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## **Addressing Regional Inequalities in Innovation Opportunities for Ethnically Diverse and Disabled Entrepreneurs**

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### **REPORT ON REGIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION FELLOWSHIP RESEARCH GRANT SCHEME (FERSA) RESEARCH**

September 2022

#### **Executive Summary**

1. There has hitherto been a lack of information and analysis of the geography of support available in the UK to disabled and ethnically diverse entrepreneurs through formal networks which provide specialised support. These organisations play crucial roles as intermediaries by directly supporting actual and potential entrepreneurs work within other organisations, to lower entry barriers for new entrepreneurial projects, and as representatives acting as advocates for better policy intervention.
2. In this study, our analysis helps to understand the provision and especially the regional specificities of available support. Our project aimed to answer three research question questions: What are the national and regional institutional contexts in which support organisations for BAME and disabled innovators operate and to what extent do they affect their ability to function? How does UK business innovation support compare with that in other countries such as the USA? In what ways could public policy initiatives be improved to facilitate delivering support for business innovation?

3. To answer these, we set out to do two things: firstly, to map the current regional geography of public and private organisations which provide target support for UK ethnically diverse and/or disabled people; and secondly, by using primary data obtained through a series of interviews, to identify economic, social and policy implications to inform policy thinking and practice. The study therefore provides an important source of data essential for better policy-making.

4. Detailed mapping of networks which support either or both groups of entrepreneurs was undertaken for each UK region. This included national schemes. This was followed by an extensive set of interviews (see Section 2). The analysis adopts both a regional stakeholder and an inclusive ecosystems approach.

5. The mapping exercise identified a total of 59 specialised networks.

- Outside London there are 35 groups of which 20 were BAME specific, 15 disability-specific (three cover both groups but have been listed under their main one). The highest concentration of BAME networks is in the West Midlands which has five networks. There was no similar geographical concentrations of networks which support disabled entrepreneurs.
- In London, a further 24 organisations were identified. Of these 19 support BAME entrepreneurs and 5 support disabled entrepreneurs. There are others which offer general business services for both groups but are not counted here. Only a small number of the networks specifically support ethnic minority women-led entrepreneurs.
- There are also 12+ national networks which support one or other group. Examples include Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG)<sup>1</sup>, the Royal National Institute for the Blind working in partnership with the British Business Bank<sup>2</sup> and the Disabled Entrepreneur – Disability UK network<sup>3</sup>.

6. The key findings from the mapping exercise are:

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<sup>1</sup> [Black Training & Enterprise Group | Devex](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.startuploans.co.uk/start-up-loans-partners-with-the-rnib/>

<sup>3</sup> [Disability UK | DISABLED ENTREPRENEUR - DISABILITY UK](#)

- Overall, several regions have no activity at all, or support only one group of the two e.g. there are no disability support networks based in their area.
  - There is very little activity in Northern Ireland and Scotland, but more in Wales – particularly action by Business Wales.
  - Some networks offer national coverage. Examples are the Inclusive Entrepreneur Network, Association of Disabled Professionals (ADP), Kaleidoscope Investments (Disability) and Asian Business Chamber of Commerce (ABCC) (Ethnically diverse).
  - There are a dozen or so national business-based initiatives such as the Leonard Cheshire Stelios Awards and the African Caribbean Business Network, Diversity VC and One Tech Capital Enterprise.
  - Some networks are online only, for example Accessful Foundation (Disabled entrepreneurs).
7. Some 60+ interviews were conducted with networks, individual disabled and BAME entrepreneurs, universities and policy bodies. Of these, 16 were semi-structured interviews with BAME and Disabled Networks. Information was collected on the organisation, activities, local and regional engagement, evaluation of performance, sustainability, and policy recommendations. While interviews were conducted in the majority of regions, it was not possible to conduct interviews with networks in Scotland or in the South East because of a lack of response from those contacted during the interviewing phase. More networks came to light during the later stages of the project. They were not contacted for interview.
8. The key findings of the interviews are:
- While best practice is spread throughout the country, the study confirmed the importance of place in many, but not all, networks' ability to function effectively. Overall, the pattern is one of London-centric support.
  - Regional contexts are very variable in the mix of organisations which offer support to each group. There is no guarantee that local organisations will speak to each other. The commitment of such organisations as Chambers of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) to supporting disabled or ethnically diverse entrepreneurs is context dependent. There is therefore a need for increasing local knowledge bases and

connectivity of local entrepreneurial/social ecosystems to bring about system change through co-creation of legitimacy of interests of disabled and ethnically diverse entrepreneurs. Government could possibly provide that “glue”, directly or through third parties.

- While many organisations have been founded recently, a number of networks have ended their support for example for disabled entrepreneurs, due to a lack of funding. Examples are Bradnet in Yorkshire and Disability Direct in Derby.
- Sustainability is an on-going key concern for the majority of networks for both groups.
- There are three main categories of organisation involved: membership organisations, charities, and commercial organisations.
- Primary activities are networking, mentoring, advocacy and influencing policy. These provide the mechanisms of support and representation of interests at local, national and sometimes international levels. Many of networks, for example those for disabled entrepreneurs, offer health and well-being support which enables entrepreneurs to take on and manage entrepreneurial activities.
- Universities are increasingly active in providing support for minority entrepreneurs, for example Northumbria University’s Business Clinic’s work with autistic entrepreneurs. Another example is the Kings College London Accelerator which has a high percentage of ethnically diverse entrepreneurs within its members.
- The advantage for the networks in working with universities is that universities give credibility to their work by association with their brand and their research, and also from their ability to provide analysis and data services. This is also reciprocal as universities benefit from association with practitioner best practice and from the potential impact of their research.
- A key message from the interviews for organisations such as universities is that they need not to do things differently for disabled or ethnically diverse entrepreneurs but to invite and involve them in what the organisation already does.

9. A very clear pattern emerges that policy, business organisations’ and academic interest in disabled entrepreneurs is much more recent than that in ethnically diverse and women

entrepreneurs. Support for the two groups is at different stages of development. The focus on disability has been mainly on gaps in employment.

