

Chapter 5

Strengthening entrepreneurship support in Hungarian higher education

This chapter expands on the findings presented in Chapter 2 related to entrepreneurship support in higher education institutions (HEIs). So, far, the focus has been on entrepreneurship education. Education activities that provide for a confluence of theory and practice are an ideal environment to nurture innovation and entrepreneurship. In the classroom, however, it often happens that theory takes over, leaving little room for experiential learning. Proximity to scientific knowledge and this type of support is often the reason why student start-ups want to stay as close as possible to their academic environment. The chapter explores current strategies and practices to support entrepreneurship in HEIs and provides learning models on how best to involve students and effectively embed support measures offered by the HEI within the wider local start-up support ecosystem.

Introduction

Globalisation, international conflicts, climate change and institutional failures are just some of the conditions that cannot be ignored and that provoke large-scale involvement of individuals to play an active role in creating viable solutions (Senge et al., 2005). Effective involvement calls for the sense of initiative and the right set of attitudes, knowledge and skills to identify opportunities and act upon them; what is commonly referred to as entrepreneurship as a key competence.

In Europe, there is a fairly strong tradition of people seeing themselves as “job-takers” rather than “job-makers” (Herlau and Tetschner, 2014). For a long time, education institutions have been preparing students for a working life in established organisations, which has left only little space in the curriculum to develop initiative-taking and entrepreneurship. This has changed, and a growing number of experiences from several countries, especially from the United States and some European countries, particularly Finland, Sweden, Iceland and the United Kingdom, show that developing the entrepreneurial mindset in education can have great impact on the enterprising behaviour of the country. Of course, it is not possible to change attitudes and behaviour through education alone, but a certain degree of positive influence can be achieved.

The growing understanding that education is an essential means to foster entrepreneurship as a transversal key competence has led, particularly in higher education, to educational proclamations, different forms of co-operation with external stakeholders, resource allocation models, new specifications in performance contracts etc. The aim is to provide for a sector holistic approach to entrepreneurship and initiative-taking, including aspects of creativity, imagination, and organisational entrepreneurship (intrapreneurship). Many of the skills needed for launching a start-up – identify and act upon opportunities, fundamental knowledge of how to manage risks, secure and deploy resources etc. – are the same skills that an employee will need in an existing organisation to successfully implement a new idea. Whereas the employee is likely to have less responsibility than an entrepreneur, both act upon the central premise of creating value.

Entrepreneurship support in higher education has manifested itself in different ways (European Commission, 2008). Definitions and terminologies often vary so much that it is hard to establish a common understanding. When it comes to what actions and priorities to take, confusion can be great and the road towards substantive achievements may feel like a very long journey with sudden interruptions and uncertain detours. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm for and attention on entrepreneurship support in higher education have never been greater than at present, and this includes most of the key stakeholders. As Gibb (2005) pointed out more than a decade ago:

“[...] the role of entrepreneurship in society, and perhaps the major reason for its current political popularity, is that it provides an opportunity for individuals and organisations of all kinds and in all walks of life to cope with, provoke, and perhaps enjoy, an increasingly complex and uncertain world.”

Students, educators, researchers and the leadership of higher education institutions (HEIs) want to improve the amount, content, quality and outcomes of entrepreneurship support. However, governments, intergovernmental organisations, employers, non-governmental organisations, parents and society are also demanding more focused efforts on developing the right competencies for learners to take an active part in technology development, knowledge economy and co-creation.

So far, the focus of entrepreneurship support in HEIs has been on entrepreneurship education. Teaching and learning are central areas for HEIs to provide students with the appropriate methods to gain and apply knowledge and skills. What students learn in the classroom can be greatly enhanced through participation and practice, for example, when student teams define and work on their own projects supported by educators and trainers, who act as enablers, and professional and technical mentors in developing the projects.

