

**College:** Dundalk Institute of Technology  
**Location:** Dundalk, IRELAND  
**Practice:** The Coca-Cola Enterprise Awards Program  
 Training entrepreneurs from both the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland

*Year Started* 1995

*Budget* IE £150,000 per bi-annual program

*Program Participants* Approximately 30 per cycle

*College FTE* 2,500

*Target Sector* N/A

*Staff Size* 1 FT manager, 1 PT administrator, approximately 16 PT mentors and trainers

*Structure* Operated through Regional Development Center at Dundalk Institute of Technology

*Key Outcomes* 100 participants have started 20 firms that employ 35 individuals

## Introduction

In stark contrast to the condition of its economy 10 years ago, Ireland is now known as the Celtic Tiger, with significant economic growth and increasing prosperity. The turnaround stems from two sources: the growth of small business, primarily in the Information Technology sector, and the government's aggressive pursuit of foreign direct investment. And while most of the effort and benefit have been in the Irish Republic, Northern Ireland has also made considerable strides. Furthermore, potential for growth exists in areas that have not yet joined in the prosperity.

The Dundalk Institute of Technology, working in cooperation with government agencies and Coca-Cola Atlantic, has established a program to

encourage and support small business development. The Coca-Cola National Enterprise Awards Program helps guide participants from business idea to start-up. The program has seen success in interest, participation, and job and business creation.

## Community Background

The counties in the Dundalk Institute of Technology's service area are Louth, Cavan, and Monaghan. They run from the northeast coast of the Irish Sea west along the border with Northern Ireland. The counties are home to little fishing villages, undulating farmland, and market towns. Dundalk, the capital of County Louth, is one of the

Program focus	Sector specific	Economic condition	Economic base			Target populations
			Mfg	Agr	Svc	
Entrepreneurship	No	Growing	N/A	N/A	N/A	Entrepreneurial candidates

Service Area	Counties Louth, Cavan, and Monaghan
Total Population	196,000
Median Household Income	N/A
% Below Poverty Level	N/A
% Unemployment Rate	N/A
% Minority Population	N/A
% Rural Population	N/A
% High School Graduates	N/A
% College Graduates	N/A

larger towns in Ireland and has some 30,000 inhabitants. Drogheda is an industrial town in the southern part of the county. Cavan, capital of County Cavan, is known for Cavan Crystal, a mouth-blown leaded crystal. Several towns in Monaghan are known for their traditional lace making.

County Louth is experiencing growth in the engineering and information technology sectors. For example, the county's new Xerox Technology Park will make Ireland Xerox's manufacturing base for Europe. Louth is also home to food and drink production companies such as Heinz Custom Foods, Coca-Cola, and Boyne Valley Foods.

## Program Description

Begun in 1995 in the midst of a recession, the Coca-Cola Enterprise Awards Program encourages and helps participants convert ideas for businesses into actual enterprises. Impetus for the program came from the high rate of unemployment faced by graduates of the Dundalk Institute of Technology (Dundalk IT) and the consequently low opportunity cost of starting a new venture.

The program is the first of its kind open to participants from both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic—a significant step toward an effective and stable economic alliance between the two.

Organized by the Regional Development Center at Dundalk IT, the program is a joint initiative of the college and Coca-Cola Atlantic (CCA), the company's concentrate manufacturing plant in Drogheda. Dundalk IT provides the curriculum and teaching expertise; the government, through the

state agency Enterprise Ireland, provides access to business mentors and resources; and CCA provides financial support (IE £150,000 for each bi-annual program) through its foundation in Atlanta, Georgia. The program also offers prize money from Coca-Cola (IE £18,000) for which participants compete by submitting their business plans.

To enter the program, applicants must have a post-secondary qualification, be it degree, diploma, or other certification. In addition, applicants must present a feasible business idea. Once accepted, participants take part in weekend training, held mostly in Dublin but supplemented by training at regional facilities and meeting with mentors. Training takes place over six days, spread over a six-month period. The program includes lectures, tutorials, and practical experiences, with a mandatory two-day residential stay at the beginning. Each participant receives a manual written specifically for the course. Participants who successfully complete the program earn National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Business Planning.

## Outcomes

Since its inception, the program has enrolled nearly 100 participants and resulted in 20 business start-ups that together employ more than 35 people. Fifteen more participants are still working on their business plans and in 2000 were planning to start businesses in the near future. To date, more than 35 participants have earned their NVQ certification.

The benefits to participants have been significant. As one participant stated:

*The program successfully targets the lack of practical support for graduates with an innovative idea...an intensive but practical step-by-step course covering every aspect of bringing an idea to the market—from patents, copyright, and legal requirements of running a business to marketing, employment issues, and finances.*

Another said:

*The program allowed me to kick start my business with a minimum of mistakes. It provided a platform for me to network with other entrepreneurs in a similar situation...and to 'pick the brains' of the various expert speakers who gave lectures.*

*The program provided me with some excellent publicity in various media. My company now employs two people and has a very promising future. Achieving the present level of success my company enjoys would have been very difficult without the education, motivation, publicity, and prize money provided by the Coca-Cola National Enterprise Award.*

The school and community have benefited as well; the school has developed a better understanding of new business creation, and the community has gained a larger and better skilled pool of entrepreneurs.

In 2000 the program was in its second wave of funding, with Coca-Cola committed to funding the program through 2002. The easy renewal of funding is itself a testament to the program's success.

## **Strengths, Challenges, and Replicability**

One of the primary strengths of the program is that participants have access to expert trainers, professional mentors, and fellow participants during and after the program.

Implementing such a program demands cooperation and collaboration between state, industry, and academia. It also requires a focus on the needs of business development. Together, the two can result in a program tailored to the needs of entrepreneurs and even create a culture of entrepreneurship in areas where there was none before.

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