



CAEL Series for Entrepreneurship and Leadership Development in Africa

**A report by the Centre for African Entrepreneurship and Leadership, University of
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“Establishing 21st century research and entrepreneurship centre in higher institutions”

Executive Summary

Nigeria, like most other African countries, is trying to grapple with the twin problems of widespread poverty and high rates of youth unemployment. With limited employment opportunities available in the public sector, entrepreneurship represents the best option for unemployed youth to escape the poverty trap and potentially create jobs and opportunities for others. Entrepreneurship is, however, not a preferred vocation for university graduates, partly because they have been traditionally orientated towards formal, white collar jobs, and they have little entrepreneurial awareness and skills to explore opportunities in new venture creation. The principal aim of entrepreneurship centres, therefore, is to generate awareness and facilitate entrepreneurial skills development, as well as provide support via incubation units and venture capital, to promote entrepreneurship and enterprise development.

In order to achieve national objectives in entrepreneurial development, universities and other HE providers in Nigeria need to establish 21st century entrepreneurship centres that are effective and efficient, and adequately equipped and structured. This is important if they are to meet the challenge of job creation and poverty reduction in an environment dominated by high graduate unemployment and widespread poverty. Furthermore, entrepreneurship centres need to partner with industry stakeholders and governments to develop and implement appropriate curriculum, and provide necessary support for nascent entrepreneurs.

In the light of the foregoing, the workshop explored topics on knowledge ecosystem, international collaboration, quality assurance, enterprise learning, and the roles of ICT and digital media, among others. In these sessions, participants were encouraged to critically assess the Wolverhampton templates with a view to adapting relevant strategies and programmes into their own local context. These can be in the form of industry-informed curricula, e-learning hubs and ICT labs, as well as partnership with the government to review and improve SME policies.

Based on the outcome of the training, HE institutions in Africa, among others, are encouraged to employ student-centred pedagogy, invest resources in establishing multi-stakeholder linkages and partnerships with industry and government, focus on commercialisation of research, and provide opportunities for ongoing staff training and development.



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Introduction

The objective of this training, organised by the Centre for African Entrepreneurship and Leadership, University of Wolverhampton (CAEL) was to explore how higher education institutions can work better with government, businesses and other stakeholders to develop institutional capabilities to make more significant contributions to the wider society using tested interventions in entrepreneurship. Along with policy makers and government officials, the training, held in February 2013, was attended by vice chancellors, deputy vice chancellors, principals and other senior executives from higher education institutions in Nigeria.

This Knowledge Transfer Programme is part of CAEL's ongoing intervention in the areas of capacity building for entrepreneurship education and enterprise development in Africa. Within the past five years, the centre has run training programmes focusing on entrepreneurship education and curriculum development, and leadership training workshops. More than 150 executives of higher institutions in Africa, including vice chancellors, provosts, and directors of centres, have participated in the training programmes. They represent more than 40 institutions of higher education, mostly from Nigeria.

The making of entrepreneurs: entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial institutions

Among policy makers and researchers across the globe, there is growing interest on the role of entrepreneurship as a key driver of economic growth and innovation ,(Oosterbeek, van Praag and Ijsselstein, 2010; Klinger and Schündeln, 2011; Peng, Lu and Kang, 2012; O'Connor, 2013). Using Schumpeter's ideas, the entrepreneurs' role is usually described in terms of their impact as arrowheads of 'creative destruction'. In the search for new opportunities and profits, entrepreneurs, it is argued, bring new combinations and innovations into the economic system, and this ongoing innovation implies permanent change and permanent disequilibrium (Van Praag, 1999). At the market level, this disequilibrium brings about the displacement of older goods with more desirable products and services, or the introduction of entirely new products into the market, expanding the range of options for consumers and end users(O'Connor, 2013).

