

# The study of entrepreneurship in Ireland

Research Article

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I (1) reflect on the current state of entrepreneurship research in Ireland; (2) assess the impact of Irish entrepreneurship research on four groups: students, academic peers, policymakers and practitioners; and (3) outline the factors that might shape the entrepreneurship research agenda in Ireland. While there is an established body of research on entrepreneurship in Ireland, I argue that this has had a limited impact on the international research community and, perhaps more importantly, it may not have impacted or informed, to the extent that it could, the teaching of entrepreneurship, the practice of entrepreneurship or policy relating to entrepreneurship in Ireland. The agenda for entrepreneurship research in Ireland should reflect (1) the national industrial development imperative, (2) aspects of the Irish context that offer Irish researchers a comparative advantage, (3) the changing nature of entrepreneurship and (4) emerging frameworks and theories.

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurship research • Ireland • Irish entrepreneurs*

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## Introduction

‘Why is it that our people are unemployed or are driven to seek the means of living by periodical emigrations to fulfil the lowest office in another land? Why is it that our harbours are bare of ships, are rivers undisturbed by the bustle of industry and intercourse, our fields producing about a third of what they might supply? that where activity exists, or that progress is now being made, it is to be traced, with but few exceptions, to the introduction of the natives of the sister kingdom into whose possession there thus pass the most valuable domains of enterprise which this country offers, whilst the Irish population rests in the lowest grade, and but rarely manifest the qualities which the time requires.’

This quote is from a review of Ireland’s industrial resources by Sir Robert Kane, the Professor of Chemistry at the Apothecaries’ Hall, in 1844 (p. 412). With some ‘modernisation’ to reflect the changing nature of industry, higher levels of educational attainment, and the development of a managerial class in Ireland, aspects of this opening quote could be applied to many periods of Irish history, including the current, post ‘Celtic Tiger’ time. Many reviews of Ireland’s industrial and economic development have argued that as a country, our relative industrial performance has been poor (National Economic & Social Council, 1982). The historian Joe Lee argued that ‘it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Irish economic performance has been the least impressive in Western Europe, perhaps all of Europe, in the twentieth century’ (1989, p. 521). However, the high levels of growth achieved during the ‘Celtic Tiger’ years suggested that Ireland had found an industrial development model that facilitated a rapid ‘catch-up’ with its wealthier European neighbours. In addition to high levels of inward foreign direct investment, the ‘Celtic Tiger’ years were also characterised by high levels of entrepreneurship. However, the recent economic crisis has once again brought to the fore the issues identified in the quote from Sir Robert Kane. Can Ireland’s entrepreneurs develop an industrial base that provides sufficient wealth for the people of Ireland?

An understanding of the causes and consequences of entrepreneurship is core to understanding industrial development. Whilst there are multiple definitions of what might constitute entrepreneurship research (Gartner,

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1990; Davidsson, 2004), a commonly used definition of entrepreneurship is 'how, by whom, and with what effects opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated, and exploited' (Venkataraman, 1997). Defining the field in terms of these questions most likely captures the current body of research by academics in the Irish higher education system that would self-identify themselves as researchers of entrepreneurship. This definition usefully distinguishes entrepreneurship research from other fields, particularly from the field of innovation, and to some extent, from the study of small businesses. Importantly, this definition also allows for contributions from other academic disciplines. For those interested in understanding entrepreneurship in Ireland, critical contributions are to be found in the work of academics found in the Departments of History and Departments of Economics.

In this paper, I reflect on the study of entrepreneurship in Ireland by first reviewing selected past and present entrepreneurship research and then by assessing the impact of this body of research on our students, our peers, policymakers and practitioners. In identifying research on Irish entrepreneurship, I began by reviewing the early editions of the *Irish Journal of Management* (IBAR at the time) for articles that addressed aspects of entrepreneurship that are included in Venkataraman's (1997). My search then proceeded to identify research, both past and present, which would shed light on the development of Irish entrepreneurs and Irish entrepreneurship. I was particularly interested in identifying the early academic studies of Irish entrepreneurs and research that studied the development of entrepreneurship in Ireland. A second approach that I adopted was to search for and review research by Irish academics in the subject area of entrepreneurship that is published in peer-reviewed international journals. My objective in reviewing this research is to provide insights into the extent, nature and impact of entrepreneurship research, rather than to provide a systematic review of the findings of all published research on Irish entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. To foreshadow my conclusions, I argue that there is a variety of research that focuses on key aspects of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship in Ireland. However, I contend that this body of research has had limited impact on the international research community and that it may not have impacted or informed, to the extent that it could, the teaching of entrepreneurship, the practice of entrepreneurship or policy relating to entrepreneurship.

## Entrepreneurship research in Ireland

### Selected early studies of the Irish entrepreneur

The earliest contribution to the *Irish Journal of Management* (what was then *IBAR*) that I was able to identify that included 'entrepreneurship' in the title of the article was John Murray's 1981 article 'In Search of Entrepreneurship' (Volume 3, Number 2). In that piece Murray argued that the available evidence on the Irish entrepreneur (i.e. the 'who' question) was 'disappointing and even confusing' and that there were 'relatively few studies' (p. 42). While Murray argued that there were relatively few studies that focussed specifically on the Irish entrepreneur, there was research that, using Venkataraman's (1997) definition, could be included within the domain of entrepreneurship. For example, in the first year of *Irish Journal of Management* (*IBAR*), Allen explored technology transfer processes in Irish firms (1979); while a few years later, Cogan and Onyemadum (1981) explored spin-offs in the Irish electronics industry.

