



Special Issue

Guest Editorial

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The responsive role of the enterprising university to national skills development: Pedagogies, practices, and partnerships

This special issue explores how higher education institutions are reimagining their purpose as active contributors to national prosperity, skills development, and enterprise-led renewal. It invites reflection on what it means to be enterprising in an era of accelerated change, and how universities can meaningfully contribute to skills development that is not only economically relevant but socially responsible.

Over the past fifteen years, successive UK governments have sought to energise the national economy through an array of enterprise-led initiatives, such as the Local Enterprise Partnerships (2010), the Northern Powerhouse (2014), the Levelling Up agenda (2019), and the UK Innovation Strategy (2021), to name a few. Each has carried a common thread: a belief in the transformative power of innovation, regional collaboration, and entrepreneurship. Most recently, Scotland's National Innovation Strategy and Entrepreneurial Campus reports (both from 2023) have further positioned tertiary education as a cornerstone of a fair, green, and enterprising future. The same narrative resonates globally, through the European Commission's innovation frameworks, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, and the United Nations' sustainability agenda, all asserting that education, enterprise, and industry must converge to create dynamic, adaptive economies.

Beneath this policy enthusiasm lies a persistent question: how responsive are universities to the evolving national skills agenda? The modern, entrepreneurial university is expected to do far more than educate. It must cultivate enterprising mindsets, broker knowledge across sectors, and translate learning into tangible social and economic value. In doing so, it must navigate the competing demands of academic integrity, policy expectation, and market responsiveness. In an era defined by economic transformation, technological acceleration, and shifting national priorities, universities are being asked to do more than educate. They are being called to respond.

The three themes that shape, and encouraged initial submissions to, this issue reflect distinct yet interconnected dimensions of this institutional responsiveness:

1. *Developing enterprising skills towards work-ready graduates* examines how universities embed enterprise within teaching and institutional culture to prepare adaptable, creative, and employable graduates.
2. *Educating (small) businesses through purposive pedagogies* explores how institutions engage directly with business communities, particularly small enterprises, through mentoring, knowledge exchange, and innovation-driven learning that fosters entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial practice.

3. Finally, *Policy-responsive institutional initiatives and activities* highlights how universities interpret and act upon regional and national priorities—such as the UK's Levelling Up framework and Innovation Strategy—through strategic partnerships, responsive programmes, and skills-led interventions.

The issue comprises nine papers, confronting a range of related themes, topics, issues and challenges. Of which, there are three case studies, an original research article, two reflective analyses, an opinion piece, and two 'on the horizon' papers.

The special issue's opening paper and first case study, Stuart Durkin (University of Aberdeen) and Joy Perkins' (Heriot-Watt University) 'Bridging the gap: The collaborative impact of enterprise education and small businesses on student skills development', illustrates student group exposure to experiential learning within small business contexts through collaboration with national bodies promoting business links with academia.

The second case study 'From Policy to Practice: Embedding Entrepreneurial Thinking Through an Institutional Entrepreneurial Toolkit', by Edinburgh Napier University's Christopher Cramphorn, Rosemary Allford, and Jackie Brodie, introduces a developed institutional toolkit comprising of digital playbook and physical playbox components to promote entrepreneurialism, support an enterprising mindset, and inspire a new wave of student and staff entrepreneurs.

This special issue's final case study, authored by Nick Quinn and Alison Gibb (University of Glasgow) titled 'Active Comparison: A Strategy for Building Competence and Confidence in Experiential Learning', explores the concepts of active comparison and approaches to self-regulated learning to centralise the importance of applied skills development, and not simply knowledge acquisition. The paper advances this perspective, promoting actionable principles and a (re)positioned, effective pedagogical tool towards employability-focused education.

A team of academics from the University of the West of Scotland (William Shepherd, Alan Martin, Philip Davies, and Alan Murray) confront regional concerns in the issue's fourth paper 'Empowering Local Economies: Community Consultancy for Sustainable Cities and Communities', where a recent study in Scotland involving small business support and 'practitioner-scholars' is explored. Themes emerging from this engagement include trust, knowledge transfer, resilience, and accessibility across regional stakeholder groups and institutions, leading to a replicable conceptualising of 'community consultancy'.

