



FOCUS ON...

# ENTREPRENEURIALISM

BTECs in entrepreneurialism, Young Enterprise clubs and A-levels in business studies, canny pupils are taking the leap to get ahead of the game



THE JOURNALIST

# AN AMBITIOUS MINDSET

Eleanor Doughty charts an industrious course



**W**hen jobs are no longer guaranteed – even for Oxbridge students – and in a world changing as rapidly as ours is today, it is not surprising that enterprising young students want to take matters into their own hands. Data collected by the Royal Bank of Scotland found that 55 per cent of 18 to 30-year-olds aim to start a business, compared to 35 per cent of the total adult population. Entrepreneurship is big business.

Schools have known this for some time. Sir Walter Saloman was awarded his knighthood for creating the Young Enterprise Awards back in the 1960s, which in 2017/18 had over 320,000 entrants. Most independent senior schools put forward a young team of excited would-be businessmen and women every year. But awareness and interest grew in the mid-noughties with the introduction in 2005 of TV reality shows like *The Apprentice* and *Dragon's Den*. Today, inspired young people can log on to YouTube and start a business from their bedrooms, and schools are working hard to engage pupils with the business community, equipping them with 'soft' skills for the next step forward.

At Cheltenham College, sixth-formers can add a 'mini MBA' to their timetable. This programme – also offered to a group from All Saints' Academy, one of Cheltenham's partner schools – is now in its third year. Development director Sebastian Bullock explains: 'Pupils learn about producing a cashflow forecast and meet with external speakers – alumni, parents, or local businesses. They then team up to produce and pitch a business plan to a panel, the best of which go to London to present to business figures in a boardroom for a cash prize. For those looking towards a full MBA, it's an excellent start and, even if students opt for a different path, they have a grounding in something with long-term value.'

Former businessman and now head of business studies at John Lyon School in Harrow, Michael Fletcher says, 'I entered our sixth-

form boys into the London Institute of Banking and Finance's student investor challenge, where they run portfolios of £100,000 worth of stocks. The trading captured the boys' imaginations – I can't walk around school without being stopped for some advice on a stock pick.'

Moira Davies, head of careers and higher education at King Edward's, Witley, says that young people today are more business savvy. 'They are already thinking about their own businesses, whether it's in or out of school,' she says. The growth of social media may be responsible: 'The technology available now means starting a business is achievable on your own,' says Hannah Graydon, of Caterham School in Surrey. Pupils partake in the school's innovation award, developing a business idea to present to judges. 'They are pretty enterprising,' she says, 'and keen coders are selling apps on the App Store.'

No longer does 'work' have to mean going to the same office every day: according to the Office for National Statistics, numbers of self-employed people increased by 180,000 from March 2018 to March 2019. Generation Z, born after the mid-1990s, are likely to be the 'slash' generation – for example, accountant/interior decorator. Emma Gannon writes in her 2018 book, *The Multi-Hyphen Method*, 'being a multi-hyphenate is about having the freedom to take on multiple projects'. The next generation entering the workplace will 'have all these other skills which will ensure that they are future-proofed for employability,' says Davies, although of course, she acknowledges it is important to recognise that not everyone is a natural entrepreneur.

Business studies is still a viable subject for the would-be business owner. At Queen Anne's School in Caversham, girls campaigned to have the subject reintroduced, says Andrea Robinson, who teaches economics, business and enterprise. Straightaway it attracted two classes. 'It's growing in popularity,' says Robinson who attributes this partly to parental influence, but says that the girls enjoy the practical subjects. 'Our syllabus is based on how businesses make decisions – it's the problem-solving skills that I talk about the most.'

Last year, Milton Abbey in Dorset, won the BTEC of the year award and business is high on the agenda. The level three BTEC and enterprise and entrepreneurship, which is equivalent to an A-level, is 'designed for students who wish to know how to start up a business,' says Rebecca Barton, head of enterprise and economics. 'We allow students to mix A-levels and BTECs to suit their needs. Options are grouped into "pods"; the business and entrepreneurship pod includes subjects ranging from modern languages to marketing, international business, property management and accountancy. These give students the opportunity to specialise at 18,' she says. 'It shows universities and employers that they are focussed on that area.'



Pupils from Queen Anne's School, Caversham presented with an award by Peter Jones

Alongside their academic studies, pupils can enjoy the Entrepreneur in Residence scheme, preparing a business plan to pitch to a panel, each year led by a notable entrepreneur. 'The winner gets £2,000 to continue their business,' says Barton. Unsurprisingly, it's popular: 'We get students doing it who I've never taught before.'