Some of these projects may lead to start-ups. Proximity to scientific knowledge and this type of support is often the reason why student start-ups want to stay as close as possible to their academic environment. The move towards offering start-up support in HEIs is thus, to a great extent, driven from the bottom up, often coming from students who want to take their start-up ideas further while studying. This calls for structures and initiatives in the HEI to support this. Students' engagement, the encouragement of faculty members and lecturers, and the visibility of such collective drive and enthusiasm towards (local) businesses and society, are key enablers for the HEI to transform from an educational institution into an incubator, or "hatchery", for new ventures with growth potential.

When starting up a business, more than just the right mindset is needed to succeed. As the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor has shown, several countries with high start-up rates show issues concerning the sustainability and viability of new firms. Many new firms apparently lack competencies in doing business effectively. The idea of the HEI as a "full service provider" covering the process from awareness, the sparking of an initial idea, to supporting the creation of a new venture is getting more and more common. However, close co-operation with start-up and business support organisations outside the HEI and a division of tasks are needed to develop a support system which is compatible with the complex world of an HEI. The presence of talented and knowledgeable students who want to engage in their own businesses, often in teams, is frequently the catalyst for external organisations and HEI leadership to start a partnership.

Reaching a critical mass in entrepreneurship support is an important tipping point when it comes to creating traction within already existing ambitions and efforts. Building a functioning entrepreneurship support system can often seem a large mountain to climb, but the higher the ascent, the better the view and the understanding of the journey ahead. The first steps seem hard and uncoordinated, but it is a question of getting the HEI and its key internal and external stakeholders to buy into the effort. Celebrating every little success will give the enthusiasm and stamina to continue the journey. One way of raising interest in entrepreneurship is to have role models among students and academic staff, who are instrumental for the journey to continue, and, even more important, is to celebrate success stories, even if they may seem small.

The culture of education is changing and this calls for radical thinking, alternative methods and, most of all, new constellations and ways of collaboration to involve key stakeholders (Binks, 2005). Building an entrepreneurial HEI is a constant journey, and elements, choices, engagement, and prioritisation are context-specific and unique for each

HEI. It is important to i) make a strategic choice to become a (more) entrepreneurial university, ii) prioritise areas for action, and iii) communicate the strategy and related activities internally and externally. Key success factors in this are bringing together key stakeholders and the sustainability of resources.¹

Analysis and findings

Strengthening the practice dimension in teaching and learning

Most of what is needed to succeed with a new idea can and should be learned while at university. To this end, professional, technical and vocational “hard” skills are blended with “soft” skills that make it possible for the individual/team to identify opportunities and act upon them. “Practice” was also considered an important part of these activities. By working in close contact with companies, students get valuable insights into the mechanisms, daily routines and procedures that constitute the companies’ practical day-to-day work. Organising this through extra-curricular activities is one way, but prioritising such an approach as an integral part of study programmes is the most efficient way for entrepreneurship education to serve as an educational and cultural game changer. Often, small elements in the method of teaching can deliver this in courses and programmes, even if the overall curriculum remains the same. Efforts in this area have already started in Hungary with the inclusion of entrepreneurship as a key competence in the training and outcome requirements of higher education.

There is overall awareness that one-way teaching with little embedding of practice will not be effective in stimulating entrepreneurial thinking and action. More student-centred approaches to education are needed, as these will help students to develop more hands-on experience when it comes to applying the acquired knowledge and skills. In this way, the teaching is balanced between a theoretical and an (apparently more desirable) practical approach. As Gibb (2005) pointed out, “[...] in an entrepreneurial programme, the challenge is to maximise the opportunity for the ‘practice in use’ of acquired knowledge, simulating the learning world of the entrepreneur by the learning processes of doing, copying etc.”