While there is general consensus about the positive impacts of entrepreneurship on economic development, there are more differences of views regarding the processes by which entrepreneurs emerge. In particular, there has been a long debate about whether or not entrepreneurship can be taught (Klinger and Schündeln, 2011). In Europe, for example, policy makers have generally worked under the assumption that entrepreneurship skills can be taught, that they are not fixed personal characteristics (Oosterbeek, van Praag and



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Ijsselstein, 2010). It is believed that, at least, higher levels of entrepreneurship can be achieved through education in general, and entrepreneurship education in particular (European Commission, 2006).

Several scholars have pointed out that the need for entrepreneurship education can be partly dependent on the nature and challenges of the environment under which the entrepreneur operates (Shah, Gao and Mittal, 2015; Flora, 2006). This may, for example, be connected with the phase of economic development of the nation, with more advanced economies throwing up new challenges in terms of, say, regulation and access to credit (Djankov et al., 2002; Ardagna and Lusardi, 2008). In this respect, it is argued that, even when people have inherent entrepreneurship tendencies and attributes, they may not create new businesses, or expand existing ones, due to lack of knowledge and skills on how to work through the challenges and harness the opportunities of the regulatory and institutional environment. Some of these idiosyncratic obstacles can be overcome through specific entrepreneurship training (Klinger and Schündeln, 2011). Seen in this perspective, entrepreneurship is not so much about making entrepreneurs as it is about providing potential entrepreneurs with skills required to work through challenges and take better advantage of opportunities in the institutional environment. These entrepreneurship skills can also be applied in other contexts other than setting up new businesses. In particular, entrepreneurship skills can be applied by an *intrapreneur* in a bigger corporate environment, as well as by the social entrepreneur to set up and run organisations whose goals are social, rather than economic (Matthews, Stowe and Jenkins, 2011).

(Liñán, 2004) distinguished between four types of entrepreneurship education: entrepreneurship awareness education, education for start-up, education for entrepreneurial dynamism, and continuing education for entrepreneurs. Thus, the type of training required is sometimes associated with the growth stage of the enterprise, from existence through survival, success, take off and resource maturity (Churchill and Lewis, 1983), or the individual's stage in the entrepreneurship career path, from foundation to awakening, specialisation, creation, and maturing (Carayannis, Evans and Hanson, 2003).

Course contents in entrepreneurship education vary from institution to institution, and are tailored with the need of each learner groups (Hynes, 1996), and often defined by the policy or political contexts of the country or region (Smallbone and Welter, 2001; Busenitz, Gomez and Spencer, 2000). Nevertheless, some themes are common across the wide spectrum of entrepreneurship modules, and among the most popular ones are: financing and marshalling of resources, marketing, idea generation and opportunity discovery, business plan, and managing growth (Mwasalwiba, 2012). Teaching methods are largely categorised into traditional featuring lectures and case studies and action-based methods, the latter including business/computer simulations, project works and creating business plans (Mwasalwiba,



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2012; Hynes, 1996; Walter and Dohse, 2009). In general, while much of entrepreneurship teaching is dominated by traditional, “lecture-style” approaches (Williamson, Beadle and Charalambous, 2013), most scholars agree that entrepreneurship education should incorporate action-based learning at its core (Leitch and Harrison, 1999; Rasmussen and Sørheim, 2006).

In order to position themselves as credible and effective providers of entrepreneurship education, universities and other HE providers should, for themselves, embrace the entrepreneurial mindset. Without detracting from the traditional role of producing graduates and publishing research, HE institutions should embrace more vigorously the commercialisation of research as they seek to play more enhanced role in innovation development. This is in recognition of increasing roles of knowledge in national and regional innovation systems and the auspicious positioning of the universities as “...cost effective and creative inventor and transfer agent of both knowledge and technology.” (Etzkowitz, Webster, Gebhardt, & Terra, 2000, pp.2). The 21st century entrepreneurship centre should therefore be a platform for integrating research within the host institution with innovation development, and this should reflect in the design and delivery of entrepreneurship curriculum.

Training review

The workshop focused on empowering academic scholars and higher education institutions to contribute to societal socio-economic development through leading-edge research, and entrepreneurship education. Participants were taken through the processes and strategies employed by the University of Wolverhampton to position itself as a “powerhouse of enterprise”.

