



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Lawton Smith, Helen (2021) Addressing regional inequalities in innovation opportunities for BAME and disabled groups: the university sector. Technical Report. Centre for Innovation Management Research, London, UK.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/47650/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>
contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

or alternatively



Addressing regional inequalities in innovation opportunities for BAME and disabled groups: The university sector

Helen Lawton Smith, Birkbeck, University of London

h.lawton-smith@bbk.ac.uk

July 2021

1. Introduction

Universities are increasingly recognised as being major contributors to society beyond the traditional roles of teaching and research. This wider role includes working with organisations, such as specialist networks, that support minority entrepreneurs, such as disabled and Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) entrepreneurs. Some universities also directly support students with those characteristics in becoming entrepreneurs. This report presents data on these activities.

2. The study method

As part of the study, *Addressing regional inequalities in innovation opportunities for BAME and disabled groups (2020-2021)*, data on expertise directed at supporting one or both of BAME or Disabled entrepreneurs have been collected from four sources. The first is a question on the interview questionnaire for the networks in the project; the second is a website search; the third is a request for information through the Enterprise Educators monthly email bulletin on Thursday 18th March and the last is suggestions of which universities to look at from project interviewees.

The universities

Table 1 collates the data from all four sources. It shows the university, its location, the activity and comments from respondents from the networks.

University	Location	Activity	Connection
<i>East Midlands</i>			
Nottingham	EM	Disability entrepreneurship support and research, Dr Tom Coogan Dr Tom Coogan - Nottingham University Business School	Innovate UK project
Leicester	EM	Africa Research Group University of Leicester	Network
Northampton	EM	University awarded grant to fund enterprise programme for BAME students University of Northampton (2018)	Web search
<i>West Midlands</i>			
Birmingham	WM	The Enterprise and Diversity Research Cluster seeks to engage with academics, policy makers and practitioners to address social science questions about enterprise and diversity Diversity Research. Enterprise and Diversity Research Cluster (EDRC) - University of Birmingham	Network
Birmingham City	WM	Centre for Enterprise, Innovation and Growth - Birmingham City Business School Birmingham City University (bcu.ac.uk)	Network
Aston, CRÈME Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME) Aston University	WM	Research centre and active support for BAME entrepreneurs Eva Kasperova undertakes research on disabled entrepreneurs Eva Kašperová — Aston Research Explorer	2 BAME Networks
<i>Yorkshire and Humberside</i>			
Leeds Beckett	Yorks & Humberside	Research and Enterprise Service Simon Baldwin Leeds Beckett University (99+) Canon Simon Baldwin, FEEUK LinkedIn	Network
University of Bradford Business & Community - School of Management - University of Bradford	Yorks and Humberside	David Spicer, Director of Business Engagement in the Faculty of Management Law and Social Sciences and is leading on the development of the School of Management's programme and portfolio in respect of small business and entrepreneurship Dr David Spicer, Senior Lecturer in HRM at the University of Bradford	Network
<i>South East</i>			

Oxford Said Business School	SE	Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses UK Saïd Business School (ox.ac.uk)	Network
Oxford University Said Business School	SE	New Oxford initiative to ensure inclusion in entrepreneurship University of Oxford provides dedicated pathways for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic students to enter entrepreneurship and senior leadership positions, supported by world-leading Ambassadors, and mentors from different sectors.	Web search
<i>South West</i>			
Plymouth	SW	DBI is a business incubator based at Plymouth University Champions Networking - University of Plymouth	Network
<i>North East</i>			
Northumbria	NE	In the Business Clinic our final year UG (level 6, 40 credit point module) and Masters Students (level 7, 60 credit point module) work on live client projects and complete a consultancy report on a pro-bono basis. Many of the client projects are addressing inclusion and diversity issues for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autistic Entrepreneurs – to encourage / support people with autism to establish and run their own business. • Linked to our work with supporting autistic entrepreneurs, we also promote and support a University / Santander initiative of providing internships for our students with autism. • We also undertake consultancy projects for charities, schools and social enterprises addressing a range of disabilities. 	Enterprise Educators respondent
<i>Wales</i>			
Swansea	Wales	Student enterprise team Student Enterprise - Swansea University	Network