10. Overall, disabled entrepreneurs are significantly worse off in access to support than are those from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

11. Over the life of the project, there has been a development of a more holistic and inclusive approach to minority entrepreneurship for example by Innovate UK, Department of Business, Economics and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the Cabinet Office Disability Unit. In January 2022 Innovate UK organised, “Innovation without limits: increasing disabled innovators access to Innovate UK programmes and funding” to which a wider variety of stakeholders including academics were invited including the lead author of this report..

12. Also part of the policy landscape in this context are two All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs). These are the APPG for Inclusive Entrepreneurship and the APPG for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Business Owners. Both are very active in identifying where policy needs to be improved to better support the interests of these groups of entrepreneurs.

13. This study confirms the ongoing need for better data as well as continuous monitoring and evaluation of policy initiatives.

14. An important gap in data and understanding is that of intersectionality between disabled and ethnically diverse entrepreneurs as well as recognition of the heterogeneity of disability and ethnicity.

15. The Covid 19 pandemic has changed how many networks operate including moving many activities online rather than face-to-face. It also halted some activity for example the Stelios Awards for disabled entrepreneurs were paused for 2020 and 2021 but reintroduced in 2022.

16. The study looked at best practice examples from abroad include North America, Canada, Finland and Germany as well as the OECD series of reports, *Missing Entrepreneurs*<sup>4</sup>. Collectively these have influenced the report and its recommendations.

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<sup>4</sup> [The Missing Entrepreneurs 2021: Policies for Inclusive Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment | en | OECD](#)

17. This study is an example of “engaged scholarship” which involves sustained and continuous interaction between policy-makers, practitioners and researchers. Stakeholder engagement with policy-makers includes Innovate UK, the Cabinet Office Disability Office and the Race Disparity Unit; The British Business Bank; the APPG for Inclusive Entrepreneurship; the APPG for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Business Owners and the UKRI which has shown a commitment to system change as indicated on its website<sup>5</sup>. With practitioners there is continuous dialogue with many of the networks and individuals interviewed in the study, for example the Inclusive Entrepreneur Network, Menta, National Enterprise Network, Accessful Foundation and SAMEE. Collaboration with other scholars in the field has been extensive and include:

- Professor Monder Ram, CREME, Aston University; Professor Thomas Cooney, TU Dublin; and Professor Derrick Cogburn, Kogod School of Business, American University, Washington DC.
- Jacqueline Winstanley, Universal Inclusion who provides the Secretariat for the APPG for Inclusive Entrepreneurship and Professor Monder Ram, CREME, Aston University have joined the Birkbeck Centre for Innovation Management Research (CIMR) as Visiting Fellows.

18. The new evidence base has informed discussions with and recommendations to policymakers. All this engagement has helped to make Birkbeck a focus of expertise in the field of innovation, entrepreneurship and diversity. The Birkbeck team’s contributions include:

- Overcoming fragmentation between stakeholder groups - through numerous personal introductions, dedicated websites, and events to which participants in the project are invited. The websites list the networks and other contacts, include information on what they do. A number of the participant Network organisers have produced videos about their work.
- Because the study participants are also invited to all CIMR events, this helps us meet CIMR’s commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. The relevant websites are:
  - Making Business Innovation Accessible to Diverse Groups — Birkbeck, University of London ([bbk.ac.uk](http://bbk.ac.uk))

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-offer/supporting-healthy-research-and-innovation-culture/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/>

- Engaged scholarship: addressing regional inequalities in innovation opportunities for BAME and disabled entrepreneurs — Birkbeck, University of London (bbk.ac.uk)
- Dissemination of knowledge and driving debates through publications, blogs and events. Several of the network organisers take part in CIMR debates. Five dedicated CIMR events have involved practitioners and policymakers.
- Additional events, a report and further dissemination activities have been supported by a BEI school impact grant (2021).
- Birkbeck has learned the importance of reciprocal engagement with stakeholders who have a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- In February 2021 Helen Lawton Smith was invited to be a Board Member of the APPG for the Inclusive Entrepreneurship “Road to Wonder” Inquiry Advisory Board.

#### 19. Other impact

Public outreach includes invited presentations in the UK at events organised by UKRI, the Innovation Caucus, The National Enterprise Network (NEN), and the Disability Rights Forum. Internationally presentations have been given to the Circle, Lund University research seminar series and for the Regional Studies Association EU Regions week event in October 2021.

- There has been acknowledgement of the study’s work in the report “[National Disability Strategy](#)” - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)) (July 2021)
- Five presentations have been given at practitioner events.
- The analytical framework combines a regional stakeholder approach with that of inclusive ecosystems. Publications so far include an edited book, a book chapter, a CIMR working paper, a special issue in two parts of *Strategic Change: Briefings in Entrepreneurial Finance* on Minority Groups in Entrepreneurship (March and July 2022) and two published reports.

#### 20. Further Research

From September 2022 to April 2023 the APPG for Inclusive Entrepreneurship which is chaired by Dr Lisa Cameron, have commissioned a research report sponsored by Innovate UK in conjunction



with the Innovation Caucus. Jacqueline Winstanley is the project lead and Helen Lawton Smith is the Lead Researcher.

## 21. Future Plans

In addition to undertaking the Innovate UK project and subsequently disseminating the outcomes, future academic plans include a submission of an article to *Regional Studies*, a shorter article to *Regions*, a *Regional Studies Policy Impact* book, and an accepted article, "*Examining ethnic minority women entrepreneurs' support networks: An ecosystem approach*" for the *Strategic Change: Briefings in Entrepreneurial Finance* special issue on Paradigm shifts in Entrepreneurship. In addition, there have been a book chapter a CIMR event on December 6<sup>th</sup> 2022 on the Future of Disability Research; and a presentation, 'Ethnic minority women entrepreneurs' support networks: An inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems approach' (with Beldina Owalla) at the Regional Innovation Policies Conference, Padua, September 2022.

Further engagement with practitioners will be through building on established relationships and continuing to highlight issues relating to challenges facing disabled and ethnically diverse entrepreneurs nationally and internationally.