Among other things, the participants were able to develop models and working templates for: i) developing employer informed curricula; ii) establishing e-learning hubs, ICT labs to benefit students, businesses and graduates; iii) working with governments to review SMEs policy e.g. establishment of Microfinance Banks at the local levels to support SME growth and job creation; iv) developing innovation and enterprise centres in a University community.

The delegates went on a tour of the University’s Visualisation Centre, where they explored cutting edge facilities including: 90” touch screen unit; multiple PC collaborative design zone; high definition video-conferencing unit; 3mby9m immersive projection zone; and mobile/tablet integration.

Participants were invited to reflect on the Wolverhampton example and adapt some of the ideas to their own local contexts. The University of Wolverhampton, it was explained, has a long and successful track record of knowledge exchange, with the highest number of knowledge transfer partnerships regionally and nationally. For example, the Business School



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engagement with small and medium scale enterprises started in 1950. Since then, more than 5,000 SMEs have been created, more than 8,000 jobs created or safeguarded, and 200 million worth of new or safeguarded sales generated. Furthermore, more than 7,000 learning opportunities have been created in support of business, and £6m spent by SMEs on research and development.

The training also highlighted the role of entrepreneurship in value creation, and how entrepreneurship centres in Nigeria and Africa should key into this. Entrepreneurship creates economic value through new jobs and enhanced productivity; creation of social value through generation of new opportunities to develop social capital; cultural value through opportunity identification and realisation; and personal value through self-realisation, autonomy and self-sufficiency (Sagagi, 2013).

Participants' feedback indicate that the training has helped the participants to highlight and focus on certain key issues and ideas they plan to explore further in their bid to improve the provision of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. Lauretta Achor, who is a senior officer with Nigeria's National Universities Commission, said the training helped bring into sharp focus the need to ensure that "industry requirements are taken into consideration in curriculum development in order to close any skills gap in university education" (Achor, 2015). To reinforce this key point about industry-university partnerships, another participant, Victor Okoye stated that, following the training, his institution had "signed a memorandum of understanding with a car assembly plant (Innoson Motors) and Anambra State Government for the empowerment of our skills acquisition centre". Furthermore, Okoye added that his institution had "just acquired some machines from India to be used in the fabrication of nails, bolts and other like tools used in our mechanical engineering department. We also have machines for molding of tiles..."(Okoye, 2015). Finally, Joy Eyisi, who is a senior curriculum leader in her university, praised the training as "...an energizer, a moral booster. It empowered me to empower Nigerian youths on different aspects of entrepreneurial skills, through the entrepreneurial activities of my University. Before the training, we were operating on anything goes affair. But with the successful achievements from the training, we introduced the spirit of excellence in our entrepreneurial practices, especially because whatever that is worth doing at all is worth doing well..."(Eyisi, 2015).

Recommendations

Based on the training the following recommendations were made on how to design and run entrepreneurial centres of excellence in Nigeria's universities:

1. Embrace a student-centred pedagogy, where the learning experience of students is at the heart of curriculum development and delivery. Curriculum should be continually



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- improved based on students' feedback and reflective insights of those delivering the curriculum.
2. Focus adequate attention on action learning and practical instruction through the use of practical labs, workshops, and student projects.
 3. Develop strong linkages with entrepreneurs, social transformers, businesses and government agencies.
 4. Invest more resources in high quality research leading to patents and spin offs
 5. Transfer innovations from research labs to farmer fields. This process can be supported by a strong extension system and enabling policies from the federal government.
 6. Establish Science Parks to facilitate the creation of innovation-led businesses, social inclusion and overall improvement of regional growth.
 7. Establish partnerships with inventors to exploit opportunities for new product development and commercialisation
 8. Explore opportunities for multi-level and multi-stakeholder collaboration through the creation of knowledge clusters; knowledge economy networks; economic micro clusters; and thematic clusters.
 9. Invest resources in the provision of ongoing opportunities for training and development of staff, especially those in the frontline of curriculum design and delivery.

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