<i>London</i>			
King's College London	London	<p><i>King's College London Enterprise Institute</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entrepreneurship Institute King's Entrepreneurship Institute King's College London (kcl.ac.uk) 	<p>Research interview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> So far this year (2020) we have closed one big activity, Idea Factory, where applicants reported themselves as 88% BAME". https://www.kings20.com/ showing the 100 ventures who have been through our accelerator and this is a digital book showcasing them https://kings-college-london.foleon.com/starting-point/100/bright-sparks/. Features include many BAME entrepreneurs.
UCL	London	<p>Global Disability Innovation Hub Home - Global Disability Innovation Hub The MSc in Disability, Design and Innovation is the flagship programme for the Global Disability Innovation Hub. Led and awarded by UCL with teaching across Loughborough University London and the UAL, London College of Fashion. https://www.lboro.ac.uk/news-events/news/2019/october/lboro-london-part-of-new-accessibility-hub/ https://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate/taught-degrees/disability-design-innovation-msc</p>	Web search
Ravensbourne University	London	<p>Ravensbourne University London's Self-Employment Entrepreneurship Diversity Scheme (SEEDS) is designed to support the natural enterprise skills of our dyslexic neurodivergent students and those from diverse backgrounds in setting up their own business or freelance career. SEEDS Ravensbourne University London</p>	Explored developing programmes for neurodiverse students – Entrepreneur interview
<i>Ireland</i>			
Dublin TU	Dublin, Ireland	Professor Tom Cooney, research expertise in disabled entrepreneurs	network

Table 1: Universities identified as having expertise in working with BAME and/or Disabled entrepreneurs.

Source: Author's survey

More details

London

In October 2019 Loughborough University London became part of a new accessible technology hub launched to drive disability-led innovation. The UK's most accessible technology hub to drive disability innovation and assistive technology was launched last week and is located within Here East. The East London Inclusive Enterprise Zone (ELIEZ) is the first fully accessible, specially designed space for entrepreneurs and businesses leaders who are disabled or are focused on servicing disabled people. ELIEZ is a collaboration between, UCL, Plexal, Here East, Global Disability Innovation Hub, Disability Rights UK, Capital Enterprise, Greater London Authority, Loughborough University, London College of Fashion, UAL, Hackney Council, Ford Mobility, Inclusion London, Barclays Eagle Labs, and the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC). It will feature an innovation lab optimised for accessibility, which will accelerate the development of needed products and services through from idea stage to global deployment. The zone will also coordinate the delivery of accessible innovation education, training and events.

Plexal is the innovation centre and co-working space that believes in the power of collaboration. It is a diverse innovation ecosystem tackling some of the biggest challenges facing society – starting with cybersecurity, mobility and inclusion. The campus is now home to everyone from University College London to Ford's Smart Mobility Innovation Office, while its physical space is enabling new mobility solutions to be trialled in a uniquely diverse and controlled environment. Plexal is the campus' innovation nerve centre founded by clients of specialist real estate investment advisory company Delancey.

[Inclusive Innovation Consultancy | Plexal](#)

3. Data analysis

3.1. Numbers and geography

In Table 1, 16 universities have been identified as having expertise in working with BAME and or disabled entrepreneurs. This is a very small proportion of the 154 recognized higher learning institutions that can award degrees in the United Kingdom. The universities ranged from top research universities such as Oxford to newer universities such as Leeds Beckett, Northumbria and Northampton, as well as an independent university. There are other universities such as Leeds (Leeds Centre for Disability Studies) which undertake research on disability issues but do not appear to have a focus on entrepreneurship.

With the exceptions of Scotland, Northern Ireland and East Anglia, all regions have at least one university working in either or both fields. The regions with the most

activity with four universities each are Yorkshire and Humberside and London when Loughborough University London is included. Another region, the West Midlands, has three. However, in this region, apart from one researcher in CRÈME (See Table 1), there is no active engagement with disabled entrepreneurs. Equally there is no network which supports disabled entrepreneurs in that region.

London, however, has the most of activity which includes research, teaching, physical infrastructure and practical support (including the ELIEZ and the King's College Enterprise Institute). The Technical University Dublin (TU Dublin) is included since one of the academics interviewed is an expert in disability research and has an interest in developing an incubator at TU Dublin for disabled entrepreneurs.

Overall, there is a reasonable match between where the networks are and links to the universities.

3.2 Type of activity

The split between universities which have established links with BAME and disabled entrepreneurs or are supporting entrepreneurship within their student populations is heavily in favour of the former: 11 to 6. The scale of activity varies by university. For both aspects, there are major centres of university activity as well as smaller scale engagement. Very few of those featured in Table 1 are specifically focused on BAME or disabled students.

