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ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING: KEYSTONE TO AN ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE

Increasingly open markets, volatile economies and concerns about unemployment are the backdrop to a dialogue among European Union (EU) countries on how governments, the private sector and civic society meet the challenges of competitiveness and jobs. Addressing this challenge, the EU has made entrepreneurship promotion a top priority (European Commission, 2010). Integral to the EU's entrepreneurship drive is encouraging countries in neighbouring regions undergoing significant institutional and policy reforms to adopt more strategic approaches to entrepreneurial learning across their education and training systems (European Commission, 2006). This forms part of a wider support package, which includes the European Training Foundation (ETF) services, to help economies to be competitive and inclusive.

This policy briefing considers the challenges and potential of promoting entrepreneurial learning more strategically. Primarily targeted at policy makers from transition and emerging economies, it argues for a model of lifelong entrepreneurial learning in which policy development and systemic reforms are benchmarked and assessed.

A major challenge is to ensure full engagement and ownership of the entrepreneurial learning agenda by all stakeholders, particularly education authorities, backed by leadership from within those authorities to see through reforms. Given the relative newness of the concept of lifelong entrepreneurial learning, this policy briefing points to the pivotal role of teachers and argues that borrowing from good practice makes good sense. Building value in an evolving policy area requires cooperation between strategic partners from the public and private sectors, including civic interest groups.

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- The challenge of entrepreneurship as a key competence
- Four principles to support the entrepreneurial learning agenda
- The importance of involving teachers
- Assessing entrepreneurial learning and good practice: why and how



WHAT IS ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING?

While academic and policy literature generally refers to entrepreneurship education, the term ‘entrepreneurial learning’ centres round two core principles. First is the notion that all individuals should be encouraged to be more entrepreneurial whether or not they have ambitions to start a business. The rationale is that entrepreneurial employees will be innovative and adaptable in fast-changing economies, seeking out opportunities and making for efficient resource managers – the entrepreneurial traits that are essential for a productive workplace. Second, entrepreneurial learning comprises all forms of education and training – formal, non-formal (what is learnt outside standard education curricula) and informal (what is learnt incidentally) – contributing to a more entrepreneurial mindset and behaviour.

Traditional entrepreneurship education and training is characterised by curricula comprising economics and business skills, such as managing cash-flow, balance sheets, business planning and tax law. The EU policy goes further. It promotes entrepreneurship as a key competence, with education and training playing a critical role in cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset (EU, 2006). An important point is that entrepreneurial learning is not solely conditioned by a commercial or profit objective (see, for example, Politis, 2005; and Rae, 2000). It equally contributes to more entrepreneurial employees, critical for business performance.

This broader concept requires a rethink on how schools and colleges, the teaching profession and the learning process are managed and developed. Important here is how entrepreneurship promotion is addressed within each part of the learning system (from primary education through to university, as well as broader training provision), and how the entrepreneurial learning outcomes at each level build upon earlier learning. The outcomes should work towards developing a more entrepreneurial culture (European Commission, 2008).

Given that entrepreneurship as a key competence is a relatively new concept, the challenge for the broader learning system is how teaching and learning processes can contribute to developing psychological and behavioural traits, such as creative thinking, problem solving, identifying opportunities and risk assessment that help develop a more entrepreneurial character.



With many bi-lateral and international organisations supporting entrepreneurial learning in transition and middle-income economies, cooperation and coordination between actors in areas such as policy support and technical assistance, is important. This ensures consistent policy messages in countries and allows dovetailing of resources to support programmes.



POLICY IMPERATIVES

The entrepreneurial learning agenda is complex. It has no one policy home, but requires coherence between policies on education, training, innovation, employment, enterprise and economic development. Consequently, success requires adherence to four principles.

- **Partnership.** Key institutions should ensure their policies are consistent, coherent and complementary, enabling entrepreneurial learning to play an effective role in building a country’s entrepreneurship eco-system. Private sector and civic interest groups should be integral to policy partnerships.
- **Leadership.** Entrepreneurial learning requires a sustained effort over time to see through required reforms. Policy leadership, particularly by the education authorities, is critical to ensure development and implementation of entrepreneurial learning. This requires a dedicated place on a country’s national development agenda, and a clear articulation within the education policy.
- **Ownership.** Partners must assume responsibility for their role in policy development and delivery. Policy ownership requires the relevant authority not only to formulate policy conducive to entrepreneurial learning, but also to implement, monitor, correct and improve it.
- **Commitment.** A lifelong entrepreneurial agenda requires commitment by all stakeholders – public and private sectors and well as civic interest groups – to create a mutually reinforcing policy framework defined by consensus, coordination and cooperation.

For education authorities a fifth principle also applies, namely **internal partnership**. This entails a sequenced dialogue, design and delivery framework involving all levels of education and training (primary to tertiary) to generate a domino effect and spill over from education into a more entrepreneurial economy.