## 22. Our answers to the three questions to be addressed are therefore that:

1. Regional contexts have a profound impact on the ability of local networks to deliver support for disabled and ethnically diverse entrepreneurs. This results from differences in the make-up and interests of the population in the region, the networks' differing reasons for coming into being, how they then communicate with other organisations, and the extent to which other organisations identify common interests.
2. The UK's national equality, diversity and inclusion agenda for entrepreneurship and innovation is gathering pace and there are good examples of intervention. Other countries, notably Canada and Belgium, offer best practice example from which the UK can learn.
3. Public policy design and specifically initiatives and their associated procedures and paperwork, needs to involve disabled and ethnically diverse entrepreneurs, as well as the networks which support them, so as to be sensitive to regional and other differences in how programmes can be accessed and delivered.

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# Final report

## 1. Introduction

While entrepreneurship is relevant to all parts of society (O'Brien et al., 2019), considerable evidence suggests that there is under-representation and under-utilisation of disabled and of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups (BAME) in business innovation (Klingler-Vidra and Pacheco Pardo, 2019). Under-represented entrepreneurs and innovators including those with disabilities and from minority ethnic backgrounds are described by OECD (2021) as “missing entrepreneurs”. The reasons suggested as underlying this under-representation are varied. For example, ethnic minorities may face social and economic disadvantages that act as a barrier to entrepreneurship (Carter et al., 2015). Kruger and David (2020) report that persons with disabilities are often marginalized and their career options limited. This is partially caused by limited access to appropriate education. While these patterns are widely recognised much research lacks context – geographical, societal, social (identity), institutional, temporal, economic and cultural (see Kloosterman, 2010).

While diversity is shown to positively impact innovation (Nathan, 2015), knowledge on the support needs and dynamics of ethnic minority entrepreneurs/innovators (Ram and Jones, 2008) as well as those with disabilities (Cooney, 2008; Rolle et al., 2020) is relatively under-researched. At issue is whether and how disabled and BAME entrepreneurs have particular business support needs, and to what extent these needs are met at the local/regional or national level.

The public policy and empirical background to this project is a study for Innovate UK *Supporting Diversity and Inclusion* published in 2019 (Vorley et al., 2019). The new project (2020-2021) which builds on that earlier study set out to address three research questions:

1. What are the national and regional institutional contexts in which support organisations for BAME and disabled innovators operate and to what extent do they affect their ability to function?
2. How does UK business innovation support compare with that in other countries such as the USA?

3. In what ways could public policy initiatives be improved to facilitate delivering support for business innovation?

## 2. Methodology

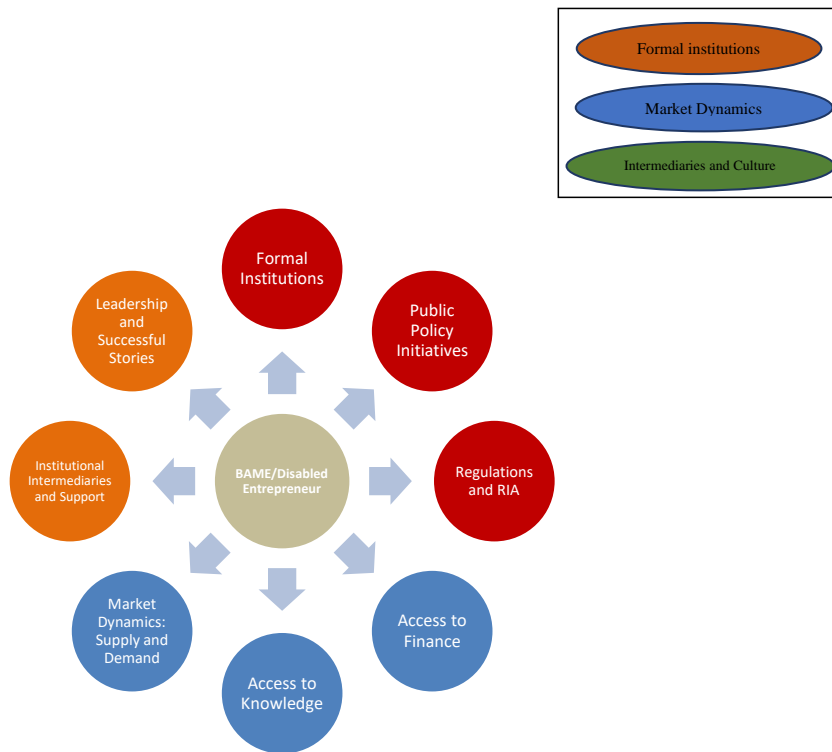
The study involved three tasks/stages. The first task was to map the regional geography of public and private organisations which support UK BAME and/or disabled people. The second was to compare the UK experience with other countries, particularly the USA which has targeted business innovation support to under-represented groups. The third was to identify economic, social and policy implications to inform policy thinking and practice.

For the first, identification of networks and individuals was drawn from various sources. These included the advisory board of the Innovate UK study, web searches, snowballing from networks interviewed, and personal recommendations. The second stage was to conduct interviews with a sample of networks and other stakeholders with an interest in the issues. Over 65 interviews were conducted with networks, individual disabled and BAME entrepreneurs, universities and policy bodies between January 2020 and July 2021. Of these, 16 were semi-structured interviews with BAME and Disabled Networks. The semi-structured interview questionnaire collected information on the organisations, on their activities, local and regional engagement, evaluation of performance, sustainability, and policy recommendations (Appendix A). Attempts at making contact with a dozen or so other organisations identified as potentially providing support were unsuccessful.

International comparisons, including the USA, were developed from four main sources: through contacts made with academics working in the field with expert knowledge; through engagement with the author of the OECD *The Missing Entrepreneurs* reports (OECD, 2021), in the panel event in the 2021 EU Regions Week organised in conjunction with the Regional Studies Association, and a CIMR event on support for disabled entrepreneurs (Appendix); and through recommendations including from colleagues and through a weekly post from the USA on EDI issues (dc@technical.ly).

The third stage has been to analyse responses from the questionnaires, UK public policy documents and reports from public and private sector organisations such as the British Business Bank.

In addressing the core issue of how we understand the evidence from the survey and interviews, we have adopted a Regional Stakeholder Ecosystem Approach (RSE Approach) (Figure 1). The basis is agency for system change.



