How to engage and empower stakeholders in entrepreneurship education

Copenhagen, 18 - 20 February 2013: Peer Learning Activity on Stakeholder Engagement
Hosted by 'The Danish Foundation for Entrepreneurship – Young Enterprise'

Part of the European Thematic Working Group on Entrepreneurship Education
Made up of policy makers and EU experts from across Europe, this group is developing policy guidance on entrepreneurship education. This is an action in the Rethinking Education package and responds to the call in the 2013 Annual Growth Survey for increased levels of entrepreneurial skills.

The stages of stakeholder involvement
In their preparatory work, the sub-group worked with a model of the key stages for stakeholder engagement, developed by the International Association for Public Participation (2004). The group chose this model to show that it is important to go beyond informing stakeholders, but to ultimately empowering them to be partners in the decision making process.

The model shows a staged developmental process:
1. Informing key organisations about policy directions towards entrepreneurship education.
2. Consulting with relevant stakeholders as part of the process of developing entrepreneurial mind-sets of students.
3. Involving stakeholders to ensure that issues and concerns about entrepreneurship education are understood and considered as part of the decision-making process.
4. Collaborating with entrepreneurial stakeholders in developing partnerships in formulating options and in providing recommendations for developing entrepreneurship education.
5. Empowering participant stakeholders in the decision-making process and to help implement and manage change regarding a more entrepreneurial mind-set.

Denmark welcomed members of the Thematic Working Group in snowy February to explore successful approaches to stakeholder engagement in entrepreneurship education. The aim was to take an in-depth look at how countries organise stakeholder engagement, keep actors involved and crucially how they develop basic engagement into more meaningful collaboration.

The participants first explored the challenges and obstacles of involving stakeholders; then worked to identify solutions through the case studies presented. Involving 17 countries, the results of the three days will contribute to practical policy guidance for EU member states, providing country specific insight and solutions for policy makers on key policy areas for entrepreneurship education.

Identifying Stakeholders
Stakeholders are understood as those who are affected by a policy topic, or have interests in a topic and the ability to influence its outcome. Stakeholder engagement process can be a participatory approach for policy making. It is a process that involves interest groups in agenda setting and decision-making as well as in implementing, evaluating and reviewing actions. For entrepreneurship education, this meeting explored how to successfully engage educational institutions on all levels; education professionals and their organisations; research and academia; business and employer organisations; NGOs; the media; and of course learners as well as their parents/carers.

All these groups can play an important role in tailoring strategies and actions and support their implementation.

“Learning from the excellent examples of sustained stakeholder involvement in Denmark”

Setting the Scene - the Danish Approach
Denmark was an appropriate place for this event to be held, as shown when Christian Vintergaard, Director of the Danish Foundation, presented the Danish approach to entrepreneurship education and stakeholder engagement. At the government level, four ministries are involved, while stakeholders are seen as vital partners both to define the policy as well as the actions needed. Christian pointed out how stakeholders have been important drivers to help entrepreneurship education gain momentum and push it forward on the political agenda.
“Stakeholders are vital partners to define actions and strategies and make them more representative”

A panel debate followed, moderated by Christian with involvement from Torben Laustsen, Director of the Danish State Bank Nordea, Anthony Gribben from the European Training Foundation and Arnoud Jullens from ‘Yes! Delft’ in The Netherlands. Torben highlighted that entrepreneurship education lends itself particularly well for business-related stakeholders to get engaged in education. For instance the Danish Nordea Bank has launched a seed capital initiative for budding entrepreneurs. Panellists agreed that stakeholders can lend actions robustness as well as encourage buy-in among target audiences.

Brokerage with International Stakeholders: Jared Penner, Head of the Education Division at Child and Youth Finance International, emphasised that financial literacy is an important learning outcome for entrepreneurship education. He presented how CYFI organises the engagement of a broad group of international stakeholders, for instance by establishing a range of working groups and actions related to ‘Global Money Week’. Working globally, they find brokerage between organisations is often one of their key roles.

Stakeholder Engagement from the Eyes of the Citizen: Christian Bason, Director of Innovation at Mindlab, a division of the Danish Government, presented examples of how public services can innovate through design thinking. He emphasised the importance of getting closer to the end-user to understand what exactly is required, and then using this knowledge to identify solutions. Without the end-user as a stakeholder, policy responds to the perceived need rather than an actual need.

“Citizens are the ‘end users’ of public services – their views are important to identify solutions that work”

The Andalucia Approach: David Rosendo from the Department for Entrepreneurship, from the Adalucia Government in Spain presented the role of stakeholder engagement in their regional entrepreneurship education Action Plan. It aims to support the fight to reduce a youth unemployment rate of almost 60%. The focus is on entrepreneurial skills for employability and active citizenship as well as start-up, and encouraging educational innovation for long term change. But it will do this through extensive stakeholder engagement in education. They created structured engagement with specific actions for them to be involved in, designed with and for stakeholders. A monitoring and coordination commission supervises implementation and does periodic evaluation. David referred to their stages of stakeholder development as Looking and Hearing, Flowing and Imagining, Informing, Having Influence, and finally Coming Together and Building.

Building Tomorrows Leading Firms: Arnoud Jullens, Incubation and Growth Manager at Yes! Delft in The Netherlands - a high-tech entrepreneur centre with the clear mission to build tomorrow’s leading firms. Yes! Delft engages stakeholders – especially schools, universities, business organisations and media - to identify and support future entrepreneurs. Stakeholders feedback helps to improve Yes! Delft’s strategies and actions. Arnoud finished by emphasising the importance of the media as a stakeholder to increase communication and reach.

“Exploring Engagement at every level of education”

A speed networking session gave insight into stakeholder engagement across the Danish education system, calling on representatives from all areas of education. Sara Green Brodersen, Vice-president and Chairman of the Board at student led organisation ‘Gate To Create’ represented the students’ perspective; Lucia Velasco, Project Manager at CSE Lab reported from the universities’ point of view; Dorte Lange, Vice-president at Danish Union of Teachers represented the perspective of primary and lower secondary schools, while Pernille Berg, Head of Knowledge Department at Copenhagen School of Design and Technology spoke for VET institutions.

The session allowed to explore stakeholder engagement in different areas of education, and for different audiences. Participants explored views on what drives and motivates engagement in entrepreneurship education, and also asked for experiences on how and with what means policy makers can effectively support engagement.

“Stakeholder Engagement starts with selling the concept – but must move beyond that”
Developing a roadmap

The three days proved that stakeholder engagement is more than just pitching the importance of this work or consulting them on their views. They need to perceive a clear benefit from their engagement. But while the evidence showed that the majority of approaches do not go beyond the 'informing' phase, meaningful involvement must mean stakeholders as partners and collaborators.

In its final session, the group brought together the learning from the three days. Small groups looked at developing a roadmap for how policy could increase the quality of stakeholder involvement. They did this by identifying the types of involvement needed at each stage (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower), for specific stakeholder groups: education institutions, educators, parents, research and academia, intermediary institutions, business. Participants addressed the purpose, the specific target audience, methods for engagement and how to evaluate these action, and collated initial results onto one single framework model.

What next?

The Sub-Group leading this topic will continue refining this framework model, and in its final form it will enable countries at different stages of development in this area to progress their national objectives. Ultimately the aim is to inform EU Member States and candidate countries' approaches to plan and organise stakeholder engagement in entrepreneurship education.

Thanks to the members of the Sub Group on Stakeholder Engagement who led the design and delivery of this event:
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Next meeting:
18-20 April 2013 Vienna, Austria
Thematic focus:
Curriculum, Policy & Pedagogy - The Future of Learning

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