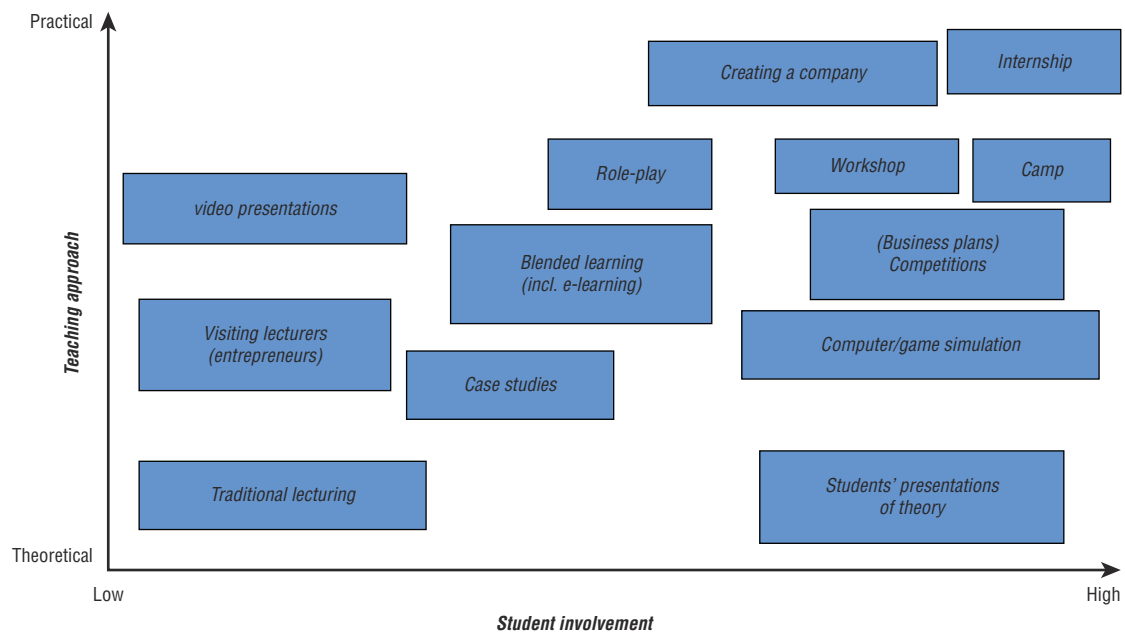
Education activities that provide for a confluence of theory and practice are an ideal environment to nurture innovation and entrepreneurship. In the classroom, however, it often happens that theory takes over, leaving little room for experiential learning. As stated in a policy paper by the National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship in the United Kingdom, “entrepreneurial creativity and its realisation in practice requires an integrative approach since it needs a mixture of knowledge and understanding, interpersonal skills and competences and various thinking styles and behaviours in order to be successful” (Binks, 2005).

Including some form of practice in education is often organised by inviting employers to play an active role in classes. Examples are giving guest lectures, presentation of a (business) case study, hosting study visits and internships, and acting as coaches and mentors. Practical input, even if highly context-specific, can still be valuable for the students (and educators), especially when it comes to business creation, how to get in touch with customers and investors, enter into co-operation and alliances etc. This is not just something the students “play at” – it is something they do for real.

Research evidence supports the idea that the participatory teaching method and embedding the practice element are indispensable for the students to make a valuable contribution to society during their studies and immediately after graduation. When

participation and practice form the basis for teaching, students will perceive the educational content as more “tangible”, and this helps them to get/stay engaged with their education. This is also important for lifelong learning in light of technology development, and knowledge co-creation. There are various teaching approaches which are based on participation and practice. Figure 5.1 shows different forms of student involvement in entrepreneurship education activities. The main aim is to create learning situations where there is a balance between theory and practice, which allows the student to acquire a balanced perception and skill-set of the subject/theme at hand when it comes to combining theory with practice.

Figure 5.1. **Elements of student involvement in entrepreneurship education**



Source: Stolt and Vintergaard (2009).

Students can be important catalysts for novel approaches

Even though the majority of students (in practically all countries and HEIs) may be largely unaware of, or indifferent to venture creation as a viable career option, there will always be a group of interested students to build on. This is also the case for the five visited HEIs. The review team met students with great enthusiasm and drive, and even though they had some doubts about whether the HEI leadership will continue to prioritise entrepreneurship, many of them considered the current efforts and support as relevant and expandable.