Paper five of this issue, 'Nurturing independence: Inspiring an entrepreneurial mindset to support 'transitioning through' undergraduate study', by Jo Edson Ferrie, Michael McEwan, Ashley Lewis Cole, and Maureen Bain (University of Glasgow), focuses on ownership of opportunities and evidencing entrepreneurial attributes and work-ready skills. As a result, a holistic transition framework is presented in both appreciating and advancing relevant and requisite entrepreneurial skills for careers and industry.

I, along with University of the West of Scotland colleagues William Russell, Jayakumar Chinnasamy, and Nawreen Sobhan contribute to this special issue with our paper, titled 'Supporting Businesses through Adaptive Intervention: Reviewing national policy and university engagement towards a principles-led entrepreneurial development framework'. It includes a policy review of UK enterprise initiatives over the past 25 years. Highlighted from this analysis, is the enduring role of universities as timely and responsive knowledge hubs, critical towards regional and (inter)national business creativity, innovation, and economic growth. Subsequently, a principles-led 'Adaptive Intervention Framework' (AIF) is constructed to assist stakeholders in emboldening and enhancing institutional initiatives in line with unique business needs.

Paper seven of this special issue, the opinion piece from Pauline Bremner (Robert Gordon University) titled 'The Barriers to Embedding Entrepreneurship Education in Universities' promotes, amidst institutional and national resource constraints, interdisciplinary teaching methods as a responsive approach towards transformational enterprise education and skills development. This is discussed as a solution to bridge academic strategy with industry expectation, and position inclusive and institutional-wide enterprise education as a significant step required in realising experiential education, achieving economic growth, and evidencing enterprising ecosystems in practice.

The penultimate paper of this issue, "But we are already doing so much!", the importance of surfacing employability initiatives in undergraduate programmes' by Susanne Schulz (Queen Margaret University), reports on findings from an Employability, Enterprise and Entrepreneurship (EEE) audit and mapping exercise concerning employability strategy benchmarks and undergraduate programme provisions in a post-1992 Scottish university. Found, was no direct link between EEE initiatives and resultant National Student Survey (NSS) scoring, and that programmes should consider and appreciate their own existing offerings and enhance these, as opposed to newly introducing more and potentially ineffective enterprising initiatives.

The final paper, 'Purposeful Pedagogy in Action: The Transition Attributes Framework' by Russell Crawford (Falmouth University) outlines the rationale of the Transition Attributes (TA) framework and its four core attributes: *skills, knowledge, mindsets, and habits* in relation to graduate attributes and student success indicators. With the potential for application across several programmatic contexts, the TA framework aims to aid skills development planning, practical activities, and sustain quality assurance in education provision.

Collectively, these insightful contributions capture the evolving identity of the enterprising university: not as a passive provider of education, but as a dynamic, collaborative force within national skills ecosystems. These papers prompt reflection on how universities can balance their academic mission with their social and economic responsibilities, ensuring that enterprise and education remain inseparable drivers of sustainable progress. All nine papers within this issue also illuminate how enterprising thinking can shape pedagogy, partnership, and policy, offering new insights into how universities can meaningfully support inclusive and future-oriented skills development.

As universities continue to navigate the intersection of education, enterprise, and policy, their responsiveness will define the next phase of skills development and innovation. The discussions presented in this issue encourage continued dialogue among educators, policymakers, and industry leaders about how higher education can most effectively sustain national ambitions. By reimagining partnerships, pedagogies, and institutional priorities, the enterprising university stands poised not only to meet current economic challenges but to anticipate future ones. In turn, this shapes workforces and society in being both resilient and ready for the opportunities of an enterprising future.

I am tremendously proud to present this special issue concerning the entrepreneurial university, and its responsive role to the national skills development agenda.

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