A question that motivates many researchers and students of entrepreneurship is: why are some individuals and new firms successful? A landmark early study of entrepreneurs that pre-dates the launch of the *Irish Journal of Management* was Fogarty's 1973 study of the traits of the Irish entrepreneur. Fogarty interviewed 22 Irish industrial entrepreneurs, 16 were entrepreneurs who had started their own firms and 6 were owner-managers who expanded existing firms. The factor common to these entrepreneurs was their 'success' (p. 21). Fogarty sought to understand entrepreneurs by asking these men about their self-perceptions (all 22 were men). How did they view themselves as different from other Irish people? Common threads that emerged from his interviews suggested that Irish entrepreneurs viewed themselves 'expert, practical, ready to learn'; 'ready to take charge'; 'confident, but with both feet on the ground'; 'creators of personal opportunity, but ruthless'; 'working to universal norms' such as 'profit'; 'service to the national and local community'; 'world standards'; 'straight dealing'; and 'hard work but human living'. Fogarty's review of the international evidence suggested to him that Irish entrepreneurs were not that different from entrepreneurs in other countries.

What about Irish people's attitudes to entrepreneurs? Did the Ireland of the 1960s and 1970s support entrepreneurs? Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) observed that 'the Irish are a fair people; – they never speak well of one another' (Boswell, 1811). Fogarty expected to hear stories of begrudgery reflecting a common assumption that the Irish resent the success of self-made entrepreneurs. He was surprised that these men did not report begrudgery or any 'jealousy of the local man who had made good in new industrial enterprise', suggesting that 'local discouragement was likely to take the form of scepticism, not opposition' (p. 96). More recent evidence from the

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor confirms that consistently a significant majority (four of every five) of Irish adults report that believe that successful entrepreneurs have a high status (Fitzsimons and O’Gorman, 2012).

However, Fogarty’s entrepreneurs were critical of aspects of Irish attitudes to work. According to them there was a lack of ‘virtues of honesty, integrity, and hard and purposeful works’ (p. 97) and insufficient awareness of ‘actual standards of workmanship, management, and business leadership in the world outside’ (p. 108). They also identified problems in Ireland’s education system, with insufficient ‘education for practical life’.

Another piece of research that pre-dates the launch of the *Irish Journal of Management (IBAR)* was Rothery’s (1977) study of 38 entrepreneurs (from 25 firms) and their contribution to employment. Rothery studied a broad spectrum of entrepreneurship questions: who starts, why they start, how they start and the impact of the start-ups on employment and growth. Reflecting the fact that many questions that concern entrepreneurship researchers have remained constant overtime, his study addressed two issues that are important themes in current research. Rothery focused on the process by which the businesses were created, noting that many ventures ‘started in a shed’. The processes he observed were characterised by what we would now describe as ‘improvisation’ processes (Baker et al., 2003). He also identified the ‘opportunity sources’ for each business, reflecting what we would now describe in terms of ‘prior knowledge’ and arguments about how entrepreneurs are partially produced by organisations (Shane, 2000; Audia and Rider, 2005). A second theme he identified in his data was the ‘frustrated employee’ as a driver or trigger to entrepreneurship, what Klepper, the winner of the 2011 Global Award for Entrepreneurship Research, described as ‘strategic disagreements’ (Klepper, 2007).

Rothery used his data to explore two important policy issues. First, he highlighted how many of the businesses he studied were dependent on ‘home’ market conditions, in particular the ‘domestic construction’ market. Second, he contrasted the entrepreneurs he studied, with a second group, though one that he argued were not as successful, the ‘educated’ entrepreneur.

About a decade later, O’Farrell (1986) produced a more comprehensive survey of Irish new indigenous manufacturing firms. This study explored changes in manufacturing employment, analysed manufacturing closures in Ireland for the period 1973 to 1981 and, of interest here, surveyed new firms. He defined his population as all ‘indigenous single plant firms which commenced production after January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1977 and before January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1981 – i.e. those operating over a four year period 1977–1980 (inclusive) and surviving until 1983’ (p. 172). He then stratified his sample in terms of three variables, size in 1981, town-size location and whether the firm received grant aid. He identified a population of 844 firms. He supplemented his survey data from more than 300 entrepreneurs with 33 in-depth interviews.

O’Farrell’s data provides interesting insights into who started the firms, their family and educational backgrounds and their motivations. Some of his observations that might be of interest in terms of current debates about the development of Irish industry are as follows. He noted that 42% of the entrepreneurs had (1) worked in full-time employment outside of Ireland; (2) had a relatively high level of educational attainment (relative to the population), with 22% having a university degree; and (3) had achieved significant upward mobility in their previous jobs, over half had a ‘managerial role’ prior to start-up, though he also identified a group whose career progress may have peaked at ‘skilled manual’ work, suggesting that the decision to start may be means of achieving career progress.

O’Farrell also explored aspects of the start-up process. He noted that about a quarter of his firms were started on a part-time basis; and about half of all entrepreneurs remained within the same industry group, though he noted how entrepreneurs with a background in service sectors moved into new industry sectors (though he only studied manufacturing firms). He identified the major financial sources used by these entrepreneurs. Personal savings was only the major source of finance for 28% of the firms (though two-thirds of all firms counted it as one of the top three sources of funds), whilst a bank loan was the major source of finance for more than one-third of firms. A very high percentage of the firms, 57%, reported that a grant was one of their three top sources of funds. These entrepreneurs identified ‘obtaining working capital’ and a ‘shortage of medium/long-term finance’ as the major problems in starting an enterprise.

O’Farrell also provided evidence of the impact of foreign firms on entrepreneurial activity. He argued that firm size and sector matter more than ownership per se in determining rates of spin-off, noting that ‘the size distribution and industry mix of the national economy, and as a corollary, regional and sub-regional economies will greatly influence the number and type of new firms being established’ (p. 202).