**Figure 1 Agency for System Change following an RSE Approach**

Source: Authors

Figure 1 identifies three inter-related elements. These are formal institutions which includes policymaking bodies and charities; market dynamics which include gaps in funding for ethnically diverse and disabled entrepreneurs; and intermediaries and culture. The last includes the networks which provide a wide range of support for entrepreneurs in their respective regions. They are also advocates for change by fighting stereotypes and setting precedents.

### 3 The Geography of Support

#### 3.1 Disability and BAME Employment Gaps

The task of mapping the geography of networks of support involved determining where support is available, of what kind, and where the gaps are. The rationale is that good analysis here leads to understanding regional specificities and subsequent policymaking. This is the only dataset of its kind.

Thus we map and analyse the landscape for business innovation support in UK regions focusing on what is specific about a region, and how it is articulated and interpreted (Berglund et al., 2016). There is an interdependence between the regional context and potential for economic development by disabled people (Renko et al., 2016) and ethnic minorities (Verduijn and Essers, 2013), there being specific economic, social and cultural conditions at the sub-national level (Ram and Jones, 2008). The study's contribution is therefore in understanding what makes responses different at the regional level and how these are explained. Questions asked include what is it about specific places that throw up particular challenges and local solutions, and what are the implications of those findings?

The geographical context is that the highest percentage of self-employed people with disabilities in the UK is in the South East (20%), followed by Greater London (13%) and South West England (12%). The share is lowest in Northern Ireland (2%), North East England (4%), East of England (4%) and Wales and Scotland both 6% (IPSE, 2019). However, according to Disability Action, 1 in 5 people in Northern Ireland have a disability.

#### Important data:

(ONS, 2021)

- Between 2004 and 2019, the biggest employment rate increases were in the combined Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic group (from 44% to 56%) and the White Other ethnic group (from 71% to 83%).
- The highest employment rates for most ethnic groups were generally in the South and East of England – the lowest were generally in the North of England, Scotland, West Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber.
- The lowest overall employment rate was in the North East
- The highest overall employment rates were in the South and the East of England
- The highest employment rate out of all ethnic groups and regions was for people in the White Other ethnic group living in the East of England (86%).
- The lowest rate was for people in the Other ethnic group living in the North East (44%)

(DWP, 2022): Disabled people of every ethnicity are less likely to be in employment compared to their non-disabled counterparts. People of Indian ethnicity have the highest disability employment rate (61.1%) with people of Pakistani ethnicity the lowest (44.1%). However, the difference between these, and other groups, is not statistically significant.

IPSE report that more than seven million people aged 16-64 of working age are classified as disabled under the UK Equality Act 2010. Over a seventh (16%) are self-employed as their main job (14% sole traders). Of the self-employed, threequarters (78%) describe working for themselves and 1 in 5 (19%) identify themselves as running a business or professional practice. Overall, figures are increasing (by around a third since 2013). The ratio of 3:2 males to female is consistent with UK figures. However, the proportion of self-employed women is increasing. These trends are more likely to be caused by “necessity entrepreneurship” or redundancy for men than for women. Older people are more likely to be disabled. Those in the age group 50-69 account for 28% and those 60+ for 26% meaning that those aged 50 and over account for over half of disabled people. Another quarter are between 40 and 49.

The evidence on ethnically diverse entrepreneurs signals that minority businesses can help in achieving the government’s top post-Covid priority (along with other top priorities) of “levelling up” deprived areas outside London. This is because 21 of the 39 Top 100 businesses in England located outside London are based in deprived areas, as are four of the five Scottish businesses in the Top 100 and one of the two Welsh ones (Legrain and Fitzgerald, 2021).

Minority businesses make up a sixth of the 6 million businesses registered in the UK and they employed nearly 3 million people in 2019–20 (Diversity UK, 2021). A report by MSDUK<sup>6</sup> shows ethnic minority businesses (EMBs) contributed £25 billion to the UK economy in 2018, but that many such businesses are being held back by barriers which hinder their growth. There are over 300,000 Ethnic Minority-owned Businesses (EMBs) in the UK, representing over 7% of all SMEs (Legrain and Fitzgerald, 2021).

The Asian business community makes an enormous contribution to UK plc, providing the backbone of UK enterprises with a share of over 11% of new business start-ups. The British Asian community generates around 10% of the country’s GDP despite making up only 6% of the population<sup>7</sup>. Ethnic minority inventors have been found to have a positive effect on patenting activity in the UK, suggesting that policymakers should aim to increase the diversity of research

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<sup>6</sup> Minority Supplier Development UK

<sup>7</sup> [ABOUT | Yaba \(yabauk.com\)](https://www.yabauk.com)



communities (Nathan, 2015). Top-quartile companies for ethnic / cultural diversity have been found to be 33% more likely to outperform on profitability (Hunt et al., 2018).

Under certain conditions, networks based on the geographical dispersion of communities enable higher levels of business competitiveness through facilitating access to resources and markets by minority businesses (Kitching et al., 2009). Ethnic minority businesses play an important role in the social adaptation and integration of new migrants in their local economies and communities (Carter et al., 2015).

A general problem for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs is a lack of growth finance. Diversity VC (2019) found that the lack of diversity in London VC firms has a major impact on the accessibility of their funds for both formal and informal interactions with entrepreneurs seeking capital. Ethnic minorities are under-represented in London VC as three quarters of venture capitalists are white. The problem of access to finance for women is particularly acute for BAME women. A report on venture capital funding in the UK during the period 2009 to 2019, indicates that Black female founders received only 0.02% of the total amount invested (Brodnock, 2020). Other difficulties in the business environment are indicated by a report by the British Business Bank (2020) which finds that more Black (37%), Asian and other Ethnic Minority background (36%) female business owners were likely to report zero profits in 2019 (compared to 16% for white male business owners). Access to finance appears to be a major barrier for Black, Asian and Other Ethnic Minority entrepreneurs and is given as the reason why nearly a half of Asian and other ethnic minority and well over a third of Black entrepreneurs stop working on their business idea (British Business Bank, 2020).

Location is an important factor in success, irrespective of ethnicity and gender. Greater London was found to be the toughest place in the UK to be an entrepreneur, with just 71% of business owners in London reporting a profit in 2019. Meanwhile, entrepreneurs in the South East and North East see most success. Differences between London and other areas of the UK are linked to higher density of start-ups and tougher market competition. Higher costs of living and operating, and greater disparity between poorer and wealthier neighbourhoods also help explain these findings (ibid).