SUPPORT TOOLS AND SERVICES

For entrepreneurial learning to be effective, monitoring and evaluation are essential. This requires performance indicators and regular assessment (see, for example, European Commission et al., 2009; and 2008). ETF's policy metrics package supports partner countries in improving policy and practice in entrepreneurial learning. Indicators cover areas such as partnership, teacher training, curriculum development and good practice promotion. Other indicators address specific socio-economic groups, for example women. Commonly agreed indicators involving a range of countries allow for benchmarking and cooperation between policy makers and education and training providers.

A ROLE FOR GOOD PRACTICE

Given the newness of lifelong entrepreneurial learning, education and training providers stand to benefit from access to innovative practice. Policy making can also be enriched by knowing what works well, and at what cost. Good practice must inform policy. However, in the bid to learn from good practice, the quality of good practice becomes critical. The case for quality assurance in an evolving good practice market is therefore strong.

ASSESSING GOOD PRACTICE: AN ETF INITIATIVE

Systematic assessment of good practice in entrepreneurial learning lies behind an ETF pioneering initiative launched in 2012 involving education and training providers from the EU, North Africa, Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. It involves a good practice peer review methodology and tools which allow experts from common interest areas, such as training for youth start-ups or women entrepreneurs to review critically each other's work, share experience and recommend improvements.

The peer review generates new ideas and fosters innovation and discussion on 'next practice'. Outcomes are disseminated through national, regional and international events. Thematic networks act as multipliers.

Web-based applications for peer reviewing good practice, including its dissemination, need to be developed.

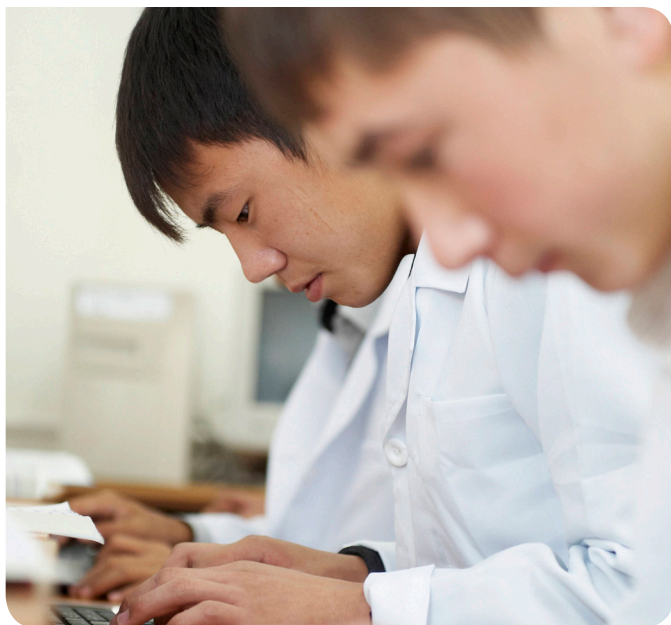
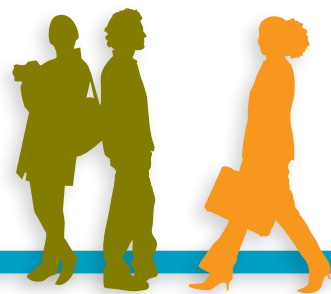


ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING TEACHERS

Education authorities must engage the teaching profession at all steps in promoting entrepreneurial learning. Firstly, the teachers must understand that it is not a covert, neo-liberal agenda being slipped through the backdoor. Rather, it is policy with direct implications for sustainable economic growth and improved job and career prospects, particularly for young people.

Secondly, the success of entrepreneurial learning requires an engaged teaching profession to be convinced of its value for students, local communities, the economy and society. Teacher engagement requires dialogue and support at all levels of education (national, regional, local and school) to ensure the necessary 'buy in' for a revised learning paradigm involving adjustments to curricula, pedagogy and assessment.

Thirdly, teacher training (pre-service and in-service) is essential. The size of the task requires a dedicated roll-out plan in each country which needs to be resourced at each step. Exchange of good practice and peer learning – teachers learning from teachers – can be both effective and efficient, particularly when public resources are tight.



CONCLUSIONS

To improve competitiveness and employment, greater demands and expectations on education and training systems are inevitable. Entrepreneurial learning is increasingly considered an essential pillar in the policy response (WEF, 2009). In its support to partner countries, ETF's focus follows four lines:

- supporting policy improvement and ownership processes in partner countries by facilitating partnership building, and cooperation with the private sector;
- promoting a culture of national policy measurement and improvement through systematic review, upgrading and extension of ETF indicators;
- supporting exchange of quality-assured good practice between education and training providers and encouraging policy makers to refer to inspiring good practice for policy improvements;
- through cooperation with strategic partners from the public, non-profit and private sectors, seek and share innovative solutions, particularly in areas still underdeveloped, such as entrepreneurship as a key competence, entrepreneurial learning outcomes, teacher engagement and training, and lifelong entrepreneurial learning models.

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