Other early work on the Irish entrepreneur focussed on the ‘stories’ of the Irish entrepreneur. These include Kenny’s ‘Out on Their Own: Conversations with Irish Entrepreneurs’ (1991) and O’Toole’s ‘The Pace Setters’ (1987). The publication of these ‘stories’ provides a description of aspects of the entrepreneur and the entrepreneurial process from that time.

## Early contributions from other fields

In addition to the studies discussed earlier, other groups of scholars have explored aspects of the Irish entrepreneur and entrepreneurship in Ireland. These include some scholars who have studied Irish economic development. For example, the work of O'Grada (1975, 1988, 1994) and Lee (1967, 1968, 1989) provides data on the supply of, and demand for, entrepreneurs in Ireland. There are also specific studies of individual industry sectors from a historical perspective (see contributions to the *Irish Economic and Social History* journal). This body of work provides insights into the environment for entrepreneurship. For example, some work suggests that for some periods in Ireland's economic development, the supply of capital was not a problem and, therefore, is not an explanation for low levels of industrial development.

An accusation common in entrepreneurship research is that mainstream economic analysis has largely ignored the role of the entrepreneur (Baumol, 1993). Yet, some Irish economists have studied entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. For example, Burke's edited volume 'Enterprise and the Irish Economy' (1995a) draws heavily of the work of Irish economists. Burke argued that research should not focus on a 'search for the elusive entrepreneur', the 'heffalump' referred to by Kilby (1971), but rather it should focus on 'entrepreneurship as a resource'. This shift in emphasis allows entrepreneurship to be studied in terms of a 'set of heterogeneous attributes which change in emphasis between industries and over time' (1995b, p. 8). This collection of work shows that Irish economists do study aspects of entrepreneurship. For example, in Burke's edited volume (1995), a contribution from Bielenberg and Burke provides data on the registration of manufacturing and service firms in Ireland for the period 1857–1905, showing, for example, that levels of activity vary overtime (from a low of 'no' new manufacturing registrations in 1871 to 41 new registrations in 1897).

## Lessons from the past

So what do these early studies of Irish entrepreneurs and Irish entrepreneurship illustrate about Irish entrepreneurship research? First, many of the questions and issues studied in the past are issues that currently face entrepreneurship researchers. For example, Rothery's (1977) focus on firm creation processes foreshadows much contemporary entrepreneurship research. Whilst he may not have had current theories or frameworks to explain what he observed, his approach clearly identifies aspects of the venture creation processes that now appear in leading entrepreneurship journals. Second, aspects of research design that are problematic generally in entrepreneurship research characterised past research in Ireland. In particular, the bias towards studying successful entrepreneurs and firms is evident in some early studies of entrepreneurs. However, O'Farrell's (1986) close attention to study design ensured that he avoided some of the research design problems identified by Davidsson (2004) as major problems with much contemporary entrepreneurship research. His comparative analysis of his findings, with published research from overseas, provides an early indication of the value to be gained by identifying which aspects of the Irish entrepreneurial story might differ from that observed in other contexts.

Third, the contemporary approach of using verbal stories, histories and entrepreneurial biographies and autobiographers as a source of research data (McKenzie, 2007) was implicitly adopted by some researchers with their focus on documenting and describing the (successful) entrepreneur. Fourth, an interesting characteristic of past research is the strong emphasis the authors placed on the policy implications of their research. Their focus on the broad question of understanding how industrial development happens may have resulted in a deeper engagement with the context they studied. Many of their findings and conclusions are, to some extent, still relevant to those currently studying entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship in Ireland. Fifth, this brief review of some past research highlights the breadth of approaches to, and perspectives on, the study of Irish entrepreneurship. Key contributions to the understanding of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship are to be found amongst the works of scholars from business disciplines and also from scholars from fields such as economics and history.

## The impact of Irish entrepreneurship research

Within academia, there is an increased focus on the impact of scholarly activity. This attention is focussed on the level of activity of the individual scholar, in terms of the quantity and quality of research outputs; on the student experience, with an argument that teaching in higher education institutes should be informed by research; and on the level of the institution, with a rhetoric around the economic benefits of higher education, and a focus on

‘university rankings’. The recent *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* report (the ‘Hunt Report’) sets out that ‘every student should learn in an environment that is informed by research’, that ‘research activity in Irish higher education will continue to increase’ and that higher education will be the ‘engine for new ideas through research, and many of these ideas will translate into the sustaining innovative enterprises of the future’ (Higher Education Authority, 2011). Whilst it is difficult to provide a systematic assessment of the impact of research, this should not be an excuse for not attempting to assess the impact. Murray in his address to the *Irish Academy of Management Conference* in 2004, which was published in *Irish Journal of Management* (2005), suggested that business school research has four audiences: our students, our peers, policymakers and practitioners. I use these audiences to organise my comments on the ‘impact’ of entrepreneurship research. Given the difficulties of assessing impact, the comments that follow are speculative.

## The impact of research on students

The management guru Peter Drucker (1985) has long argued that similar to other disciplines entrepreneurship can be taught. International reviews of the evolution of the domain of entrepreneurship highlight the increase in the number of students opting to study entrepreneurship. Ireland is no different in this regard (Hill et al., 2003). There has been an increase in the teaching of entrepreneurship within higher education institutes, primarily within business schools, as these tend to be the home of the academics doing the teaching. However, the reach of entrepreneurship education continues to extend across disciplines, with evidence of increased offerings of entrepreneurship modules across faculties and schools within higher education institutes.

There has also been an extension of entrepreneurship education into the secondary school curriculum, and in particular, into the optional curriculum of transition year.<sup>1</sup> The optional business studies subject within the Junior Cycle<sup>2</sup> has as an aim and objective to develop, amongst others, a positive attitude ‘towards entrepreneurs, towards profits, towards the creation of wealth and its distribution’ (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment). Senior Cycle students of business have in recent years been asked to identify from a case study ‘enterprising characteristics/skills’, to outline the ‘benefits of preparing a business plan’ and to explain the term ‘intrapreneur’.