What is missing from these reports are data on intersectionality i.e. on ethnically diverse disabled entrepreneurs. Without such data it is impossible to produce a holistic set of recommendations for policy.

### ***3.2 Organisations Breakdown by Region and Policy action***

The analysis (Table 1) shows that the overall pattern is one of fragmentation of activity with gaps in many regions of the UK. The mapping exercise identified a total of 60 specialised networks.

- Outside London there are 35 groups of which 20 are BAME specific, 15 disability-specific. (Three cover both groups but have been listed under their main activity). The highest concentration of BAME networks is in the West Midlands which has five networks. There was no similar geographical concentration of networks which support disabled entrepreneurs are located.
- In London, a further 24 organisations were identified. Of these 19 support BAME entrepreneurs and 5 support disabled entrepreneurs. There are others which offer general business services for both groups but are not counted here. Only a small number of the networks specifically support ethnic minority women-led entrepreneurs.
- There are also 12+ national networks which support one or other group. Examples include Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG)<sup>8</sup>, the Royal National Institute for the Blind working in partnership with the British Business Bank<sup>9</sup> and the Disabled Entrepreneur – Disability UK network<sup>10</sup>.

Only a few organisations target BAME or ethnic minorities in general. Examples include EYST in Wales and Bucks BAME Network in the South East of England. Even fewer organisations target BAME women. Examples include “Wearetechwomen” in the East of England and AMINA for Muslim Women in Scotland.

Some organisations support services for both BAME and Disabled entrepreneurs either exclusively or in a suite of services to a wide base of entrepreneurs. Examples include MENTA in the East of

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<sup>8</sup> [Black Training & Enterprise Group | Devex](#)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.startuploans.co.uk/start-up-loans-partners-with-the-rnib/>

<sup>10</sup> [Disability UK | DISABLED ENTREPRENEUR - DISABILITY UK](#)

England and the Centre for Entrepreneurs (CFE) in London. Some networks have an international footprint for example Inclusive Entrepreneur Network.

For disabled entrepreneurs, no apparent pattern emerges. Therefore, a logical explainable distribution for the disabled support organisations is not detectable, other than in locations which have low populations for people with disabilities which suggests low levels of demand for entrepreneurial support.

For ethnically diverse entrepreneurs, Asian support networks are more extensive than for other ethnicities. Asian nationalities are the largest ethnic concentration after white British and before black African. For example, Birmingham in West Midlands has a high number of BAME support organisations in line with the high concentration of Asian communities. On the other hand, African and Black communities tend to attract diaspora and returning migrants to support African businesses in the UK and Europe – for example One Africa Network, ABCN and BABA.

Secondary research identified a number of current policy initiatives in the UK. Public reports of government and nongovernment organisations show that there is a wide range of national support schemes for varied categories of entrepreneur (Table 1). Interviews were conducted with all of these except BEIS and DWP.

<i>Policy body</i>	<i>EDI commitment</i>
Cabinet Office Disability Unit established 2019	The aim of the Disability Unit is to break down the barriers faced by disabled people in the UK. It is creating an evidence-based disability strategy that understands the lived experience of disabled people. The unit has a 10 year plan national strategy for disability, on innovation – what will make innovation work for and by disabled people. It operates 9 Regional Stakeholder Networks, helping to ensure disabled people's voices are heard throughout England SAMEE is a member of the stakeholder network. It also needs an evidence base.  <a href="http://www.gov.uk">Disability Unit - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</a>
Race Disparity Unit	Collect, analyse and publish government data on the experiences of people from different ethnic backgrounds.  <a href="http://www.gov.uk">Race Disparity Unit - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</a>
Innovate UK	Committed to encouraging diversity and inclusion in business innovation.  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/innovate-uk-diversity-and-inclusion">https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/innovate-uk-diversity-and-inclusion</a>

	<p>Funded study led by Innovation caucus in 2019 which outlines barriers, challenges, opportunities and support needs for minority ethnic groups and disabled people to participate in business innovation</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-diversity-and-inclusion-in-innovation-study">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-diversity-and-inclusion-in-innovation-study</a></p>
UKRI, central strategy team for EDI	<p>Helps develop strategy and engages with external stakeholders on disability issues. Identifies a need data on under-representation of people with a disability to build a synthesis of existing evidence and hence understand barriers that disabled innovators face. UKRI has a role to play in policies and practice having identified policy gaps.</p> <p><a href="#">Gender equality plan – UKRI</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.ukri.org/what-we-offer/supporting-healthy-research-and-innovation-culture/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/external-advisory-group/">https://www.ukri.org/what-we-offer/supporting-healthy-research-and-innovation-culture/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/external-advisory-group/</a></p>
External Advisory Group for EDI	<p><a href="https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/commons-committees/science-technology/Correspondence/191030-UKRI-to-Chair-re-Impact-of-funding-on-equality-diversity-inclusion-and-accessibility.pdf">https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/commons-committees/science-technology/Correspondence/191030-UKRI-to-Chair-re-Impact-of-funding-on-equality-diversity-inclusion-and-accessibility.pdf</a></p>
BEIS	<p>Evidence-based approach to supporting EDI focused innovation but not apparently entrepreneurship.</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/beis-equality-objectives">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/beis-equality-objectives</a></p>
DWP	<p>Access to Work programme supports disabled people become self-employed</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work">https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work</a></p>
APPG Inclusive Entrepreneurship	<p>Set up in July 2020 to ensure that Parliament is fully informed on what is needed to create and sustain the most beneficial conditions for inclusive economic growth.</p> <p>Its goals are to stimulate, encourage and nurture inclusive entrepreneurship throughout the country, and to engage with entrepreneurs who have protected characteristics, particularly disabled entrepreneurs.</p> <p><a href="#">APPG Inclusive Entrepreneurship (universalinclusion.co.uk)</a></p>
APPG BAME Business Owners	<p>Established to bring together parliamentarians from all parties and both Houses with key players in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) businesses to promote the growth of successful BAME businesses across the UK.</p> <p><a href="#">Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Business Owners APPG (Defunct) (paralleparliament.co.uk)</a></p>

**Table 1 Examples of UK government and parliamentary bodies' commitment to minority entrepreneurship**

Source: Authors

Examples of parliamentary action for ethnically diverse and disabled entrepreneurs are two APPGs. The *APPG for BAME Business Owners*<sup>11</sup> has as a key aim promoting an inclusive national strategy of policy, support and resources to enable the growth of BAME owned businesses for the benefit of the overall UK economy.