When a certain level of demand for entrepreneurship support is reached, HEIs may also consider giving individual students or a student association the task and matching resources (e.g. budget and premises) to develop the entrepreneurship support system at the HEI. Engaged students are “worth the money” (which is often a very small amount seen in the big picture). With their commitment and new/unconventional ideas to make things happen, these students become inspiring role models for other students. This does not mean that the students themselves should be responsible for developing the HEI’s entrepreneurship support; they are a potential upgrade-lever within a joint effort.

Involving student organisations in entrepreneurship support

The critical mass in entrepreneurship needs to grow in Hungary's HEIs and student organisations can play an important role in this. They can put in manpower and efforts, which the HEI may have difficulties providing, and many HEIs across Europe build on their engagement. The HEIs can support student organisations by giving them access to office space, auditoriums for events, and minor financial support. An example is Business Booster Sofia at Sofia Technical University in Bulgaria (Box 5.1).

Box 5.1. Business Booster Sofia at Sofia Technical University (Bulgaria)

Business Booster Sofia (www.booster.bg) was founded in 2012 by a group of engineering and economics students from Sofia Technical University. It recently registered as an association. The aims are to:

- Motivate students to be more entrepreneurial and innovative, by showing how significant they are for the national economy.
- Create a sustainable entrepreneurship environment which is easily accessible to students.
- Establish a meeting point of students from different backgrounds – a co-working space/incubator for the new ventures.
- Organise education courses aiming to increase motivation and knowledge on the importance of start-ups and the steps of starting-up a business.
- Provide information about potential sources of financing, business partners, standards and intellectual property rights.
- Establish working connections with real businesses to foster the application of university research.
- Create a network of committed mentors and investors, ultimately to establish a dedicated technological start-ups investment fund.

All activities in Business Booster Sofia are carried out with the students' own resources (knowledge, experience, time, connections) on a voluntary basis. Business Booster Sofia collaborates with LaunchHUB, Eleven, the Association of Business Clusters in Bulgaria, the Chambers, Junior Achievement Bulgaria, and various government offices.

Classes are offered in the early evening to allow all students to attend. Courses last on average two months and are focused on technology topics (e.g. cleantech, fintech etc.). The first cohort has already graduated. Applications for the second course were so numerous that parallel classes have been organised to keep the dynamics of small interdisciplinary groups.

Source: OECD (2015).

Often, students and researchers are only exposed by “accident” (word of mouth) to creativity workshops and similar. A structured effort (e.g. undertaken by a student association) to map and publish all relevant activities in the wider start-up support community (universities, public, private) is a way to draw attention to the manifold possibilities, which are likely to exist within or not far from the HEI. This also paints a more diverse picture of what is really happening in the local economy and can engage students from various study programmes (i.e. reaching beyond economics, business and technical studies). A simple way of creating awareness and passing on information about entrepreneurship is to scan the “market” for events, activities, seminars, workshops or similar and gather them centrally on the university's website.

One way of raising interest in venture creation is to have role models among students and faculty members, and, even more important, to expose and celebrate the successes of the entrepreneurs and their companies. An initial focus on the HEI's geographical proximity may also help to build and strengthen its role in the local economy. Activities such as "Career Days" where (local) companies visit the HEI to speak about their company (and eventually recruit future employees) are common at many HEIs worldwide. "Start-up Days" with local and graduate start-ups are another way to stimulate interest in entrepreneurship. They could be organised in co-operation with local authorities and organisations, the university, and graduates/alumni. Students can be the drivers of this. It is important that such an event is organised on the HEI's premises. Familiarity with the venue and the presence of HEI leadership and faculty members will raise the credibility and integrity of the event. The visibility of such initiatives is very important for the students (and faculty for that matter), particularly when the aim is to establish and nurture an entrepreneurial culture. A relevant learning model is SEA, Supporting Entrepreneurship at Aalborg University (Box 5.2). A main goal of Aalborg University is to expose all students to the possibilities of starting new ventures. This involves exposure to, and provoking of, the full range of enterprising behaviours, not only in the form of commercial activities or for-profit ventures, but also in terms of activities and achievements that create value in a broader and more altruistic sense. Students are encouraged to create partnerships with other students who share mutual interests and the desire to "create something".