Does Irish entrepreneurship research shape the educational experience of students? The availability of case studies and text books on Irish entrepreneurs and Irish new ventures would suggest that many academics contextualise their teaching of the entrepreneurial process with examples of Irish entrepreneurs. A search of the *European Case Clearing House* using ‘Ireland’ as geographic setting and the search terms of ‘entrepreneur’ and ‘entrepreneurship’ generated a list of 32 cases published between 1984 and 2010, though this may not have captured all entrepreneurship cases as there are more than 140 cases with ‘Ireland’ as the geographic setting (Table 1). There are also several books of cases studies of Irish entrepreneurs, for example, ‘Irish Cases in Entrepreneurship’ (edited by Cooney, 2005), ‘Ernest & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Case Series’ (edited by Henry, 2007) and ‘The Case for Irish Enterprise’ (Ó Cinnéide, 1986). The demand for, and downloads of, the Global Entrepreneurship Reports for Ireland also suggest that students are actively engaged in understanding entrepreneurship in an Irish context.

However, an examination of the curriculum of entrepreneurship modules in higher education could lead to the conclusion that the design of the teaching of entrepreneurship is not informed by current research. Whilst recognising that entrepreneurship education can have multiple objectives and, therefore, might be delivered and assessed in a wide variety of ways (see, e.g. Hytti and O’Gorman, 2004), reviews of curriculum and anecdotal evidence would suggest that the standard entrepreneurship curriculum is built around the concept of the preparation of a business plan.

Whilst the preparation of a business plan does not imply adherence to one dominant mode of entrepreneurship, it does suggest that lecturers of entrepreneurship may be deliberately, or inadvertently, presenting the entrepreneurial process in a manner that is inconsistent with the experience of many entrepreneurs. Why might teaching a business planning logic be inconsistent with the experiences of many entrepreneurs? First, a focus on the planning process might suggest that entrepreneurs can ‘search’ for opportunities and select from a range of a business ideas. Whilst Fiet would argue that serial entrepreneurs are ‘systematic’ and deliberate in their search (2002), other evidence suggests that entrepreneurial opportunity results from ‘prior knowledge’ (Shane, 2000) and that entrepreneurs, and their ideas, are ‘products’ of organisations (Audia and Rider, 2005). Second, the business plan is typically predicated on an implicit

<sup>1</sup> In secondary school, some students (typically aged 15 to 16 years) take an extra year between the Junior Certificate and Senior Certificate Cycle.

<sup>2</sup> A three year curriculum for secondary school children aged from 12 to 15, which is followed by a state examination.

assumption of what might be referred to as 'causation' processes (Sarasvathy, 2001) or what Baker et al. (2003) referred to as 'design-proceeding-execution' processes. Research evidence suggests that for many entrepreneurs, the venture creation process is characterised by 'effectuation' and improvisation processes (Sarasvathy, 2008).

Third, by focussing on the business planning process, students might be encouraged to focus on the 'what you know' question at the expense of the 'who you know' question. As Johannisson and Monstead (1997) have demonstrated, entrepreneurship is essentially a networked process. Fourth, the business plan is often developed with an assumption that entrepreneurs will be able to attract external funds, and in particular venture capital, to the business. Evidence of how businesses are funded suggests that most are self-financed and only a very small minority of all start-ups receive venture capital (Bygrave and Quill, 2007). Finally, the planning model may under-represent the extent of part-time and home-based business start-ups.

**Table 1.** Selected ECCH published cases (1984–2010).

Case Name	Year of Publication
Surecoms Ltd: A case of high tech rapid growth	2010
John Teeling: Life of an entrepreneur	2010
Cooley Distillery plc: Start-up and growth challenges (1986-2009) <sup>3</sup>	2010
U2: Reinvention and strategic redemption	2007
'From hen-house to riches': The story of how Peter Fitzgerald built Radox Laboratories	2006
C&C's 'Bulmers' and 'Magners' brand: The Irish Alcoholic Beverage Company's brand repositioning strategies	2005
Abrakebabra: Growing pains in a fast food restaurant chain	2004
Abrakebabra: Surviving the franchisee revolt	2004
Proactive Design and Marketing Ltd: Proactively gaining customers against the odds	2004
Aspen Grove	2003
Brown Bag Films: From an accidental beginning to an Oscar nomination	2003
Israel – Ireland – Finland: Why does Israel lag? Countries as businesses	2002
'Irish Breeze'	1999
Blarney Woollen Mills	1999
The Celtic Tiger takes to the world stage	1999
Vincent Craft Fragrances	1999
'Riverdance goes global'	1997
Blooming Clothing	1997
Monaghan Mushrooms	1995
Riverdance	1995
Ballygowan Spring Water	1993
Bargin Books	1993
BBV: Ballyneet Business Ventures	1993
Bunratty Banquet	1993
Noel C Duggan: The best is yet to come?	1993
Melrose Restaurants Ltd	1986
The Irish House: 'It's a long way to Tipperary'	1984
Nicobrand (A) and (B)	1984

## The impact of research on peers

Can Irish research influence the international research community? Before assessing the impact of Irish researchers, I outline two reasons why I believe researchers in Ireland should be contributing to international debates on entrepreneurship. These are (1) the opportunities that Ireland provides for research and (2) the increase in the number of publication outlets for entrepreneurship research.