The person who provides the Secretariat for the APPG is also the BAME lead for the FSB and has also been working with Chambers of Commerce to discuss challenges and opportunities for black business owners. Hence at this level, there is a useful overlap of natural allies. Key issues for her are the importance of getting the right stakeholders on board and access to data. Stakeholders include captains of industry, business networks and individual owners. She also is in contact with the Race Disparity Unit in the Cabinet Office. It is therefore crucial to have access to data which map the extent and variety of BAME activity and are sensitive to ethnicity. Bringing both together will help sell the message that BAME businesses are central to the well-being of the economy.

The *APPG for Inclusive Entrepreneurship* was established to ensure that Parliament is fully informed on what is needed to create and sustain the most beneficial conditions for inclusive economic growth. Its goals are” to stimulate, encourage and nurture inclusive entrepreneurship throughout the country, and to engage with entrepreneurs who have protected characteristics, particularly disabled entrepreneurs.”<sup>12</sup>

Overall, there is a need for organisations to come together to target equality, diversity and inclusion in entrepreneurship. Evidence from the interviews with policy-makers suggests that.

- Some LEPS are better than others.
- There is a need to get stakeholders to buy into transformational change but before that can happen a model of what an inclusive approach to entrepreneurship support is required. Pilots of an integrated approach could be run in one or two regions

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<sup>11</sup> [Home | APPG BAME \(appgethnicbusiness.co.uk\)](http://appgethnicbusiness.co.uk)

<sup>12</sup> [APPG Inclusive Entrepreneurship \(universalinclusion.co.uk\)](http://appgethnicbusiness.co.uk)

- Different messages are currently being sent. Some give an economic case for BAME and Disabled entrepreneurs, some have a social and equality agenda. So far it is unclear which approach is most effective.

However, there is a clear conclusion that the terms “BAME” and “Disabled” include a diverse set of entrepreneurs. Differences are sectoral, age and gender as well as in skill sets from the very highly skilled to less skilled. This leads to a need for different government departments – e.g. Innovate UK and BEIS to work together. Overall, there is a need for clear articulation of where each organisation is focusing as well as managing expectations.

Table 2 summarises the organisations by region.

	*unclear if it still exist	BAME	Disabled	Totals	Summary
1	Scotland	4	1	5	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Oceanic Consulting</li> <li>-AMINA-Muslim Women's Resource Centre</li> <li>--African Council, Aberdeen</li> <li>- Radiant and Brighter Community interest groups</li> <li>- Empower Women for Change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Work4Me Senscot*</li> </ul>	<p>Growing support for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs in Scotland, including BME refugee and migrant communities, (Radiant and Brighter Communities) Muslim Women support group, and African Council. Ocean Consulting organises Asian and Business Awards bring together the top Asian entrepreneurs from around the country, to be recognised, rewarded and remembered for their creativity, resolve and spirit, and their dedication to hard work – provides accolades and networking.</p> <p>AMINA Empowerment via Enterprise (EVE) Project offers innovative and interactive enterprise support to Muslim and Minority Ethnic women across the city of Dundee.</p> <p>Africa Council organises a number of events related to entrepreneurship providing networking opportunities and advocacy.</p> <p>Radiant and Brighter Bright Futures Women's Leadership and Enterprise Program Bright Futures Leadership and Enterprise Program -Unlocking Potential, Showcasing Skills and the Contribution of BME Women in Scotland.</p> <p>Empower Women for Change - Supporting African youth and women entrepreneurs. Provision of training, workshops, advice sessions, coaching and mentoring will be delivered and developed to impact in women's and communities lives.</p> <p>Disabled support organisations missing. Work4ME was a consortium cooperative championing the cause for self-employment for people with long-term conditions.</p>	

2	<b>Northern Ireland</b>	0	2	2	
			-Disability Action -UnLtd	<p>Regional effect: Northern Ireland is one of the poorest regions within the United Kingdom. The lack of jobs or business opportunities discourages in-migration. Consequently, only disability support organisations were found but not BAME support.</p> <p>British Business Bank is facilitating the setting up of a Northern Ireland Equity Taskforce</p> <p>Disability Action Exploring Enterprise Programme in the North Down area. Provides support for disabled people and need some support in gaining employment or becoming or becoming self-employed.</p> <p>UnLtd provides funding to support social entrepreneurs and people with innovative solutions with the potential to change society for the better. UnLtd particularly encourages applications from people with disabilities or those who identify as Black, Asian or from a minority ethnic background.</p>	
3	<b>Northeast England</b>	1	1	2	



		-Asian Business Connexions (ABC)	-Innovation SuperNetworkNE <a href="#">Diversity in Innovation - Innovation SuperNetwork</a>	<p>Limited support for BAME and disability entrepreneurs with the exception of Asian Businesses.</p> <p>ABC provides expert support and advice on developing businesses to their full potential by offering a range of services – in PR and marketing, including website and advert design</p> <p>Innovation SuperNetwork’s Key stakeholder is <a href="#">Innovate UK</a> through <a href="#">SBRI</a> (the Small Business Research Initiative) and <a href="#">Department of International Trade</a> to support NE business in networking and exporting. <i>Diversity in Innovation programme Innovation Finance</i> work is committed to redressing gender balance, improving the diversity of angel investor network and the amount of investment into female and minority-led businesses.</p>	
4	<b>Northwest England</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	
		-GMSSEN (BAME social entrepreneurs) [Manchester] (GM BAME Network)	-Association for Disabled Professionals*[Bolton] -Universal Inclusion [Lancashire]	<p>GMSSEN established network for BAME-led social enterprises in 2019. Provides networking opportunities and business support in the form of peer-to-peer learning, Mentoring, Business advice.</p> <p>ADP members consist mainly of disabled people living in the UK (all of Executive Committee are disabled),</p> <p>Universal Inclusion and the Inclusive Entrepreneur Network have created a holistic membership organisation both digital and real world comprising of business support, bespoke inclusive events and PR opportunities, peer support, advocacy and mentoring for people who have protected characteristics particularly disabled people. Its successful inclusive entrepreneur programme combines traditional start-up and scale up elements alongside an essential health and wellbeing strand. Universal Inclusion provides Secretariat to the <a href="#">All Party Parliamentary Group for Inclusive Entrepreneurship</a> and members of the Network feed directly into the APPG. <a href="#">Universal Inclusion</a> and the <a href="#">Network</a> collaborate with cross sector organisations including academia to create an international inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. These organisations are based in Edgworth, Bolton but operate throughout the UK and internationally.</p>	

