to be under-researched. It is important to stress that the categories used are highly 'porous'; some countries are highly sensitive to the variable used (and hence the ambiguity in the table around certain countries). Some country groupings are more cohesive than others.

Table 1 Typology of Entrepreneurship Ecosystems

| | Institutional Regimes | | | Eco-system Outputs | |
|--|---|---|--|--|---|
| | Education and training¹ | Labour market, employment and social welfare² | Business formation³ | Desirability of self-employment⁴ | Rate of business formation⁵ |
| Anglo-Saxon Systems (Ireland, UK ... Netherlands?) | Choice, competition and markets are characteristic features. Choice at 15-16. Employer involvement: Low and voluntary leading to strong sectoral variation Level of school autonomy: Moderate to high Level of NQF development: implemented Amongst the most advanced in terms of the development of national strategies for entrepreneurship education. | Very low employment protection; unemployment benefits dominant. Active labour market policies important though less than in Nordics. | Ease of starting a business: Very good | Moderate to high | Moderate to very good |
| Nordic Systems (Sweden, Finland ... Denmark?) | Strong lifelong learning culture; choice takes place at 16. Medium % of VET enrolments in upper secondary. Employer involvement: Low in upper secondary Level of school autonomy: High Level of NQF development: conceptual, design and implementation stages. Amongst the most advanced in terms of the development of national strategies for entrepreneurship education | Weaker employment protection than under Continental Systems counterbalanced by high levels of unemployment protection and 'active' labour market interventions. | Ease of starting a business: Good | Low to moderate | Moderate to good |
| Continental Systems (a) (France, Belgium, Luxembourg ... Netherlands? Italy?) | Type of schooling selected between 12 and 16. Medium to high % of upper secondary VET enrolments. Employer involvement: Moderate to strong. Level of school autonomy: Moderate to high Level of NQF development: design, consultation and implementation stages. | Strong employment protection, moderate welfare payments. | Ease of starting a business: Good to moderate | Low to moderate | Moderate |
| Continental Systems (b) (Austria, Germany ... Denmark?) | Highly institutionalised system with strong relationship to structure of occupations. High percentage of VET enrolments in upper secondary. Routing into VET or general tracks is at a very early age (10-11). Has faced challenges with respect to development of learning outcomes approaches. Strong and highly organised social partner involvement. Level of school autonomy: Moderate | Strong employment protection, moderate welfare payments. | Ease of starting a business: Moderate to poor | Low | Poor to moderate |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|------------------|------------------|
| | Level of NQF development: design, consultation and testing stages. | | | | |
| Mediterranean Systems (Spain, Greece, Portugal ... Italy?) | Choice from 14-16. VET sector poorly developed with low % of upper secondary VET enrolments though increasing. Employer involvement: Low but developing Level of school autonomy: Low to moderate Level of NQF development: exploratory, conceptual, design and testing stages | Very strict employment protection and low unemployment benefits; heavy reliance on family networks. | Ease of starting a business: Moderate to very poor | Moderate to high | Poor to moderate |

Sources:

- 1 System structure and employer involvement data from ECOTEC (2008); Level of school autonomy, Eurydice/European Commission (2008); Level of NQF development, Cedefop (2009)
- 2 Sapir (2005)
- 3 World Bank *Doing Business 2010* (data covers period from June 2008 to May 2009). Database: <http://www.doingbusiness.org/economyrankings/>
- 4 Flash Eurobarometer Survey 192 "Entrepreneurship Survey of the EU (25 Member States), United States, Iceland and Norway" (December 2006-January 2007)
- 5 World Bank Group Entrepreneurship Survey (2008). Figures used are 'entry rates', defined as the numbers of newly registered corporations divided by the number of total registered corporations. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRES/Resources/469232-1107449512766/WBG_EntrepreneurshipSurvey2008_final.xls

What does the typology tell us about countries' potential to respond to the challenges discussed in the first half of this paper?

