

## Chapter 33

# Connecting Social Enterprise and Higher Education: Universities as Drivers in the Support of Social Enterprises in the United Kingdom

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### ABSTRACT

*Despite the increased attention paid to enterprise and entrepreneurship education in recent years, there exist limited bodies of research on the extent to which higher education institutions support and promote social enterprises. This chapter addresses this by drawing on previous research concerning enterprise and entrepreneurship education in universities and their role as drivers in bringing social change and improvement in individuals and the wider society. This chapter provides many examples of social enterprise curricular and co-curricular programmes in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom and concludes with a discussion of the opportunities and challenges of universities supporting social enterprise initiatives with a roadmap for future research directions.*

### INTRODUCTION

Key studies have suggested that entrepreneurship takes up a vital position in society and contributes to the economic growth of countries (European Commission, 2000, 2003; Karmel and Bryon, 2002; Gibb and Hannon, 2007; Pittaway and Hannon, 2008). Over the past few years, there has been active discussion regarding the role of entrepreneurship in economic development across the globe (Matlay, 2008; Wilson, 2009). The interest in the field of entrepreneurship has intensified since the economic crisis of 2008, as more people have decided to take up self-employment (O'Connor, 2013).

The pressures of globalisation and consequent structural changes to economies have led to considerable effort amongst policy makers and governments worldwide to advocate enterprise and entrepreneurship education across universities, suggesting an increased need for education and training of venture creators (Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Zhao, 2004; O'Connor, 2013; Hannon 2006; Heinonen & Poikkijoki,

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1923-2.ch033

2006; Oosterbeek et al., 2010). A clear example of this is a report on 'Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education' published by the Quality Assurance Agency and the European Commission in 2003 that suggested that enterprise and entrepreneurship education should be undertaken across the curriculum. The report pointed out that by developing enterprising behaviours and skills among students, we could enhance their employability opportunities as well as offer them a space to learn about the prospects and risks faced in running an enterprise. As this report highlighted, providing enterprise and entrepreneurial experience may also be beneficial to higher education institutions (HEIs), by increasing the attractiveness of what they can offer for potential students (European Commission, 2008).

This policy environment has contributed somehow to the establishment of a diverse range of entrepreneurial and enterprise curricular and co-curricular programmes, events, competitions, and awards being offered in various forms in HEIs across the globe (Atherton, 2004; Hytti & O'Gorman, 2004; Solomon et al., 2002). However, several authors have criticised the emphasis that policy makers and governments are putting on enterprise and entrepreneurial education, arguing that this is the effect of marketisation at the expense of educational and social benefits to individuals and communities (Field, 2006; Hemsley-Brown, 2011; Jack & Anderson, 1999; Katz, 2003; Klapper, 2004; Leffler & Svedberg, 2005).

While critical literature on Entrepreneurship and Enterprise education is on the increase, mostly in the United States and the United Kingdom (UK) (Jones & Iredale, 2010), (see, for example, Tedmanson et al. (2012), and the special issue in the journal *Organization*, 2012, 19(5)), there exists a shortage of empirical studies on social enterprises and higher education (Universities UK, 2012). Such research is needed because it will assist universities to develop innovative pedagogies that can be tailored to students and staff with diverse skills and from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to create and bring social change and improvement in individuals and the wider society (Galloway & Brown, 2002).

This chapter presents an integrative framework that draws on previous research about entrepreneurship and enterprise education as well as providing the reader with an insight into the role of universities as drivers in the support and creation of social enterprises. Case study examples of the on-going practices of social enterprise initiatives in higher education institutions in the UK are presented. As such, the main aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with an insight into social enterprise related initiatives supported by higher education institutions. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the contribution of universities to the social enterprise sector as well as the opportunities and challenges enabling social enterprise initiatives with a roadmap for future research directions.

## **ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION: THE NEW ERA**

Forty years ago, only a handful of universities formally offered any type of entrepreneurial program. This situation has changed dramatically, as today; over 3,000 institutions across the globe offer multiple courses, degree programs and/or concentrations in enterprise and entrepreneurship (Morris et al, 2013). According to Jones and Iredale (2010), policy makers and academics have often used the terms 'Enterprise' and 'Entrepreneurship' Education interchangeably. However, a distinction must be made between those terms. As observed in Table 1, while 'Entrepreneurship Education' focuses on starting growing or managing a business and the use of knowledge and skills needed to start up a business, 'Enterprise Education' focuses on the acquisition and development of personal skills, abilities and attributes that can be used in different contexts and through the life course and the understanding of how a business works (Rae, 2010). 'Enterprise Education' has a learner-centred focus, where the teacher embraces

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