Irish researchers can contribute to international debates on entrepreneurship by identifying the aspects of the Irish context that provide important insights into the nature of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial processes. Some aspects of the Irish context that may offer Irish scholars a comparative advantage are the following. First, Ireland's

<sup>3</sup> This case is available as a series of shorter cases: *Cooley Distillery plc: Start-up, turmoil, and survival (1986-2000)*; *Cooley Distillery plc: Growth strategy (2000-2004)*; and *Cooley Distillery plc: World distiller of the year (2008)*.

large and persistent inflow of foreign direct investment creates opportunities for the study of if and how international subsidiaries shape local entrepreneurial opportunities; and if and how ‘high-tech’ foreign direct investment influenced the emergence of ‘high technology’ entrepreneurship in Ireland. Second, the relative lateness of Ireland’s industrial development and the small size of the Irish market might provide opportunities for studying the evolution of the institutional environment for entrepreneurship and the evolution of the relative ‘rewards’ to entrepreneurs.

Third, in the policy and programme domain, Ireland developed a relatively focussed ‘entrepreneurship’ support system, and one that differs from that observed in other countries, for example, the United Kingdom (Storey, 1994; Lundström and Stevenson, 2005). Fourth, the highly open nature of the Irish economy and the small size of the Irish domestic market provide the opportunity for studying international new ventures. Fifth, the recent economic crisis creates an opportunity to study the determinants of entrepreneurial activity in the context of a period characterised by both rapid growth and decline. Sixth, the focussed investment in developing new knowledge within universities allows researchers to study commercialisation processes and the emergence of new knowledge-based businesses and new technology sectors.

Coupled with this inherently interesting context for the study of entrepreneurship, there are now many more opportunities for contributing to the international research community. Over the past few decades, the number of outlets for academic research in entrepreneurship, including conferences and peer-reviewed journals, has increased dramatically. Schendel and Hitt (2007) recently estimated that there are more than 40 journals that currently publish work about entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. There are now many ‘communities’ of scholars who define themselves in terms of specialised or niche areas of study, creating opportunities for many Irish researchers to both contribute to and shape the academic debates within these niches.

So given this interesting context and the increased number of avenues for publication, how have Irish researchers fared? Assessing the impact of research on peers has tended to focus narrowly on the quantity of peer-reviewed publications, the quality of the journals published in (measured in terms of impact factors), and in some cases, on the citation levels of specific articles. To assess the activity and impact of Irish researchers, I identified those researchers who have self-selected themselves into the domain of entrepreneurship through the classification of their published work. Specifically, I used the *Business Source Complete* database and searched for peer-reviewed publications for the period 1984–2010 (26 years) that use the word ‘entrepreneur’ or ‘entrepreneurship’ to define the ‘Subject’ category and where the ‘Academic Affiliation’ of one author was classified as ‘Ireland’ (which includes both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland).

This search yielded a little more than 40 articles in the domain of entrepreneurship, published in more than 20 journals that include an author who at the time of publication was affiliated to an Irish institution (Table 2). The following points are of note:

- There are many researchers in Ireland (both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland) who have, at various stages of their career, engaged in work in the domain of entrepreneurship.
- This list includes articles across a broad range of topics, including, for example, corporate entrepreneurship, family business, entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurship in universities, aspects of female entrepreneurship, networking, entrepreneurial motivations and many aspects of the financing of new firms.
- There has been a recent increase in the number of journal publications. For example, half of the articles were published during the four-year period 2007–2010 and three quarters were published in the period 2000–2010.
- Classifying the articles in terms of the *Association of Business Schools* (ABS) journal rankings shows that 2% were in Grade 4 (highest impact journals), 37% in Grade 3, 10% in Grade 2, 39% in Grade 1 and 12% in journals not ranked by ABS.
- The percentage of publications in higher impact journals (ABS Grade 3 and Grade 4) is not significantly higher in the more recent period of publications. For the more recent four-year period (2007–2010), 45% of publications are in higher impact journals (Grade 4 and Grade 3); for the period 2000–2010, 35% of publications are in higher impact journals; whilst for all years (1987–2010), 38% are in higher impact journals.

Focussing more narrowly on those articles that appeared in journals included in the ABS subject area of *Entrepreneurship & Innovation* results in a list of 18 articles over this period (Table 3). The following points are of note:

- Twenty-two separate Irish researchers contributed to these papers.
- The contexts studied include informal investors; internationalisation of new firms and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), as well as international new ventures (INVs), the entrepreneurial team, the networks of entrepreneurs, the determinants of entrepreneurial activity, the influence of gender on various aspects of entrepreneurship,

entrepreneurial education and training, information and communications technology (ICT) and e-commerce in new and small firms, intrapreneurship and public sector entrepreneurship.

- The distribution of these articles in terms of ABS rankings is as follows: 1 in a Grade 4 journal (Entrepreneurship: Theory & Practice); 10 in Grade 3 journals (of which 5 are in International Small Business Journal); 2 in Grade 2 journals (both in Venture Capital: An International Journal of Entrepreneurial Finance); and 5 in Grade 1 journals (of which 4 are in Journal of International Entrepreneurship).

**Table 2.** Selected publications classified by ABS journal ranking classification.

Ranking*	Journals	Number of articles (%)
Grade Four	Entrepreneurship: Theory & Practice	1 (2%)
Grade Three	Entrepreneurship & Regional Development; International Small Business Journal; Journal of Marketing Management; Journal of Small Business Management; Long Range Planning; Organizational Research Methods; R&D Management; Small Business Economics	16 (38%)
Grade Two	Business Strategy & the Environment; Review of Industrial Organization; Venture Capital	4 (10%)
Grade One	Irish Journal of Management; Journal of Enterprising Culture; Journal of European Industrial Training; Journal of International Entrepreneurship; Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal.	16 (38%)
Not included in ABS rankings	European Law Journal; Journal of Corporate Citizenship; Journal of Occupational Behavior; Journal of Strategic Change; Marketing Education Review.	5 (12%)

\* Journal rankings are from a high of 4 to a low of 1. Rankings based on Version 4 of The Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Quality Guide.