While most of the networks' links are with the enterprise centres in the universities, this is not the whole story. This is because research undertaken by academics is important to some of the networks both for its content and how this can give legitimacy to their activities – for example in their advocacy activities.

Disabled entrepreneurs

With respect to disabled entrepreneurs, as mentioned above London is a major international centre for research, application of research and teaching in disability innovation and entrepreneurship. The UCL Global Disability Innovation Hub and ELIEZ are sites of major public sector investment for which there is no equivalent for BAME entrepreneurs. However, it has been reported on a number of occasions that it is very difficult to engage with the organisation.

Northumbria University Business Clinic's students (UG and PG) work with entrepreneurs on consultancy projects on a pro-bono basis. Many are concerned with inclusion and diversity issues for example autistic entrepreneurs.

Ravensbourne University in London is supporting disabled student entrepreneurs

A researcher at Nottingham University is in the process of developing disabled entrepreneurship support programme.

BAME entrepreneurs

Here there is smaller scale activity but there is more widely available support for BAME entrepreneurs. The largest centre is the Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship, CRÈME, at Aston, led by Professor Monder Ram. It is a Centre of Excellence in research, teaching on BAME entrepreneurship and offers practical support for BAME entrepreneurs. Professor Ram is well connected to policy-making communities and to networks of BAME entrepreneurs, including one within the region and one in Yorkshire and Humberside. The latter network has personal links with enterprise centres in two universities in their home region, one of which helped establish the network. As these are both within the university enterprise outreach departments, this suggests that the universities provide practical support.

Similarly a BAME network in Wales has developed close links with Swansea University's enterprise programme.

Both BAME networks in the West Midlands have active links with several universities within their region, as well as in adjacent regions such as the East Midlands. While some of this involves practical support, what also emerges is that networks value the research insights from the university teams. Indeed this has emerged as a theme with both the APPGs for BAME Business People, and for Inclusive Entrepreneurship. Academic involvement is viewed as increasing legitimacy in their activities.

One of the networks is based in an incubation centre at Plymouth University. This was developed through personal contacts between the network and the university. The diversity business incubator was established with the support of Plymouth University.

In 2018 Northampton University was awarded a grant of £70,000 as part of Santander Universities Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Fund. The University committed to use the funding to offer an Enterprise Boost Accelerator programme, which aims to reduce the gap in the level of success between white and BAME students on graduation. The programme was intended to provide greater opportunities for BAME students by encouraging an entrepreneurial mindset and building their business skills during a two day course.

The King's College Incubator has a very high representation of BAME student entrepreneurs in its programmes and also works with non-university BAME entrepreneurs.

A recent player is the Oxford Foundry at University of Oxford's Said Business School. It has launched an Entrepreneurial Fellowship Initiative in July 2021 to support more people from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic backgrounds in senior leadership positions within business, start-ups, and venture capital. 20 Oxford University students will undertake right-week summer internship placements with high growth start-ups from the Oxford Foundry's portfolio of accelerated businesses. The Said Business School's Goldman Sachs Enterprise programme was reported as being helpful to one of the West Midland BAME network by supporting its activities.

In other cases PhD students have been employed as interns by the networks. This is for example the case with a BAME network in the North West and one in Wales.

4. Conclusions

The data here are only a snapshot of the kinds of engagement that universities currently have with BAME and disabled entrepreneurs. The evidence shows a complex set of relationships with the two groups of minority entrepreneurs. The data indicate that activity ranges from ad hoc short term linkages, to established programmes with public sector backing. Much of the activity is recent (within the last 3-4 years) which indicates a growing awareness in the university sector of the societal benefits to university research and enterprise programmes.

The geography data show that there is some match between where the demand for networks is – as indicated by the presence of formal organisations which support BAME and Disabled entrepreneurs. Predictably London has a strong presence. It is also shown that in some parts of country there is little or no activity – for example, in the South East only Oxford University is represented and in East Anglia nothing at all has been found.

On the part of the networks, there is universal enthusiasm for working with universities. Given the nature of university priorities it can be reasonably assumed that the universities which do have links find them rewarding. There are many reasons why others do not engage (resources, strategic priorities etc). This could be addressed by policy-makers who might be able to find financial and other incentives for more links to be in place.

These data form a small part of a larger study on the geography of networks of support for Disabled and BAME groups. They are indicative of patterns of activity. A systematic study in which the universities are presented as case studies, would shine more light on what can and is being achieved.