The biggest challenges are faced by '**Mediterranean Systems**' like those in Spain. Starting from a weak position with respect to the rate of business formation, enterprise is handicapped by complex business start-up regulations. Within the education and training system, levels of school autonomy are low which means that compared to other countries, there is probably further to travel with respect to the development of local solutions. The involvement of business is amongst the lowest in western Europe, which militates against the rapid development of more systematic approaches and may mean that these countries need to 'leap frog' over the intermediate stage of the development of an extensive local base of interaction with business, a path which the UK seems to have followed for example. The one positive feature appears to be the high desirability of self-employment, which seems paradoxical against the comparatively low rates of business formation. However, this might be a function of strict employment protection which protect those in work, but not those outside, plus a high incidence of family firms. Much entrepreneurship in this context might be 'replicative' rather than 'innovative'. In this context, questionmarks should be raised not just against the rate of progress in entrepreneurship education that is likely to be achievable but also whether the changes will be able to have a major impact on business formation rates given the barriers in the business formation regime. In this regard, the experience of Portugal is notable: strong state intervention appears to have had a significant impact.

At the opposite end of the spectrum sit '**Anglo-Saxon**' UK and Ireland. Already benefiting from comparatively high rates of business formation, positive attitudes to self-employment and few obstacles to starting a business, these systems benefit from high levels of school autonomy and comparatively open educational systems. Indeed, the UK and Ireland are in many ways in the vanguard of entrepreneurship education: there is a long history of school level action, not to mention education-business partnerships, and around one half of secondary schools participate in mini-company programmes. Although formally business involvement in education and training is highly variable at national level, at local level there is substantial involvement, much of it informal. For these systems, there is a very strong foundation on which to build, and action has already been taken to develop national strategies. They have far less distance to travel to reach the EC goals than other systems.

In between these two poles sit two or three other systems which face different mixes of challenges. Of these three '**Nordic Systems**' have the greatest potential to make rapid progress. With business formation rates that are already fairly strong, and environments that are amenable for getting businesses off the ground, these countries should be able to reap the benefits of changes in the education and training system. These changes should fall on fertile ground, given the high rates of teacher autonomy and openness of the systems to competence-based approaches. National strategy development is also amongst the most advanced in Europe. Efforts may need to be put into developing business participation. The biggest challenge might be with respect to the comparatively low popularity of self-employment as a career choice; in other words attitudes to entrepreneurship may be a significant issue.

'**Continental Systems**'¹ seem to face challenges with respect to their rates of business formation, and also the desirability of self-employment. Strong social welfare regimes might stack the cost-benefit equation against the risk-taking involved in entrepreneurial activity, especially when coupled with business start-up processes which are comparatively challenging. The countries with less institutionalised education and training systems (sub-group a) might be in

¹ Two types of 'Continental' system are identified, to reflect the highly institutionalised nature of education and training systems in Germany and Austria.

a slightly advantageous position compared to the highly structured systems of Germany and Austria by virtue of higher levels of school autonomy and curricula which are more amenable to accommodating learning outcomes based approaches. On the positive side, the strong and highly organised involvement of social partners including business offers potential for opening up schools to the wider world, if this can be converted to action at regional or local levels, as it has, for example in Baden-Württemberg.

Conclusions

The typology deployed in this paper has started to shed some light on the factors that will shape the response of countries to the EC entrepreneurship agenda. Evidently it over-simplifies an extremely complex picture. Nonetheless it indicates how different institutional regimes can interact to predispose or otherwise a particular 'ecosystem' to respond to new challenges. The different configurations of variables identified are likely to have a bearing on both *how* the intended reforms are undertaken and the *outcomes* they produce in Europe. Furthermore, it places the changes that need to take place in education and training *in the context* of other areas of policy and practice that can either counteract or reinforce the effects. There is no quick fix. Even if entrepreneurship education does change 'hearts and minds', changes may be needed in other parts of the ecosystem to realise the benefits. For some countries, the distance to be travelled is significant.

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