For some schools, entrepreneurial activities are extra-curricular and about making a difference. [Lucy Elphinstone, Head of Francis Holland, Sloane Square, is passionate about introducing her girls to business from the age of 11, and even offering their sixth-form workspace to entrepreneurs in the local central working hub in exchange for mentoring. 'Our girls are being trained to be job-makers, not job-takers,' says Ms Elphinstone who also talks about intrapreneurs. 'At the heart of it, it's about social impact and we can all make a difference within a society.'](#)

This attitude would resonate with Sue Grice, Head of Careers at Merchant Taylors' School, Hertfordshire, where sixth-form boys work with the charity Phab, helping disabled teenagers. 'Some people see enterprise as just being commercial. An



Take risks in a safe environment

enterprising attitude goes past that – it's about being able to work in teams, solve problems, and prioritise.' These skills are illustrated during a ten-day activity programme which the boys put on for young people with disabilities at the school, says Grice. 'They learn as many skills through that type of programme as they do through Young Enterprise.'

St Edward's School, Oxford, has gone so far as to devise a new curriculum to replace GCSEs. On their new

design and entrepreneurship course, pupils will create business plans, market ideas, and learn about negotiation, as well as re-imagine design. 'Kids see design as woodworking or metal-working, because that's what their parents have told them it is,' says Matthew Albrighton, deputy head (academic). 'Now, we are designing a course to teach them about being an entrepreneur. We want them to embrace the challenge of solving problems, rather than just doing the necessary paperwork to get a grade at the end.' Pupils will learn how to fail in a safe environment. 'They might feel that if they don't succeed first time then they're going to fail the course,' says Albrighton. 'They should never see failure as a bad thing.'

Celebrating failure is a new trend in today's work world. The journalist Elizabeth Day's popular podcast, *How to Fail with Elizabeth Day*, sees public figures explore their failures on air. As Day writes in her accompanying book, *How to Fail: Everything I've Ever Learned From Things Going Wrong*, 'I have evolved more when things were going wrong than when they were going right.'

Carol Chandler-Thompson, headmistress of Blackheath High School GDST, is keen for her girls to engage with risk-taking. 'We want to get them used to risk-taking in an environment where it's not a crisis if things go wrong,' she says. 'We've got to embrace this idea of failure as being an enjoyable challenge. Failure is a driving force to succeed,' adds Albrighton. And as most entrepreneurs will concede, failure is a right of passage in entrepreneurship but the good ones know this, pick themselves up and try and try again until they get it right.

## THE ENTREPRENEUR IS ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR YOU?

Julian Hall is Entrepreneur in Residence at Putney High School GDST



One of Putney High School's many entrepreneurial alumnae, Ali Pumfrey told my sixth-formers: 'I didn't know that I was going to become a chef and set up my own food

business when I left school! Be open and do as much work experience as possible to discover your passion.'

Entrepreneurship as a career is unpredictable, uncertain and requires the resilience of graphene and will power, said a top CEO of a highly regarded London firm.

And it is about solving problems. Deloitte Digital has released a short film, *The Stages of Business Disruption*, providing insight and humour into the story of business and digital transformation, and highlighting a critical aspect of becoming an entrepreneur; trying to solve a problem by building or doing something that (lots of) people want. Most people don't become entrepreneurs until they've found a problem which they are passionate about solving. But for those desperate to become entrepreneurs, Y Combinator, one of the world's largest and most successful start-up accelerators, identified a negative, pre-entrepreneurial behaviour of a 'solution looking for a problem' – coming up with solutions for problems that don't actually exist.

It doesn't matter whether you become an entrepreneur or not, the skills are useful and transferable. There is entrepreneurship – and having the mindset to set up a business that disrupts or innovates – and then there's the application of entrepreneurial skills, which can be applied anywhere, many of which are akin to life or employability skills.

Whether it's in the finance sector, music, education, tech or even fashion, young people need these skills. Some are more obscure; adaptability, curiosity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence and failing fast are all commonly touted as 'must have' traits in new talent hires. So the question isn't so much 'Is entrepreneurship for you?', but more 'what entrepreneurial skills do I need for future success?'

At 'Start It', the recent creation of the West London Schools Entrepreneurship Programme in which Putney collaborates with St Paul's and other local partner schools, creative problem-solving is the essence. Teams of post GCSE students join together to brainstorm, plan and negotiate their way to a final pitch of a sustainable business solution to a pressing world problem. The passion is palpable and creative ideas flow.

Not everyone will be an entrepreneur; not everyone cares enough to solve the problem, but as Steve Jobs said in his 2005 Stanford address, 'Do what you love, because if entrepreneurship is for you, that will be the spark.'