



**TACKLING A POLICY BLIND SPOT IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION:  
CAREER GUIDANCE AND FAMILY BUSINESS.  
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All through my teenage years, how I envied my school mates! They had stacks of time for cinema, sport and going out. They always managed to have pocket money. And then there were the holidays, details on which I edited out of the classroom banter. I grew up in a small business family. There was no such thing as holidays or pocket money. If there was money going it had to be 'earned'. Working evenings, weekends and vacation was the norm. The family business was a 24/7 operation. And all hands were needed. At 18, I was packed off to university. My parents were keen that I do better than them. I would graduate, get a cosy, well-paid job. My evenings would be mine. I'd travel the world.

That was the late 1970s.

Fast-forward to 2014. My parents' business has changed hands. I'm working in the international public service. No longer the insider in a family business, I'm an outsider working on ways to build more and better businesses; and more a better jobs. The backdrop to my job is a failing global economy and stubbornly high unemployment, particularly amongst young people. Since the 2008 global financial crisis, I've been following policy debates – each bent on finding solutions. I have my own ideas. The global economy is a complex area with many dark corners. If there are to be solutions, they need to do more than just quick fixes. I'm convinced we need

to prepare the next generations for uncertain times. And entrepreneurship education has to be part of the plan.

I've researched entrepreneurship education. The more I've got into the literature, the more I've realised how muddled the policy area is. The starting point is definition: what is entrepreneurship education? A second issue is rationale: why is entrepreneurship education important? A third is ownership: who is responsible for entrepreneurship education? And finally, the eco-system: how should entrepreneurship education interface with the wider education and enterprise support structures?

Dealing quickly with definition, entrepreneurship developments in most countries still focus on entrepreneurship as a 'business' subject in the curriculum. Entrepreneurship as a transversal competence is still not fully understood and requires a separate blog! Secondly, why entrepreneurship education is important speaks for itself. Failing economies and chronic unemployment call for all parts of society to connect up for sustainable and effective solutions. Education must play its part. As to who is responsible for entrepreneurship education, the answer is more clear. There is no one policy home. All levels of formal education must be engaged. And the non-formal learning environment is an integral part of all developments. And finally, entrepreneurship education must be part of a wider eco-system that includes the business community and education-support services like careers guidance and counselling.

My work to date in many countries (transition economies, middle income and developing economies as well as the world's most developed countries) underlines how careers guidance is a policy blind spot in the entrepreneurship education agenda.

I often wonder had the careers guidance I got at school and university taken note of my family's business, whether I would have ended up returning home and getting more involved. Wasn't business succession from my parents to me, a viable career opportunity? Notwithstanding the fact that my parents wanted me to 'do something better', why was my family's business ignored in career planning discussions? Had it been factored into the career guidance support at secondary and tertiary level, and in turn integrated into my education (e.g. 'after hours' learning for sons and daughters of business owners), could I have brought new value and opportunities to the family business? Would the family business still be in the family? In short, my careers guidance missed an important opportunity. It missed my potential as a successor to my parents in the ownership of the family business.

Many small businesses founder simply because business succession is not planned or managed well. The EU's Small Business Act (2008) highlights the implications of 'poor succession' for both the economy and employment as millions of owners of small firms retire without onward plans for continuity of the businesses or the people they employ.

Schools and universities, careers guidance services and enterprise support agencies need to connect up and build a support framework that ensures that young people and families can make an informed choice on business succession from parent to siblings. What would this mean in essence?

Firstly, in addition to concentrating on school exit support for compulsory education, careers guidance services would need to adopt a 'school-entry' policy. The objective should be to immediately identify those pupils from family-run businesses with a view to a conversation involving the parents, school and careers advisory services as to issues and options for young people within the family business after compulsory education. Schools already providing entrepreneurship education could adjust curriculum and the learning environment to meet the specific needs of young people from business-owning families. Other schools not yet addressing entrepreneurship education could take advantage of having pupils of local business owners attending the schools to build entrepreneurship learning activities into the teaching and learning environment while engaging those businesses into the learning process.

Secondly, assuming that young people continue to post-secondary vocational or higher education, the 'family business' tag should follow them. This would alert those responsible for teaching and careers guidance to continue liaison, advice and support, particularly for those that demonstrate intent to join the family business as an employee or owner. This has immediate implications not only for the careers guidance and support services. But it also raises issues for the approach taken to entrepreneurship promotion (if any) in vocational, post-secondary and tertiary education. Should specific provision within formal education be made to accommodate pupils and students who intend to commit to family businesses on completion of studies? Or, could 'after hours' support be provided to young people and their families to maximise the potential of entrepreneurship education in ensuring a smooth transition of a family business from parents to their children?

Thirdly, what role should SME support agencies have in working with families, schools/universities and young people to ensure a more developed interest, know-how and skills to bring to the family business particularly in terms of transfer of ownership and onward development of the business? And shouldn't careers guidance services be better connected to SME support organisations that provide information and advice to family businesses? On a number of occasions through my work, I have witnessed how young people seeking information from their local careers services on self-employment, only to find that a very different and conflicting set of information was then provided by the local SME agency. This causes confusion and can be discouraging to those ready to look at entrepreneurship as a career option. All public services should connect up to maximise the overall value of their contributions to a local, regional or national entrepreneurship drive.

People often ask me, what would you do if you had the chance to turn the clock back? In terms of career choice, I'm not sure that I would change anything apart from making mistakes earlier and learning faster! But I would have liked to have had information, advice and support to allow me to better understand the opportunities that were available to me through my parent's business. Just maybe, had I had entrepreneurship education during my secondary and tertiary education, I could have brought new ideas, energy and drive to the business. And the business might still be in the family.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Anthony Gribben has over 26 years' experience in education and labour market reform at both policy and delivery level of which some 20 years have been spent working within transition and middle-income economies. A former teacher of undergraduates on entrepreneurship and child development, Anthony spearheaded the development of an international policy metrics package for entrepreneurial learning which has been adopted by some 25 countries.

1) European Commission (2008). Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Think Small First: a Small Business Act for Europe. Brussels, 25.6.2008. COM(2008) 394 final.