



# **The State of Entrepreneurship Education: A Review of the United Kingdom**

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There have been a series of policy initiatives in the United Kingdom (UK) designed to promote entrepreneurship education that date back to the early 1980s. The initiatives include: Enterprise in Higher Education, Science Enterprise Centres, the Higher Education Innovation Fund and Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning. All have been led by government intervention, through policy funding mechanisms, and have sought to have an impact on Higher Education in the UK through the introduction of enterprise education. As a consequence of these initiatives it is appropriate to conclude that there is a strong base of graduate entrepreneurial capability in the UK with resources flowing into Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for the purpose of promoting such education (Hannon, 2005).

In comparing the US and UK levels of graduate entrepreneurship, the UK Government has acted to take further steps to increase UK graduate entrepreneurship activity and outcomes. The National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship (NCGE) was launched in September 2004 by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, to lead developments in this area. Funded by the DTI's Small Business Service and the Department for Education and Skills the NCGE's mission is to increase the scale and scope of sustainable graduate start-up businesses through shaping the education and support environments.

Although this 'landscape' is clearly vibrant at an operational level as evidenced in recent mapping<sup>3</sup>, many HEIs have yet to develop strategic

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approaches and across the sector awareness of existing activity could be higher (Pittaway and Cope, 2007). As a result, many questions remain unanswered both from a research and a policy perspective. For example, what is considered 'enterprise' or 'entrepreneurship' in the context of these initiatives? What has worked, in what way has it worked and why? How do we measure and assess the impact of these educational practices? What are effective educational practices? Does entrepreneurship education translate into higher levels of graduate entrepreneurship? The purpose of this special issue of the *International Journal of Entrepreneurship Education* is to begin to tackle some of these questions and to review the state of entrepreneurship education in the context of the United Kingdom.

The policy and contextual challenges in the UK are also mirrored in the research on enterprise education. While there has been significant growth and interest in the subject there remain gaps that are of significant importance. For example, researchers have convincing evidence to support the view that 'enterprise education', however it is conceived, does have an impact on student intentions to become entrepreneurs and their self-efficacy when considering entrepreneurial actions (Hansemark, 1998; Peterman and Kennedy, 2003) but we have limited evidence about actual entrepreneurship amongst graduates and the impact of education on entrepreneurial performance (Pittaway and Cope, 2007). Likewise we know from previous research that a range of institutional and contextual factors can promote and support enterprise education but we have limited understanding about the possible strategic typologies that different institutions might use (Dainow, 1986; Gorman et al. 1997). Similarly, while we know a great deal about the growth of entrepreneurship education in the United States (Solomon, Duffy and Tarabishy, 2002) there is only limited evidence about its development in other countries (NCGE, 2004).

In this special theme section we, therefore, seek to begin to address some of these gaps in the field and respond to some of the strategic policy questions set. In the special issue there are four research papers and two case study papers. The research papers look at recent conceptual and empirical research conducted on enterprise education in the UK and do so at four different levels of analysis moving from a mapping study of enterprise education in England, through a focus on institutions and pedagogy, to a focus on students. The case study papers are different from those usually published in this journal. Instead of providing cases to be used in teaching, the case studies provide examples of practice in the UK. One focuses on extra curricula issues and the use of students as interns, supporting enterprise education, and the other examines the issues related to embedding enterprise education across the university.

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3. See Hannon et al's paper in this special theme section.

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