The impact of Irish researchers is not limited to publications in ‘ranked’ peer-reviewed journals. There are a large number of books and reports that focus on Irish entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. For example, the *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor* reports for Ireland have provided access to internationally comparable data on the extent and nature of entrepreneurial activity in Ireland (see Fitzsimons and O’Gorman, 2012); Mulcahy’s report on *Angels and IPOs: Policies for Sustainable Equity Financing of Irish Small Businesses* assessed the availability of early-stage venture capital for Irish firms (2005); and reports from within state bodies that are sometime made available on a confidential basis provide further insights into aspects of Irish entrepreneurship.

Despite the promising context that Ireland offers and the increased opportunities to publish research, it could be argued that researchers in Ireland have made only a modest impact on the international community of entrepreneurship scholars, certainly if such impact is measured in terms of peer-reviewed publication.

### The impact of research on practice (entrepreneurs)

The practice of entrepreneurship is often presented as divorced from the teaching and research of entrepreneurship. Nascent entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs and owner-managers don’t typically look to their local higher education institute for advice and guidance during the start-up phase. There are a number of reasons why this might be the case. First, there is indeed evidence that much entrepreneurial activity occurs in the absence of any formal entrepreneurship training or education. The 2008 GEM report for Ireland specifically addressed this issue, reporting that just 37% of early-stage entrepreneurs and 38% of established owner-managers had any education or training related to starting a business (Fitzsimons and O’Gorman, 2009). A second reason for the lack of engagement might be due to the ‘myths’ that persist about the entrepreneurial process. The popular understanding of the entrepreneurial process is the lone entrepreneur, struggling against the odds, often in his ‘garage’. This representation of the process is often associated with a ‘rags to riches’ or ‘poor boy makes good’ element to the story. The aspiring or nascent entrepreneur is encouraged to ‘go for it’ or ‘feel the fear and do it anyway’. Not advice that is likely to send the aspiring or nascent entrepreneur in the direction of a higher education institute!

Research published in this journal suggests that this myth is evident in stories of leading Irish entrepreneurs (Whelan and O’Gorman, 2007). Whilst elements of this representation of the process are true for some entrepreneurs, the evidence about entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial process, more generally, suggests that these stories misrepresent the experience of many entrepreneurs. For example, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor for Ireland has consistently shown that the rate of entrepreneurial activity is high for those with high levels of educational attainment, that entrepreneurial activity is lower amongst those from lower income households and that the average number of owners in new businesses is greater than one (i.e. there is a significant amount of team

entrepreneurship). Other research has challenged the ‘garage’ myth by highlighting how entrepreneurs frequently make use of knowledge and resources from their prior work experiences. The idea that entrepreneurship is a lone pursuit is also challenged by research that has studied the networks of entrepreneurs (Johannisson and Monstead, 1997).

**Table 3.** Publications in the ABS Entrepreneurship and Innovation journal list

Journal	Number of articles
<i>Grade Four*</i>	
Journal of Business Venturing	-
Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice	1
<i>Grade Three</i>	
International Small Business Journal	5
Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	1
Small Business Economics	2
Journal of Small Business Management	2
Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal	-
<i>Grade Two</i>	
Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development	-
International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research	-
Venture Capital: An International Journal of Entrepreneurial Finance	2
International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation	-
Family Business Review	-
<i>Grade One</i>	
Journal of International Entrepreneurship	4
World Review of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development	-
Journal of Enterprising Culture	1
International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal	-
Journal of Entrepreneurship	-
Social Enterprise	-

\* Journal rankings are from a high of 4 to a low of 1. Rankings based on Version 4 of The Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Quality Guide.

A third possible reason for the lack of interaction between entrepreneurs and academics is the extensive support system that is delivered through various publically funded bodies. Advice is available from a range of sources: state bodies, such as *Local Enterprise Offices*, *Enterprise Ireland*, Education and Training boards; European-Union-funded initiatives such as *Plato*; organisations such as the *Chambers of Commerce*, the *Small Firms Association*, and *ISME* (Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association); from web-based resources; and from the large number of ‘how to’ books.

This is not to say that there are not examples of engagement between entrepreneurs and researchers in higher education institutes. In recent years, many higher education institutes have developed institutional structures for engaging with entrepreneurs and enterprise. Principle amongst these has been the development of technology transfer offices and incubator space. Some higher education institutes have ‘pockets’ of deep engagement with owner-managers, with, for example, students working directly with owner-managers as part of their studies. These interactions are all ways in which higher education institutes influence practice. Frequently, individual academics engaged in the teaching of entrepreneurship will be directly engaged with entrepreneurs, though this activity is typically not reflected in the measured activity or outputs of higher education institutes.

## The Impact of research on policy

An important focus of research in the domain of entrepreneurship is how research findings might shape policy. State-funded reviews have been critical of various aspects of Ireland's industrial policy. The 1982 'Telesis' Report was critical of Ireland's focus on FDI and argued that 'no country had succeeded in achieving sustained economic growth except on the basis of native industry' (NESC, 1982). The 'Culliton' Report re-stated this concern in 1992, highlighting the weakness of Irish indigenous industry, when compared to foreign-owned industry (Industrial Policy Review Group, 1992). The O'Driscoll Report in 2004 noted that 'over the period 1990–2002, exports by agency-assisted indigenous enterprise grew in nominal terms at 5.5% per annum (versus 15.9% for foreign-owned companies); when inflation is taken into account, the real growth in both sales and exports was negligible' (Enterprise Strategy Group, 2004, p. 8). O'Driscoll argued that 'Ireland's economic success over the past decade was driven largely by the performance of the internationally-traded goods and services sectors, and in particular by the growth of foreign direct investment' (p. 4). Extant research on Irish entrepreneurship, particularly amongst those that have focussed on industrial development, suggests that Ireland has been characterised by insufficient levels of what Baumol refers to as 'productive' entrepreneurship (1990); and that from an industrial development perspective, there has been an over emphasis or over-reliance on foreign-owned businesses, at the expense of the development of indigenous industry.

