



Webinar: Support services for student entrepreneurship in higher education

Background Note

19/05/2025

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Thematic strand 1: Entrepreneurial skills and mindsets in education

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The [Community for Educational Innovation \(CEI\)](#) webinars bring together educators, researchers, policymakers, industry leaders, and representatives from civil society to exchange knowledge, share best practices, and engage in discussions on innovation in education. CEI webinars promote the strategic development of skills and competences essential for student success across various sectors, aligning with the objectives of the recent European Commission's communication on the [Union of Skills](#) to enhance the EU's competitiveness through the advancement of its education and training systems.

This note describes the background, focus and key questions that will guide the presentations and discussions during the webinar on "Support services for student entrepreneurship in higher education", which will take place on 19 May 2025.

1. Support services for entrepreneurship education

Support services for entrepreneurship are key to providing students with the resources, mentorship, and infrastructure necessary to transform entrepreneurial ideas into successful ventures. These services are typically extra-curricular or co-curricular offerings that go beyond the academic curriculum. They include incubation and acceleration programmes, mentorship schemes, networking opportunities with the start-up ecosystem, and access to seed funding, among others (OECD, 2021a; European Commission, 2021). **These services help students bridge the gap between academic learning and practical business application, enabling them to develop entrepreneurial mindsets and capabilities crucial for future economic and social impact** (OECD, 2021b).

These services are particularly important as they provide students with real-world experiences where they can apply theoretical knowledge and experiment with business ideas. According to the *Oslo Agenda for Entrepreneurship Education in Europe* (2006)¹, "entrepreneurship education should provide students with the competence to start and run a business, and it should become an integral part of every higher education institution."

¹ The *Oslo Agenda for Entrepreneurship Education in Europe* is a strategic framework developed to guide the development of entrepreneurship education across Europe. It was established in 2006 under the auspices of the European Commission and OECD to address the growing need for entrepreneurship education and to promote entrepreneurship as a key skill for the 21st century.

2. Support services for developing entrepreneurial skills and mindsets

Support services in entrepreneurship education are essential for the development of the necessary skills and mindsets that students need to navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship. These services contribute to the development of various capabilities, such as creativity, problem-solving, resilience, and leadership.

- **Creativity and innovation:** Entrepreneurship education fosters creative thinking and innovation, essential qualities for entrepreneurs. Through programmes like business incubators and accelerators, students are encouraged to experiment with their ideas, which helps develop innovative solutions. The OECD (2021a) notes that “incubators and accelerators play a critical role in helping students bring their ideas to life through structured support, mentorship, and access to resources.”
- **Risk-taking and resilience:** Entrepreneurship often involves taking risks and dealing with failure. Mentorship programmes provide the support students need to develop the resilience required for overcoming obstacles. According to the OECD (2019), “the role of incubators and accelerators in fostering an entrepreneurial mindset is particularly significant in supporting students through their initial failure and pivoting towards more successful business models.”
- **Leadership and teamwork:** Many support services offer students opportunities to work in teams, which helps develop leadership and collaborative skills essential for entrepreneurial success. As the European Commission (2021) highlights, “effective entrepreneurship education not only cultivates technical skills but also soft skills such as leadership and teamwork, which are integral to building successful start-ups.”
- **Practical business skills:** Support services provide essential business skills such as marketing, financial planning, business modelling, and pitching to investors. Through incubation centres and start-up competitions, students gain hands-on experience in managing real businesses (OECD, 2021a).

These services contribute to creating an entrepreneurial culture within educational institutions, fostering individual success and societal growth by cultivating a new generation of entrepreneurs (OECD, 2021c).

3. Key examples of support services

Several key support services are commonly implemented across higher education institutions to promote entrepreneurship:

- **Incubators and accelerators:** These programmes offer the infrastructure and resources required to nurture early-stage ventures and scale-ups.



Incubators provide students with office space, mentorship, and administrative support, while accelerators offer more intensive, time-limited support to scale established start-ups. The *OECD Policy Brief on Incubators and Accelerators* (2019) asserts that “incubators and accelerators are essential for transitioning entrepreneurial ideas into scalable businesses by providing access to expertise, networking opportunities, and sometimes capital.”