5	<b>Yorkshire and Humberside</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	
		-YABA (Asian)	-Bradnet*	<p>Bradnet (now part of Inspired Neighbourhoods) had an initiative to support disabled entrepreneurs but now provides care and support. This means that dedicated support organisations for disabled entrepreneurs are <i>missing</i> in Yorkshire.</p> <p><u>YABA</u> was established to provide a voice for the Yorkshire Asian Business community at regional, national and international levels .<a href="https://www.yabauk.com/">https://www.yabauk.com/</a> Delivers advocacy, networking bespoke events, mentoring and support services</p>	
6	<b>East Midlands</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	
		-MSDUK [Leicestershire]	-Disability Direct* [Derbyshire] - Blind Business Association Charitable Trust (BRACT) [Northamptonshire]	<p>MSDUK supports ethnic-minority businesses to bring new innovations to market and unlock a diverse talent pool of entrepreneurs networking to help develop new ideas, scale up become investor ready. Organises Innovation Challenge competitions for innovators.</p> <p>The Enterprise Centre was part of Disability Direct but now have no contact with disabled innovators. Had 3 years European Social Funding some 10 years ago.</p> <p>BRACT Aim to maximise the potential for long-term business success Offers business advice, mentoring, seminars, conferences, need-orientated projects and a small grants fund.</p>	
7	<b>West Midlands</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	
		- Asian Business Chamber of Commerce (ABCC) -CREME (BAME) -One Africa Network & African Business Chamber (African) - Black Country Asian Business Association (BCABA)* (Asian)		<p>Birmingham is <u>very</u> ethnically diverse so it is logical is has the highest concentration of BAME support in the sample. However, the city seems to suffer from inequality in <u>ethnicities, employment</u> and was <u>disproportionately</u> hit by Covid-19.</p> <p>Five networks which support ethnically diverse entrepreneurs -Specialised support organisations for disabled entrepreneurs are missing. ABCC offers advocacy, Networking and training in around about 250 events annually, marketing support, networking, Signposting to other organisations e.g. universities and government schemes</p> <p>CREME (Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship; Aston Business School) actively engages with BAME businesses and Business organisations so is included here as a networking organisation.</p>	

				<p>African Business Chamber (AfBC) is the UK's business organisation representing African owned businesses and entrepreneurs in the UK. AfBC organises events and runs a number of campaigns aimed at empowering and supporting the organisation, its members and the business community around the United Kingdom to accelerate growth, enhance productivity, access new opportunities, showcase products and solutions, and highlight the needs of African businesses. One Africa Network supports skill development, business start-up and growth, innovation.</p> <p>BCABA organize great meet ups and events all over the United Kingdom with entrepreneurs providing networking opportunities.</p>
8	<b>Wales</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
		-Centre for African Entrepreneurs CAE (African) Business Wales	-Disability Wales: Endeavour Crowdfund	<p>CAE offers Assistance and support with business idea development Assistance with writing a business plan. Help with access to external finance Specialised mentoring &amp; coaching course Workshop, networking, exhibition and promotion events for African entrepreneurship.</p> <p>Business Wales offers an accelerator programme designed to champion diversity in entrepreneurship in Wales aims to developing participants' core business skills and a 'success mind-set' webinars and masterclasses, one-to-one expert mentoring and coaching, from inspirational speakers, role models and business growth experts.</p> <p>Disability Wales' Endeavour project seeks to inspire and support disabled entrepreneurs to establish their own businesses.</p>
9	<b>East England</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
		-Wearetechwomen [Essex] -MENTA (generalist but focuses on BAME) [East Anglia]	-Accessful Foundation (online only)[Essex]	<p>We are Tech Women Events, conferences and awards for women of all ethnicities and addresses ethnicity disparities.</p> <p>MENTA offers affordable training, advice and key services to aspiring and established business owners in Norfolk and Suffolk Supports both BAME and Disabled entrepreneurs as part of their broad portfolio. Not-for profit</p> <p>Accessful Foundation aims to make entrepreneurship accessible for everyone. Facilitating networking and mentoring, by giving grants, by creating and promoting representation and by being a transparent, diverse and innovative charity that campaigns for positive change.</p>

10	<b>Southeast England</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	
		-Berkshire Black Business (BBB)	-Disabled Entrepreneurs Network (DEN) - Disability Dynamics [Hampshire]	Berkshire Black Business is a business community that welcomes anyone who is interested in Berkshire's Black and minority ethnic communities. It offers a friendly business community for growing businesses.  Disabled Entrepreneurs Network (DEN) is operated by the Association of Disabled Professionals (ADP). DEN provides networking opportunities and information services for self-employed disabled people and those setting up and running their own small businesses throughout England, with regional contacts in each region.  Disability Dynamics is registered in Hampshire and was established in 2008 to support disabled entrepreneurs.	
11	<b>Southwest England</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	
		-Black South West Network, BSWN [Bristol] -Diversity Business Incubator (DBI) [Devon]	-SAMEE [Bournemouth] -Mutually Inclusive [Bristol]	BSWN offers advocacy, research on issues such as Engaging the BAME social enterprise sector in social investment DBI is a Business Hub for Minority Ethnicity entrepreneurs. Offers business advice, finding grant money for start-ups or already existing businesses SAMEE Supports self-employment and provides enterprise support for disabled entrepreneurs, from pre-start up to existing businesses through businesses advisors and also signposting to other organisations, careers advice Mutually Inclusive offers mentoring, enterprise support, support for person assisting disabled persons especially people with learning difficulties dealing with Access to Work, advocacy	
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>35</b>	
12	<b>London-based and National Organisations</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>24</b>	
	Consulting/Mentorship/ Capacity Building/Training/private enterprises	-Oceanic Consulting Asian Business Awards -WCAN -One Tech Capital Enterprise		Oceanic Consulting is Britain's largest Ethnic consulting and promotions organisation and organises networking events WCAN is a young social enterprise dedicated to the personal and professional development of black women. Hosts events for black women entrepreneurs	