Box 5.2. Student-centred entrepreneurship support at Aalborg University (Denmark)

Aalborg University (AAU) in Denmark was founded in 1974. From initially 3 000 students, AAU grew to approximately 20 000 students, who can choose from more than a hundred study programmes, at Bachelor, Master and Doctorate levels, and three different geographic locations across Denmark.

Teaching and learning at AAU are centered on problem-based and project-organised pedagogies. The so-called "Aalborg model" trains students in independent learning, which is often embedded in the local business community, and is thus close to real-life problems. Students learn to identify and analyse problems, to carry out result-oriented work, and to work successfully in teams. Most of these learning objectives are similar to what is required starting up and developing one's own business. Hence, entrepreneurship is an integral part of AAU's core strategy and elemental to its innovation approach as a knowledge-generating and culture-bearing institution that contributes to technological, economic, social, and cultural innovation.

Entrepreneurship support at AAU is co-ordinated by SEA, Supporting Entrepreneurship at Aalborg University, working across all faculties. SEA's budget is financed one-third from the AAU main budget and two-thirds from external sources. SEA offers a range of different activities, including awareness creation events, learning activities "about, for and in" entrepreneurship, provision of incubator facilities, and intensive collaboration and networking with external partner organisations.

All of SEA's activities have been developed in close collaboration with AAU researchers, external stakeholders, and students. Getting everyone on board with the premium importance of entrepreneurship and innovation, as clearly stated by AAU senior management, helped to spread activities across faculties and embed them into curricula.

Box 5.2. Student-centred entrepreneurship support at Aalborg University (Denmark) (cont.)

A highlight is WOFIE, an annual four-day interdisciplinary workshop on idea development, creativity, business development and risk-taking, for all AAU Master students or PhDs. It is organised simultaneously and video streamed between the university's three campuses.

Source: Author's own work, based on Aalborg University (2017).

Start-up support

For students, start-up support may in many ways be seen as a more relevant and effective way to achieve their dream of starting their own business than following courses on entrepreneurship. Many of these courses are centred on business plan writing, which may be less effective and even counterproductive compared to more active strategies of experiential learning, which underpin idea generation, selection and implementation. Education activities based on business plans tend to be more academic exercises than action-oriented, and immediate action is needed when setting up a venture. Instead, targeted support is more focused on the immediate needs and challenges of student entrepreneurs.

For students, managing the requirements of a full-time study programme while pursuing a start-up dream can be difficult, but HEIs can help to maintain a balanced workload between these two objectives. Allowing students to use incubators and physical spaces, such as co-working spaces, maker spaces and laboratories, increases the presence of students on campus and builds connections between their educational programme and their start-up. Open meeting spaces for students and start-ups can facilitate exchange and networking. The involvement of students working as interns in student/graduate start-ups is an emerging practice in HEIs across Europe. Furthermore, the location on campus or in close proximity to the academic activities provides an opportunity for the start-ups to explore challenging tasks in an academic set-up, which yields material for genuine case studies and follow-up research.

It is often this kind of basic support, along with the engagement and enthusiasm of dedicated faculty members and/or administrative staff, which triggers in students the desire for an entrepreneurial career. Only a few HEIs in Hungary offer basic start-up support for students and staff. Would-be entrepreneurs often pursue their dream of venture creation on their own and outside the HEI. Information on campus about existing support – within the HEI and outside – is not easily accessible, and, even if it does exist, is often hidden too deeply on a website. Existing support services often rely on a small group of people or are delivered by faculty members outside of their working hours.