- **Mentorship schemes:** Mentorship is an integral part of entrepreneurship education. As the *OECD Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Higher Education in Sweden* (2021a) report highlights, “mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs or business professionals gives students real-world insights, helping them refine their ideas and avoid common pitfalls.”
- **Networking opportunities:** Networking with investors, entrepreneurs, and start-up professionals is crucial for entrepreneurial success. Many universities organise events such as pitch competitions and business fairs, which provide students with opportunities to present their ideas and connect with potential investors or collaborators. As AGCAS (2023) notes, “networking events create vital linkages between students and the start-up ecosystem, enabling them to build relationships that may lead to further business opportunities.”
- **Seed funding and access to capital:** Access to funding is often one of the biggest barriers to starting a business. Many universities collaborate with investors, venture capitalists, and government programmes to offer students seed funding. The *European Commission's A Guide for Fostering Entrepreneurship Education* (2021) states, “providing students with access to capital enables them to move from concept to execution, bridging the critical gap between idea and market entry.”
- **Entrepreneurship centres:** Dedicated entrepreneurship centres within universities are becoming increasingly common. These centres offer a range of services, including business advice, legal support, financial planning, and access to research and development. According to the *Oslo Agenda for Entrepreneurship Education* (2006), “entrepreneurship centres serve as hubs for cultivating entrepreneurial talent, offering students the resources needed to launch ventures and integrate entrepreneurial thinking into various disciplines.”

4. Alignment with broader ecosystem-level support services

Support services in entrepreneurship within higher education institutions are closely connected to broader city and regional ecosystems. **Successful support systems require collaboration between universities, local governments,**



industries, and international partners. The alignment of these services with the regional ecosystem ensures that students benefit from a supportive network of resources and opportunities.

- **Local and regional government support:** Local and regional authorities often play a key role in creating the conditions necessary for entrepreneurship to flourish. The *UNESCO Entrepreneurship Education for Learning Cities* (2021) report suggests that “cities can foster entrepreneurship by creating a supportive policy environment that encourages collaboration between educational institutions and local businesses.”
- **Industry partnerships:** Universities often collaborate with local businesses and industries to create practical opportunities for students to engage with real-world business challenges. These partnerships help students gain industry-specific knowledge and expertise. According to the *OECD Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Higher Education in Croatia* (2019), “such collaborations ensure that academic entrepreneurship is aligned with the actual needs of the business world, providing students with a competitive edge.”
- **International networks and cooperation:** International partnerships are also essential in expanding the reach of entrepreneurship education. The *OECD Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Higher Education in Slovenia* (2021b) report underscores that “international cooperation and sharing of best practices significantly enhance the effectiveness of entrepreneurship support services, enabling institutions to adopt more innovative approaches.”

5. Challenges in implementing support services

Despite the positive impact of entrepreneurship support services, several challenges hinder their implementation and scalability. These challenges include:

- **Sustainability:** Many entrepreneurship support initiatives depend on short-term funding, which can limit their long-term impact. The *OECD Policy Brief on Incubators and Accelerators* (2019) warns that “without sustainable funding models, entrepreneurship support programmes risk becoming short-lived and unable to scale.”
- **Institutional prioritisation:** Continuously embedding support services into institutional strategies requires ongoing cultural changes within higher education institutions. The *European Commission’s A Guide for Fostering Entrepreneurship Education* (2021) highlights that “embedding

entrepreneurship in higher education requires cultural and institutional shifts that prioritise practical, hands-on learning alongside theoretical education.”

- **Fragmentation of services:** Support services are often scattered across various departments and external organisations, which can create confusion and inefficiencies. According to the *OECD Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Higher Education in Slovenia* (2021c), “fragmented services can limit their overall effectiveness, and there is a need for better coordination and integration within institutions and across the entrepreneurial ecosystem.”
- **Access to funding:** Securing sustainable funding for the operation and growth of entrepreneurship support units remains a critical challenge. Many of these units depend on project-based or short-term funding cycles, which jeopardises their continuity and limits their capacity to deliver high-quality services over time. The *OECD Policy Brief on Incubators and Accelerators* (2019) emphasises that “without long-term institutional commitment and stable funding streams, entrepreneurship support structures struggle to maintain operations, attract qualified staff, and scale their impact within the educational ecosystem.”
- **Scalability:** Scaling successful support services to accommodate growing numbers of students or expanding initiatives across different regions poses a significant challenge. The *World Bank* (2024) notes that “expanding entrepreneurship support services requires careful planning and additional resources to ensure they remain effective and accessible to all students.”

6. Focus and key questions for the webinar

The webinar on ***Support services for student entrepreneurship in higher education*** will explore how institutions help students transform entrepreneurial ideas into real-world initiatives and how these services—such as incubation and acceleration programmes, mentorship schemes, and networking opportunities—contribute to developing entrepreneurial mindsets and capabilities.

Key questions guiding the discussion will be:

- How can higher education institutions effectively integrate support services for entrepreneurship into their academic frameworks and institutional strategies?
- How can universities collaborate with local, regional, and international ecosystems to enhance the entrepreneurial support network for students?

- What challenges do higher education institutions face in scaling and sustaining support services for entrepreneurship, and how can they overcome these barriers?

These questions will guide the webinar's exploration of good practices and challenges, providing valuable insights for improving and scaling entrepreneurship support services in higher education.

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