

How to make young people more employable? Teach entrepreneurship in schools

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A detailed survey of five EU member states in which schools have been teaching entrepreneurship confirms impressive benefits for young people, businesses, and wider society, explains Caroline Jenner



The educational value of entrepreneurship education should be a no-brainer for politicians at all levels of government, says JA Europe chief executive | Photo Credit: Adobe Stock

The research was undertaken for the Innovation Clusters for Entrepreneurship Education (ICEE) and co-funded by the EU's ERASMUS + programme as a policy experimentation project led by JA Europe. The survey report includes a meticulous analysis anatomising the responses of students, their parents and teachers, and representatives of businesses and public authorities ([first results can be found here](#) [1]). In addition it identifies what policymakers now need to do to secure wider implementation of

this new type of teaching.

What's the overall conclusion? It's crystal clear: young people like the hands-on experience, their parents support them in acquiring it, teachers recognise the educational value of entrepreneurship education and, crucially for all of us, organisations of all kinds – whether private sector, public authority, or beyond profit – have before them a pool of young people who are more employable thanks to their newly acquired entrepreneurial mind sets.

With Europe still challenged by stubborn pockets of unemployment and disconnected communities, it is – or should be – a no-brainer for politicians at all levels of government.

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The study's findings ought to be welcome news for EU leaders. In 2010 they agreed that nobody should leave compulsory education without having had at least one practical entrepreneurial experience through, for example, running a mini-company.

But since then progress has been snail-like. The bleak conclusion is that, whilst some member states lead, even more trail. Today a mere 10 per cent of Europe's school leavers satisfy the EU's expectations. This survey is a timely wake-up call to governments – and other stakeholders – throughout the region.

Due to be published in January, the survey is the work of a distinguished team at the East Norway Research Institute (ENRI) led by Vegard Johansen. His research has three areas of focus.

First: he wanted to know what helped entrepreneurship education to grow and what held it back. He asked, next, what was the educational value for students of running a JA Europe mini-company project ([Click here for further details](#) [7]). And finally he sought to measure the impact on schools and their teachers.

Johansen's team worked in 25 schools in Belgian Flanders, Estonia, Finland, Italy, and Latvia. The countries' education ministries were strong supporters. The Foundation for Entrepreneurship – Young Enterprise Denmark and Croatia's Josip Juraj Strossmayer University also collaborated.

"With Europe still challenged by stubborn pockets of unemployment and disconnected communities, it is – or should be – a no-brainer for politicians at all levels of government"

Surveys conducted with 12,000 respondents were drawn from the main stakeholder categories:

students aged 15-20, teachers, parents, business representatives, and local and national officials.

These surveys generated a rich set of quantitative data. Survey response rates demonstrated real enthusiasm with students and teachers recording over 60 per cent and 70 per cent respectively.

In addition 150 interviewees participated in individual and group sessions and the research team observed students at work on their mini-company projects. This provided suggestive qualitative outcomes. Conducting the surveys over two years allowed comparison between before and after scenarios.

Researchers found that young people not only enjoyed their entrepreneurial education but also that their motivation and performance as students improved overall. This was especially the case for students less stimulated by the traditional curriculum.

Furthermore entrepreneurial education speaks convincingly to the diversity agenda. Students identified as having special educational needs often do well. Generally girls benefit at least as much as boys; often they do significantly better.

For both sexes the impact on self-confidence is distinctive and remarkable. Boys and girls who 'deep dive' into entrepreneurial education - that is, work for 100 hours or more on micro-company projects - reported a more profound understanding of the skills they need to be entrepreneurial and much less inhibition in using them than those experiencing only a 'light touch' let alone none at all.

Most teachers were keen to deliver entrepreneurial education. The survey picked up requests for training and professional support and not only from those unaware of techniques to facilitate interdisciplinary learning or uncomfortable in using them.

A significant majority of parents liked the 'real experience' of the mini-company projects. So does business: most companies aware of entrepreneurial education see how their volunteers can play a distinctive role in delivering it. The survey has ample evidence that business involvement is welcomed by most schools and appreciated by their students.

With so many of the key building blocks neatly in place, how does the survey explain the dismal 10 per cent of European students actually recording "a practical entrepreneurial experience"? Teachers, parents, and business representatives all wanted greater commitment and delivery by their national educational authorities.

"What is not in doubt is the impact on society of entrepreneurial education"

In particular they thought that entrepreneurial education had to be embedded firmly in the curriculum. Survey respondents wanted to see other stakeholders stepping up to the challenge. They suggested that local communities, both political and business, have to show greater and more sustained interest. So do school management boards and NGOs. And they were clear that funding must be found where it is needed.

What is not in doubt is the impact on society of entrepreneurial education. Robust metrics for that impact must await ICEE's further research. For the moment we know from the respondents to ENRI's survey that students experiencing a level of entrepreneurial training comparable to that of other subjects in their curriculum believe themselves to be more creative, self-confident, and resourceful than those who do not.

They are more likely to be fully engaged citizens in consequence. That is in itself an achievement: education policymakers will want to take note. The fact that the experience also makes young people

more employable will be of interest to other political decision takers not to mention to prospective employers.

Entrepreneurial education will not solve all our problems but, more widely implemented in Europe's schools, it could help us address some of the most pressing with greater vigour.

About the author

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