Building a basic start-up support system on campus should thus be considered a priority for the near future. There are several policy initiatives that seek to develop the start-up ecosystem in Hungary (see Chapter 1). It will be important that the entrepreneurship support in HEIs becomes an integral part of such local, regional and national systems. The current offer of basic start-up support is not well-connected with more advanced support. This is an area that is not fully developed as yet in the country, which causes limitations for entrepreneurship support in HEIs. As it is not the primary task of HEIs to deliver more than just basic support, pathways are needed for nascent entrepreneurs to move quickly into a local entrepreneurship ecosystem which offers advanced and specialised support in

business development support, financing, mentoring, access to networks, etc. This requires a strong collaboration and relationship with local, regional and even national entities and organisations providing start-up and business development support. This was largely absent or underdeveloped in the visited HEIs.

Greater emphasis on soft skills in venture creation support

Risk-taking, language, execution, team work, ideation, interpersonal capabilities, and how to manage change are some of the prerequisites that are needed when it comes to identifying and acting upon ideas – and these can all be learned. Hence, what are often referred to as “soft” skills actually become “hard” skills. Business knowledge in marketing, sales, financing, planning, and management are of course relevant and useful requirements to have, but these can be learned much more easily by immersion in a real situation, thus outside the classroom or after graduation. It is not knowledge about numbers or market potential that pushes a great idea; it is the ability to have the idea in the first place, engage others in its development, perform well in a team, and make use of the “know-who” more than the “know-how”.

The focus on business plans and the use of them in business plan competitions should be downscaled. Even though the business plan often offers good and relevant considerations, the development of business plans seems to make such plans into academic exercises and takes away the focus from what the entrepreneur really needs onto what he or she thinks that the stakeholders might like to hear. Many interview partners underlined that cognitive learning, inter- and transdisciplinarity, communication, project- and problem-based learning, as well as experimental learning, are much more important for venture creation than business-plan writing, spreadsheets and marketing expertise. The latter can almost always be acquired somewhere or sometime else, but what really gets an idea and team going is to recognise opportunities and act upon them and the ability to create enthusiasm and commitment. Collaboration, how to work with others, obtaining the right resources for your project and being able to create instant development and improvement (prototyping, iterative processes etc.) are very important success factors. The Business Model Canvas and Lean Startup are useful methods to foster these skills (Box 5.3). Both methods have their roots in doing (action) and prototyping rather than descriptions (business plans), which are claimed to be counterproductive, unrealistic and without focus on action.

Box 5.3. Business Model Canvas and Lean Startup

The aim of most business plan writing exercises is to gain additional resources for the project, and if by resources we mean financing, the most important thing for financiers is security and certainty for them that their investment is good. Security from banks and investors can, however, be secured in other ways. Greater emphasis should be on the more tangible and action-oriented features of the start-up; i.e. the personality, drive, and engagement of the entrepreneur(s), an account of what has been done so far and what the next steps are, the identification of the entrepreneur’s network and connections (the “know-who” factor) and how well he or she (or the team) can establish and make use of these connections.

Practicing the writing of business plans can be seen as an easy way to engage students in the development of both the mindset and execution of enterprising behaviour or venture creation. However, the business plan is more and more often seen as a reactive, irrelevant

Box 5.3. Business Model Canvas and Lean Startup (cont.)

and more or less useless piece of paper. The tendency internationally goes towards business models and actions, thus introducing Business Model Canvas and Lean Startup.

Business Model Canvas is a strategic management and entrepreneurial tool that allows the entrepreneur to describe, design and challenge a business model. It is a new way to proceed in a fast changing world, where business models, rather than products, are predominant. The Business Model Canvas is a template for developing new or documenting existing business models through a visual chart with elements describing a firm's or product's/service's value proposition, infrastructure, customers, and finances.

Lean Startup is a method for developing businesses and products by shortening the start-up's product development cycles. It combines experimentation along different hypotheses with iterative product releases and validated learning. The concept is based on an approach that pushes the start-up to focus on iteratively created products or services that meet the needs of early customers, and, in this way, reduces market risks by sidestepping the need for large initial funding and expensive product launches, which may fail.