The often implicit assumption that the relative poor performance of Irish industry indicates the absence of policy to promote industry would be a misrepresentation of the story of Irish industrialisation. Indeed, the evidence is that since the foundation of the state 'government policy has taken an active role in encouraging enterprise' (Burke, 1995b, p. 4). This has manifested itself in many ways, such as direct engagement in industry through the creation of semi-state businesses, the policies of creating barriers to trade (the protectionist tariffs) and the opening of the Irish economy to free trade, the development of sector development strategies, state-funded investment banks and direct and indirect supports for indigenous new firms through state development agencies such as *Enterprise Ireland* and *Local Enterprise Offices*.

Notwithstanding these efforts to develop Irish industry, the conclusion of many commentaries on Ireland's industrialisation, and of the positive aspects of the 'Celtic Tiger' growth story, is that the success of Irish policy was the result of four decades of pursuing an export-led industrial policy that relied significantly on attracting export-oriented inward foreign direct investment. Few commentaries identify indigenous entrepreneurship as a cause of industrial development or the 'Celtic Tiger'.

Irish research on entrepreneurship offers policymakers differing explanations for Ireland's relative poor industrial development. Some argue that there is a problem with the supply of entrepreneurs. Fogarty explored the question 'Does the problem of increasing the supply of successful native Irish industrialists present itself in a different guise from the corresponding problem in other countries?' (1973, p. 22). He argued that the perspective of these entrepreneurs as to the difficulties in Ireland is

that too many people still fail to acquire in their families, in the schools and colleges, in the Church or in work itself the qualities needed for initiative and enterprise, whether on their own account or as employees within an organisation; the achievement motivation, the practical abilities, the awareness of world standards and of the possibilities of enterprise, even the basic moral qualities of hard work and responsibility.

Similar arguments can be found elsewhere. For example, Lee argued that 'native businessmen of the necessary quality simply were not, for whatever reason, available', suggesting that a 'native entrepreneurial cadre of the requisite quality had failed to emerge' (1989, p. 536). Keating and Desmond argued that the Irish are poor entrepreneurs not because of objective factors such as 'absence of means and opportunities' but because of subjective, cultural factors (1993, p. 190).

However, there is a broad counter argument that suggests that the issue is not a problem with the supply of entrepreneurs but a misalignment of incentives, such that entrepreneurial activity has been directed into unproductive, and what recently might be considered, destructive rent-seeking behaviours. For example, O'Connell (1992) argued both that 'there is every evidence that Irish people are highly responsive to financial incentives' and that 'the incentive structure itself, however, it is now widely accepted, has been heavily biased against productive economic activity'. Kingston (1995) and Barrett (1995) made a similar argument, suggesting that profit opportunities in Ireland were skewed in favour of rent-seeking behaviour. This theme found support in the 'Culliton Report' when it suggested that 'the competitive edge of Irish industry has been distracted from serving the market and achieving high productivity, into maximising the grant or tax benefit' (Industrial Policy Review Group, 1992, p. 22).

Does academic research on entrepreneurship inform Irish industrial policymakers? The policymaker may not seek answers from academics for a number of reasons. Academic research may appear removed from contemporary policy challenges, it may appear to be over interested in analysing past policy interventions, or it may be focussed on aspects of entrepreneurial activity that are not of direct interest to the policy maker. The policymaker may seek evidence of how to create new firms that have a large economic impact, yet the academic cannot predict ‘when and where in social or economic space, new organisations will arise in large numbers’ (Romanelli and Schoonhoven, 2001, p. 40). To the policymaker interested in economic outcomes, much academic research ‘fails’ to distinguish the ‘chaff’ entrepreneur from the ‘seed-corn’ entrepreneur (Foreman-Peck, 1985) and there is ambiguity about which aspects of context explain variation in entrepreneurial activity generally, and ‘productive’ entrepreneurship in particular (Storey, 2000).

However, despite the differences in focus and timescale, there is a compelling case that Irish policymakers and agencies have engaged with academics in the process of developing aspects of policy. For example, the National Economic & Social Council engaged in a series of research projects in the 1990s on indigenous development. These included *Networking for Competitive Advantage- Enterprise Support Policies in Dynamic European Regions* (National Economic & Social Council, 1996), a series of cluster studies (National Economic & Social Council, 1997) and a series of industrial development policy reviews. Forfás, through the National Competitiveness Council, reports on aspects of entrepreneurship, and they have supported other studies of entrepreneurship, including co-sponsoring with Enterprise Ireland the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor study in Ireland. Various development agencies such as Enterprise Ireland have engaged academics and consultants to review and advise on aspects of policy and programmes.

However, it could be argued that the direct funding support for entrepreneurship research is quite low, certainly compared to what is available through the state system in, for example, the United Kingdom, Germany and the Benelux and Scandinavian countries; that there has been no systematic drive by academics and policymakers to identify a programme of research in the domain of entrepreneurship and that the focus of many policy makers is on explanations that prefer ‘macroeconomic analysis to managerial- and firm-level analysis’ and who ‘are trapped into an ‘environment determines all’ model of casualty’, to the exclusion of the entrepreneur and the new firm (Murray, 2005, p. 9). For these reasons, opportunities for academic research to inform policy may be more limited than might benefit both academics and policymakers.

