



Interview with Dr Richard Tunstall

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Dr Richard Tunstall is helping to train the next generation of European entrepreneurs through his work embedding enterprise and innovation into the university curriculum. He took some time out of his busy schedule to chat to us about his experiences with innovation and entrepreneurship.

Tell us, Richard, what does the word 'innovation' mean to you?

Innovation is often portrayed as being the realm of new ideas, but for me it's also about going beyond that to how those new ideas are developed and implemented. It's important that we see innovation as something that is about not only the development of technology and new products, but about new ways of working, new forms of services and new ways of doing good in society. Innovation is a small word, but it has a lot of big consequences.

As you know, the EIT champions innovation and entrepreneurship with the aim of increasing Europe's growth and competitiveness at a global level. Why do you think these two particular areas are so essential for Europe's future?

In terms of Europe's future, Europe operates in global markets and, increasingly, it's about how we can bring out new forms of services and goods, and new ways of working. Unless we have an injection of enterprise and innovation, that's not going to happen.

The reason why growth is important in a global concept is about how we can achieve scale in new innovations and entrepreneurship. Europe is a large place, but in order to really achieve global competitiveness you're going to have to have a global position. We need entrepreneurship and innovation to instigate that, it's a challenge that Europe has struggled with and I think the EIT's initiatives will play a large part in how we're answering that challenge.

Do you think Europe can rival the Far East and the US in terms of innovation and entrepreneurship?

A lot of our attention is around that growth issue; about how Europe can rival the US in terms of the traction and growth of ventures. But I think that rather than just looking at the US and the Far East in an aspirational way, we need to look at them and say, "How can we do things differently? How can we achieve growth and success through innovative and entrepreneurial means?" It's about finding the right way for Europe to do it and then trying to capitalise on some of the things we're already doing and take them further in a way that is unique to Europe, building on these unique competencies and capabilities.

If you had the power, what would you change about entrepreneurship and innovation in Europe?

For me, it's about abandoning our obsession with the superstar entrepreneur who is going to change everything by themselves and the idea that, as part of that, you must have an interstellar business. That entrepreneurship and innovation are only about one goal and one path to success. Instead we should acknowledge the cultural differences in Europe, develop our strength through diversity and think about how we can actually have more focus on team entrepreneurship, collaboration and open innovation. And focus on entrepreneurship in areas that are challenging – like the environment, sustainability, society and areas of emerging technology – where we can, perhaps, capitalise on opportunities that other people aren't. It's about finding niches and developing those, and doing so

in a way that will lead to sustainable growth in a way which becomes deeply embedded in Europe's culture for all, not just the fortunate few.

You're a lecturer in the Centre for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Studies at Leeds University and enterprise is your speciality. What are the key messages that you tell your students day-in, day-out?

I encourage them to see entrepreneurship as a set of tools and techniques that can help them to achieve their goals and aspirations. For it to be more meaningful to them, my students need to see entrepreneurship as a route to impact. They need to work out how they can take what they know, leverage it, develop it into something else, find the right people to work with and then be able to achieve their dreams in a focused way. The key things for me are action, collaboration and focus.



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The University of Leeds has won four major awards for its student enterprise this year. One of your roles at the university is being the Partnerships Director of cross-faculty enterprise programmes, which have themselves also been recognised as cutting edge by the UK Prime Minister's Advisor on Enterprise in Education. Can you tell us a bit more about these, especially in terms of which faculties collaborate and how the process works?

We have a range of enterprise undergraduate programmes, which link to different types of faculties. So we have biotechnology with enterprise, biology with enterprise, social policy with enterprise and music with enterprise. The idea with that link is that we don't see

enterprise as being a bolt-on 'fun' topic. What we're trying to create are collaborative programmes that are relevant to the research-led teaching of the parent faculty, while also focused on students who want to make an impact, and who have some kind of personal drive and motivation to do something beyond traditional, single-honour studies. What's also exciting is that we're beginning to witness a different mindset from those students enrolled in these programmes, about how they approach their studies and the opportunities available to them.

You've been in entrepreneurship for quite a long time now. Have you observed a change in entrepreneurship education over the years?

Traditionally entrepreneurship education has been about training students in how to develop a new start-up. While that's still an important part of what we do, I think now the focus is on seeing enterprise as a broader set of skills and attributes. We're saying that it's not just the raw and functional areas of business, it's about how we support people in finding new ways to develop projects, to achieve their aims, and to focus their own personal development. It's also about trying to help students see a way of creating impact through what they learn through their primary discipline and develop in different directions according to their personal aspirations.

Do you think you can teach people to be entrepreneurial or do they have to have it in them to start with?

I think that's increasingly not becoming the right question to ask. I think there's a third piece missing, which is: can we create the environment for the development of entrepreneurs? Because it's true that nobody can *teach* someone to be an entrepreneur – but only if you think the word 'teach' means to give a lecture. I think at Leeds we recognise our role as facilitators of learning, not only as expert knowledge holders in our field.

What we need to do is provide an environment where we can support any individual, regardless of their background, subject of study or personal motivations for engaging in entrepreneurship and innovation.



From a teaching perspective, we're interested in understanding how we can create classroom environments that are going to help people's mind-sets and skills to develop, and also lead to the development of new ideas. It's about finding people's knowledge and skills and leveraging that. We don't need to just have students who already identify themselves as entrepreneurs, but when we accept everyone we have to change the way we do things and respond to that demand – and I think that's what is happening.

In a way, what you're describing is what the EIT educational programmes are trying to achieve – to create that supportive environment where talent can flourish.

In terms of the future of entrepreneurship and enterprise education, if entrepreneurship and innovation is about

making an impact through start-ups, job creation and innovative projects, then I think that's one of the unique selling points, one of the USPs of the EIT – being able to cross boundaries and identify people who have certain specific skills and then give them that catalyst to develop those skills.

From my experience, taking this approach of bringing entrepreneurship and innovation into faculties and encouraging collaboration between them, to create true interdisciplinarity in education to address contemporary challenges and create an impact for society, the economy and students own careers, is where we'll see the future of these things going.