Source: Author's own work, based on Strategyzer (2017) and Lean Startup (2017).

Simplifying commercialisation processes

Basic and applied forms of research go hand-in-hand. A decline in public funding for research and growing expectation that the knowledge (co-)created in and with HEIs will deliver new solutions, products and services for a better future, makes partnerships in creating, transforming and applying knowledge paramount for today's research. Ideally, partnerships are based on mutual interests and create value for all involved parties. Experts in the technology transfer offices (TTOs) are able to match potential partners with relevant research groups, explaining tangible reasons for collaboration. They will become "salesman of knowledge", but keeping integrity and excellence in research as unique selling points.

The energy spent on technology transfer efforts at HEIs worldwide seems to have far less effect than the resources put into support for business start-up and early development. International experience shows that the effort spent on intellectual property rights and licensing does not, in the long run, provide sufficient outcome and financial output that justifies the attention given to them. Greater emphasis should be placed on start-ups and spin-offs as these are the real value-makers and job creators in the short and the long term. The support should ideally be offered in collaboration with, and physically located in, the incubators' facilities and science parks, with regular activities, such as technology scouting events taking place at HEIs, and in collaboration with the industry clusters in the relevant region. Specialised support demands personnel with special skills, knowledge and contacts. It will be important to also focus on the (initial) commercialisation of research and on IPR and licences, rather than overly focusing on the latter.

The existing system for approving and setting up a university spin-off seems to be far too complicated, as it deprives the HEI of the possibility to act professionally on a potential commercialisation opportunity. There are two main problems. Firstly, the current system does not create interest in spin-off activities as a way to commercialise research among faculty members, even if they find a valuable idea/invention/research result. Secondly, the current system suffers from scarce resources; TTOs often lack the human resources to actively scout for commercialisation opportunities across the HEI.

As a principle, the HEI should not take equity from a student start-up. It is common practice to teach students that everything usually comes at a price, but the initial and basic support at the HEI – creating some kind of safe environment/lab for the entrepreneurial student – should be totally free of charge. Students should pay back through helping other student entrepreneurs and sharing experiences. Students are the core part of the critical mass, and are ambassadors that brand the HEI at home and abroad.

Connecting the dots: Inclusive and dynamic venture creation support

The emphasis in venture creation support in Hungarian HEIs has so far has been more on spin-offs, that is, ventures created upon research results and with the involvement of the HEI, than on student start-ups. As discussed earlier in this report, spin-offs are considered an additional source of income for the HEI, a way to build the reputation of the HEI and its research, as well as career and funding opportunities for individual researchers or research groups. The few examples of start-ups among the students are initiatives that would have emerged anyway, as these are driven by young people that have already set their minds on going into this realm. There is nothing wrong in having a strong TTO and well-functioning structures for the commercialisation of research results, but a strategic balance between TTOs (primarily working for spin-offs and patenting) and incubators (primarily working with student start-ups) should be discussed and established according to current and future potentials in both areas.

Both spin-offs and start-ups benefit from venture creation support. A strong basic venture creation support, linked with other support structures locally, regionally and nationally, is likely to attract students and staff who wish to create value through entrepreneurship, thus creating new role models, and overall a distinctive knowledge-intensive brand for the HEI. There are many examples of large and impressive incubators and substantial support structures, but what is necessary and relevant is the scope that suits a specific HEI and its context. Instead of large-scale solutions, an approach is needed that starts with matching the given resources and the needs and expectations of students.

The “rule of thumb” is to make venture creation visible and easily accessible. This requires substantive communication both inside and outside the HEI. All and up-to-date information should be available from the HEI’s main website. Basic information includes the existing offer, contact persons, office hours, open days and other events that showcase start-ups and entrepreneurial role models etc. Such information should be listed next to information on study programmes, research activities, etc. The official website’s information is the responsibility of the university – the underlying layers and links are to be developed more autonomously and organically. Most important is that the one-door-entry is visible on the front-page of the website. Further efforts include reaching out into student networks, educator networks, external partners, etc. (European Commission, 2010).

