

Entrepreneurship & Business Start-Ups in Ireland

VOLUME 1: AN OVERVIEW

Thomas N. Garavan
Barra Ó Cinnéide
Patricia Fleming
with Breda McCarthy
and Ambrose Downey

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Introduction

This book, and its accompanying volume of case studies, have arisen for a number of reasons. Firstly, a significant gap exists in the Irish literature concerning issues of entrepreneurship and small firm growth. Many practical start-up guides exist for small firms and would-be entrepreneurs, whereas there is a significant lack of academic literature associated with entrepreneurs and small firm owners. These volumes seek to fill this need. This first volume presents some of the contemporary research on entrepreneurship and small business start-ups in Ireland. The second volume consists of case studies that if used with students, will enhance problem-solving skills as well as giving them insights into the entrepreneurial process and the types of decisions that have to be made in small firm start-up. Secondly, considerable course development in Irish universities has occurred in the areas of entrepreneurship and enterprise. There is also a considerable development of business studies curriculum involving courses in entrepreneurship and enterprise. Despite such curriculum developments, there has been no associated growth in textbooks and case material. It is hoped that this volume may be suitable as a text for such new courses.

Thirdly, the volumes recognise that there is a need to combine theory and research with practical examples through cases of entrepreneurs and small firms. The cases presented in volume two have been written as a result of detailed interviews with entrepreneurs and small firm owners. The material therefore reflects the concerns and the major decisions which they made.

Volume 1 of the series begins by examining the context of entrepreneurship and small firms growth in Ireland. It specifically focuses on the importance of the small firm in the Irish economy. This importance is likely to increase in the future, due in the main to the fast pace of change and the greater need for firm flexibility. The first chapter maps out the development of the Irish economy and industrial policy and discusses the importance of the small business to the economy. The chapter concludes with a

discussion of government initiatives to stimulate entrepreneurship and briefly considers the nature of entrepreneurship.

Chapter 2 considers in greater detail the nature of entrepreneurship and characteristics of the entrepreneur. The chapter specifically critiques attempts to identify an entrepreneurial personality and concludes that it is impossible to identify an identity-kit of the successful entrepreneur. The chapter considers alternative perspectives of entrepreneurship. It concludes that entrepreneurship means different things to different people and that entrepreneurs may be best described by their activities. They are individuals who start new ventures with a vision for growth, they seek change and persist in gathering essential resources and use their energy to achieve profitable results.

Chapter 3 focuses on high-technology entrepreneurship in Ireland. The chapter examines the concept of high-technology and the nature of high-technology entrepreneurship in Ireland and discusses the socio-psychological, demographic characteristics and motivations that surround the decision to become a high-technology entrepreneur. The chapter concludes with a consideration of policy initiatives to stimulate high-technology venture formation in Ireland.

Chapter 4 considers the role of entrepreneurial education and specifically the growth of entrepreneurial studies in Irish and European universities. It focuses in particular on approaches to curriculum design and development of courses in entrepreneurship and enterprise development. There is a special examination of the learning process and why entrepreneurship education requires different learning methodologies to conventional education. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the teaching strategies which can be used to promote the development of entrepreneurial skills as well as a consideration of the role of entrepreneurial education.

Chapter 5 considers the graduate entrepreneur in Ireland, a significantly under-researched area. The chapter initially focuses on the concept of the graduate entrepreneur and then examines the range of contextual factors that may influence the level of graduate entrepreneurship. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to reporting on a major empirical study of the characteristics of Irish graduate entrepreneurs, considering their psychological characteristics, motivations and the problems they encountered.

Chapter 6 gives detailed consideration to the role of the entrepreneurship training and its role in facilitating entrepreneurship and business start-ups. The first part of the chapter considers some of the issues and difficulties highlighted in the literature on entrepreneurship training. The second part presents a detailed comparative analysis of the design features of six entrepreneurial programmes undertaken within the European Union. Special consideration is given to their objectives, the philosophy of such programmes, their duration and structure, the learning strategies and methods used, the nature of programme facilitation and the degree of similarity in terms of design and delivery. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the relationship between employment creation and entrepreneurship training.

Finally the series has been written with students in mind. Therefore, volume 2 includes a range of cases which it is hoped will give students a deeper insight into the entrepreneurial process and illustrate that the environment can be just as important as personal skills for successful entrepreneurship. This finding has important implications for policy and the support of SMEs. If the environment is not conducive then entrepreneurial talent will largely lay dormant. An important policy implication lies in encouraging potential entrepreneurs to start their own businesses. There are many example of policy developments in Ireland which are aimed at helping start-ups and specifically helping existing small firms and reducing the high failure rate of start-ups.