

Engaging with enterprise education: reflections on the Liverpool John Moores University experience

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Abstract

Enterprise education is moving higher up the agenda for educators. However many practitioners still find themselves on the outside looking in as many often perceive barriers that defeat their best intentions. There are now tools to combat these barriers, including UK and European guidelines, frameworks and sources of support that can help an educator embed enterprise successfully. This Viewpoint was prompted, in part, to sector conversations on students' perceptions on value for money, and new QAA guidelines on enterprise and entrepreneurship education. The paper draws on the experience of the Centre for Entrepreneurship, which has been supporting staff and programmes at LJMU to prepare students to meet today's challenges in the workplace.

Keywords

enterprise education; entrepreneurship; employability; student experience; curriculum development

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Engaging with enterprise education



Interest in enterprise education is growing rapidly. Today, there is an emergent body of staff who are looking to modify their courses in a way that develops learners, so that they can transition after higher education with ease and confidence. Enterprise education has the power to transform the student experience of university, something I see on a day-to-day basis in my role at LJMU's Centre for Entrepreneurship. For instance, in our 'customer discovery' exercises, we have found that students place great importance on developing soft skills – such as, collaborative skills (negotiating, emotional intelligence, empathy), engaging in problem solving, developing creative and innovative ideas, and applying these insights in a 'live' industrial or professional context. This represents a sharp contrast to a notion of the student as a passive learner, staring silently into a computer screen, whilst grappling with the completion of a 3,000-word essay. My hope here is to offer an overview of developments both within LJMU and outside that illuminate our journey to date.

How we got here

Universities Minister Sam Gyimah (2018) declared, "Prospective students deserve to know which courses deliver great teaching and great outcomes – and which ones are lagging behind." As the Teaching

Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) metrics become defined, prospective students will have the opportunity to make choices based on potential earnings and value for money, *and* at a subject level. In this context, embedding enterprise education, at all levels, offers a 'bonus' above and beyond a course sticker price. Students' sense of the value they place on being at university can therefore be qualified. The strands of the current debate can be traced back to the Wilson Review (2012) on business-university collaboration. The review posited, "Graduates of today just don't have the necessary skills to meet the needs of business today" – i.e. skills viewed in its broadest sense. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) responded by issuing its *Guidelines on Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education* in 2012, which set out the parameters of 'enterprise' and 'employability' – that do also overlap. It is at this point that we begin to appreciate the magnitude of the national conversation, especially in the way in which universities should approach enterprise education.

In the current socio-political and socio-economic climate, it is not surprising that the QAA opted to revisit its original guidance and, in January, issued an update to its original guidelines. Whilst there has been much focus on the TEF, as practitioners, it is worth being conscious of another dimension: the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF). This is a framework that is intended to "benchmark how well universities are doing at fostering knowledge sharing and research commercialisation" and "[sitting alongside the Research Excellence Framework and TEF, will provide] a holistic view of how universities are delivering their threefold mission of generating knowledge through

research, transmitting knowledge through teaching, and translating knowledge into practical uses...” (HM Government, 2017: 79). Thus, over the coming years, we can expect particular interest in the number of student start-ups and other spin out activities. (At LJMU, the Centre for Entrepreneurship - via funding, advice and training - helps students and graduates start their own business. In 2017, the Centre was ranked in the top 15 UK universities for the number of businesses created and the number of firms still active, as measured by the Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey.)

Winning hearts and minds

In terms of support for staff, the Centre for Entrepreneurship co-ordinates a tightly knit Enterprise Educators Academe consisting of entrepreneurial educators from a wide range of curriculum areas (from Nursing to Product Design; from Dance to Electrical Engineering). Helping staff to understand the nature of enterprise education *and* forge links into the curriculum requires considerable time and patience – there is no quick fix. This includes qualitative and personalised methods, such as coaching, mentoring and networking – all powerful means of encouraging staff to engage in critical reflection, evaluation and dissemination. As LJMU staff have found, what works in one context may not work in another and, in accepting that there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution, working together to consider what adjustments might be made is all part of the learning process.

Over the past three years, the Academe has hosted monthly events in our internal network, including the hosting of keynote presentations from internationally recognised experts in entrepreneurship and enterprise education, such as Colin Jones of University of Tasmania. Further, as a

member of Enterprise Educators UK, a leading independent membership network for enterprise educators, the Centre encourages and supports LJMU staff to attend events nationwide.

Whilst attending the International Entrepreneurship Educators Conference (IEEC17), I noted how one speaker spoke passionately on consideration of the language used in promoting enterprise education and how this might impact on take-up (Wood, 2017). I have much empathy with this perspective as teaching staff need to identify with and understand enterprise education in their own course context, and within their own frames of reference. At LJMU, we try to address this through live civic projects. These showcase collaboration, engagement and enable students to reflect on applying their learning beyond university, thus nurturing entrepreneurial behaviours in a sensitive way; staff are very receptive to this approach. It is worth noting that our practice very much mirrors wider thinking. For example, the European Commission’s Entrepreneurship Competence Framework, ‘EntreComp’, is very much geared toward bridging the gap between terminology and practice.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, there are ample ways in which practitioners can engage with enterprise education; the emerging guidelines, frameworks and case studies are constantly enriching our understanding. The nudge towards a curriculum that embraces entrepreneurship will continue, as will the volume of insights and maturity of knowledge within the institution. Our challenge is to document this emerging practice, to disseminate impact, to foster conversations, and to continue to adapt in

the ever-changing landscape of higher education.

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