Offering physical workplaces where nascent entrepreneurs can meet and making these accessible for external stakeholders is also important. This can be initiated even with only a few places. Most (small) incubators grow by word-of-mouth.

A good idea is to include international students when it comes to promoting such initiatives. They are catalysts for quick(er) growth as they often have more time and desire to engage in such activities while they are studying abroad. Student incubators should create and nurture an open and creative culture where student entrepreneurs share ideas, visions, mistakes, and successes in order to learn and act. The practice of sharing ideas and holding

events on personal experiences and learnings, plays a pivotal role in student start-up support all over the world. It was a general feature at the meetings with Hungarian students that the fear of getting their ideas stolen made them hold back these ideas, thus preventing them having valuable input and feedback that could help to further develop their ideas.

Efforts should be put into creating a network of start-up alumni. Members could be invited to contribute to the design and delivery of the day-to-day offering of support at the HEI. Start-up alumni, in turn, have access to talented students and stay in touch with the academic community and research activities. This “giving back” from graduate start-ups is free of charge for the HEI and the positive attention generated through hosting now famous and successful” former students is likely to have self-perpetuating effects on the attractiveness of future events.

Basic start-up support should always be connected with more specialised support structures. Offering new ventures emerging from the HEI a smooth transition from basic support (offered largely by the HEI), to advanced support, requires a strong collaboration and relationship with local, regional and even national entities and organisations providing start-up and business development support. Instead of waiting for nascent entrepreneurs to contact external support providers, there is a tendency to establish support facilities directly on campus. Often, organisations collaborate in bringing the support directly to the HEI, and also HEIs join efforts and resources, in particular when the latter are scarce.

There are different ways of connecting the different parts of an entrepreneurial ecosystem. A truly entrepreneurial university engages with the right partners to provide adequate support, but equally important, is the ability to be part of a fully integrated partnership with other stakeholders and partners in the innovation ecosystem. A relevant learning model that summarises these efforts into a coherent and strong communication strategy is Plymouth University (Box 5.4).

Box 5.4. Stakeholder engagement at Plymouth University (UK)

Plymouth University is a unique example of how a university can develop and promote itself as a truly enterprising university. This is not only when it comes to rhetoric and appearance within entrepreneurship (sub-) websites, but the overall communication strategy aims to present the university at the forefront of development, attitude and content in all its efforts in general. Such a communication strategy makes way for positive language and exposes the good practices and – most importantly – the real intentions of the university. This provides a positive attitude and well-defined brand when it comes to attracting students interested in entrepreneurship, as well as stimulating the ones already present in the university.

Plymouth University may not offer support or services that are so different to many other entrepreneurial universities in the world, but the positive and proactive language combined with the prominent appearance on the website invites further investigation and study within the area. A very interesting feature, however, is their Customer Charter, that specifically explains the philosophy and attitude towards what it means to be an entrepreneurial university. Even though the charter states some obvious elements in start-up support (and beyond), it is also an important element as a guideline and codex for the self-perception of the administrative staff, faculties and management at the university.

Box 5.4. Stakeholder engagement at Plymouth University (UK) (cont.)

Another feature is the list of partnerships, including links to science parks, chambers of commerce, innovation agencies, business councils, other start-up support entities, local firms etc. This emphasises the importance of having close collaboration with the ecosystem surrounding the university to provide the best support possible. Even though the university is not responsible for the more advanced support, the important thing is to be able to point students in the right direction when it comes to specialised start-up support.

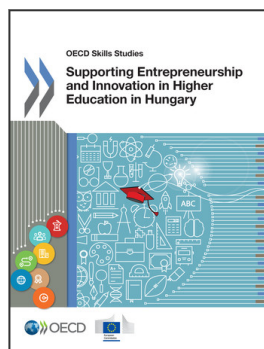
Source: Author's own work, based on Plymouth University (2017).

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