## An agenda for researchers

What determines the research agenda of Irish entrepreneurship researchers? How are research questions determined? The future research agenda for entrepreneurship researchers will most likely be determined by (1) the national industrial development imperative, (2) the aspects of the Irish context that offer Irish researchers a comparative advantage, (3) the changing nature of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship policy and (4) the emerging frameworks and theories. Irrespective of the source of the research opportunity, the key questions shaping a research agenda in entrepreneurship remain largely the same:

‘Where do organisations come from? What accounts for the formation of new organisational populations? Why do we observe that new organisations arise in large numbers only occasionally and in a few particular times and places?’ (Romanelli and Schoonhoven, 2001, p. 40).

The national imperative for the development of indigenous enterprise presents a broad research agenda for those interested in entrepreneurship in Ireland. This could be summarised in terms of Baumol’s call for an understanding of ‘what determines the supply of productive entrepreneurship?’ (1993, p. 16) or, phrased differently, what factors influence a country’s ‘entrepreneurial capital’, defined as the ‘regional milieu of agents that is conducive to the creation of new firms’ (Audretsch and Keilbach, 2004, p. 420). The Irish policy agenda also challenges researchers to explain both the growth and the internationalisation of new and existing firms.

A second factor that could shape the entrepreneurship research agenda is the aspects of the Irish entrepreneurship story that are of interest to an international audience. There may be some research questions that are easier to study in an Irish context. Some of these were outlined above. These areas may provide researchers with opportunities to contribute to, and shape, the international research community.

Reflecting the dynamic nature of entrepreneurship, new topics and contexts emerge. The changing nature of markets, organisations and careers, mean that there is an on-going dynamic in the 'how, by whom, and with what effects' of entrepreneurship. For example, will developments such as crowd funding, the migration of e-commerce into social media, mass individualisation (the production of one-of-a-kind products by way of user-driven design and manufacturing), next generation communications technologies, the growth in the 'cloud', the aging population, increasing wealthy consumers in emerging economies and the greening of businesses and consumption redefine the business landscape in favour of the entrepreneur or shape how entrepreneurship happens? How will changes in organisations shape the career structures and organisational origins of entrepreneurs? As large organisations adopt 'leaner' and more flexible structures and processes will they play a more important role in bringing new ideas to markets? Is entrepreneurship an effective model for solving social problems in the developing and developed world?

The final factor that might shape an emerging research agenda is the application of new models, theories and approaches to the study of entrepreneurship. Concepts such as effectuation and causation (Sarasvathy, 2008) and improvisation (Baker and Nelson, 2005) allow researchers to describe and explain aspects of the entrepreneurial process. Methods such as the use of narratives, verbal histories and action research, create alternative ways for studying entrepreneurship. Data sets of entrepreneurs such as the Panel Study of Entrepreneurs (PSED) and the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) provide researchers with opportunities to study earlier phases of entrepreneurship and to study the nature and extent of entrepreneurship across national contexts. These developments from within the academic community will undoubtedly influence the research agenda pursued by Irish researchers. Yet researchers must question new directions and new fashions and fads. The strength of the academic community is that through peer evaluation of research, it can provide a form of quality assurance. However, academics may need to keep a 'foot in both camps', both the academic community and the practice of entrepreneurship (the entrepreneur, the manager or the policymaker) to guard against what Shapiro (2005) labelled the 'flight from reality in the human sciences'.

The agenda is also shaped by the opportunities for, and rewards from, research. In general, the Irish academic is similar to the lone entrepreneur. Much research activity is carried out by the lone, resource-constrained, researcher. Typically, the financial budget is small, and the resource constraint, as perceived by the researcher, is time. Research 'competes' with teaching, management and increasingly the 'service or engagement' imperative of higher education. The rewards from research come through promotions, which depend on peer-reviewed publications. Whilst there is some truth in aspects of this description the evidence presented earlier is that the published output was co-authored in over three out of every four articles. A research model based on the individual researcher limits the scope of research, in terms of the extensiveness of data that can be collected and the time frames over which data can be collected.

Will large-scale, funded, collaborative, long-term research projects emerge in the domain of entrepreneurship? Efforts to shape the teaching and research agenda have begun through, for example, the founding of the *Irish Network of Teachers and Researchers in Entrepreneurship* (INTRE), and some Irish researchers have experienced the advantages (and disadvantages) of collaborative research through international projects. In terms of funding for such research projects, Murray argued that the problem is a lack of demand, suggesting that 'our own ambition has been too meagre, our vision too limited, our conversation with our audiences too impoverished and our commitment to building networks and alliances too faint' (2005, p. 20). Even if large-scale collaborative project emerge, it is unlikely they will be available to all, and they will therefore need to co-exist with the existing model of the 'lone' researcher.

A final factor that may shape the agenda of entrepreneurship researchers in Ireland is the increased attention to entrepreneurship education in higher education institutions (HEIs). Many HEIs are considering if, and how, they can deliver a research informed entrepreneurship education experience to undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral students and if, and how, they can support postdoctoral researchers and research active staff in identifying and realising the commercial potential of their research activities. This increased interest will create both opportunities and pressures for researchers in entrepreneurship.

## Conclusion

The brief for this paper was to reflect on the current state of entrepreneurship research in Ireland and to outline key aspects of a research agenda. I have argued that in Ireland, there is a significant body of research that contributes

to an understanding of entrepreneurship, that a diverse range of disciplines contribute to our understanding of entrepreneurship, that Irish research informs the teaching of entrepreneurship, that there is a strong policy imperative for entrepreneurship research and that there is evidence that there is ‘demand’ from policymakers for such research. Against this, I have argued that the collective output of this research work in Ireland has not contributed, to the extent that it could, to the international academic community; to shaping the teaching of entrepreneurship; to the practice of entrepreneurship; or to Irish entrepreneurship and industrial policy. Our report card might read: ‘much achieved, but could do better in some regards!’

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