				One Tech capital Enterprise's aim is to boost access to investment and entrepreneurial support opportunities for tech startups founded by women and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.
Networks/Networking/ Alliances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-African Caribbean Business Network (ABCN)</li> <li>-The National Black Women's Network (NBWN)</li> <li>-BABA (British African Business Alliance)</li> <li>-YSYS (Your Startup Your Story)</li> <li>-Ubele</li> <li>-UKBlackTech</li> <li>-Kurdish House London</li> </ul>	-Learning Disabilities	<p>ACBN is a business development network whose membership comprises African and Caribbean owned businesses across the full spectrum of business types and activities, offers networking</p> <p>NBWN supports entrepreneurship In this time strapped business community entrepreneurs can now benefit from events organised by our expert team.</p> <p>BABA is a diaspora led network for Business Leaders, Investors and Development organizations in Africa or expanding into Africa.</p> <p>YSYS A startup community dedicated to connecting diverse people with shared values in the tech ecosystem.</p> <p>UKBlackTech is an innovation group that is on a mission to make the UK the most ethnically diverse tech ecosystem in the world. Offers business support services.</p> <p>Ubele is an African Diaspora-led intergenerational social enterprise founded in 2014 supports emerging projects and social businesses to enable the development of their business models to flourish.</p> <p>Kurdish House is a business development network that supports Kurdish businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs to build and thrive in their start-ups: from ideation through to a viable business.</p> <p>Learning Disabilities In Business programme explored the route to self-employment and small business ownership for those people with learning disabilities interested in an alternative path to work.</p>	
Acceleration/Incubation/ Co-working Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Impact Brixton</li> <li>-Impact Hub Kings Cross</li> <li>-Hatch Female Founders</li> <li>- Business Launch Pad</li> </ul>	-Global Disability Innovation Hub	<p>Impact Brixton provides a co-working space with high proportion of BAME members.</p> <p>Impact Hub Kings Cross offers co-working space programme – programmes including BAME entrepreneurs. New Roots is a mentoring and peer-to-peer support programme for people from a BAME background interested in entrepreneurship.</p> <p>Hatch Female Founders offers practical programmes and support for female founders to succeed at business and life. Have run BAME female founders programme.</p>	

				<p>Business Launch Pad Targets young people and work with a lot of BAME young entrepreneurs.</p> <p>Global Disability Innovation Hub is a research and practice centre driving disability innovation for a fairer world.</p>
Charity/ Grants/Awards (non-profit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Diversity VC</li> <li>-TERN or The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network</li> <li>-Centre For Entrepreneurs (CFE)</li> <li>- Foundervine</li> </ul>	-Leonard Cheshire Stelios Awards for Disabled Entrepreneurs	<p>Diversity VC is a non-profit partnership promoting diversity in Venture Capital.</p> <p>TERN supports refugee entrepreneurs in the creation and development of their businesses, providing services throughout three stages of entrepreneurial process: business exploration, business start-up and business growth.</p> <p><a href="#">CFE</a> is a registered charity delivers entrepreneurial development programmes; researches the state of entrepreneurship and how to unlock potential in neglected groups, communities and locations.</p> <p>Foundervine helps create start-ups run by diverse founders and build inclusive acceleration programmes</p> <p>Leonard Cheshire Stelios Awards offers financial prizes for disabled entrepreneurs</p>	
Funding/VC (commercial)	-ImpactXCapital (VC fund for ethnically-diverse entrepreneurs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Kaleidoscope Investments</li> <li>-Disabled Entrepreneurs</li> </ul>	<p>ImpactXCapital is a double bottom line venture capital firm, founded to support underrepresented entrepreneurs across Europe.</p> <p>Kaleidoscope Investments provides Business Investment supports to disabled entrepreneurs to develop businesses.</p> <p>Disabled Entrepreneurs is the charity arm of Kaleidoscope Investments offers business support including one to one or collective mentoring sessions - 121 or collective business mentoring sessions.</p>	
<b>Grand Totals</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>59</b>	

**Table 2 Geographical distribution of networks and organisations that support ethnically diverse and disabled entrepreneurs**

Source: Authors

### ***3.3 Geography of university support for minority entrepreneurs.***

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 disabled and ethnically diverse entrepreneurs. Some universities also directly support students with those characteristics in becoming entrepreneurs.

Data on expertise directed at supporting one or both of ethnically diverse 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 18<sup>th</sup> March, and the last comes from project interviews asking at which universities to look. Table 3 collates the data from all four sources. It shows the university, its location, the activity and comments from respondents from the networks.

Table 3 identifies 16 universities as having expertise in working with ethnically diverse and or disabled entrepreneurs. This is a small proportion of the 154 recognized higher education institutions (HEIs) that can award degrees in the United Kingdom. The 16 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 CREME (See Table 3), there is no active engagement with disabled entrepreneurs. Equally there is no network which supports disabled entrepreneurs in that region.

Not surprisingly London is a major international centre for research, application of research and teaching in innovation and entrepreneurship in disability and ethnically diverse entrepreneurship as well as physical infrastructure. For example, the Centre for Innovation Management Research (CIMR) at Birkbeck, University of London engages disabled and ethnically diverse entrepreneurs in events and networking activities.

For disabled entrepreneurs, practical support includes the London Inclusive Enterprise Zone (ELIEZ). 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 by interviewees that it is very difficult to engage with the former organisation.

In 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 is located within Here East. 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<sup>13</sup> is an innovation centre and co-working space that promotes 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 site is now home to a range of organisations from University College London to Ford's Smart Mobility Innovation Office, while its physical space allows new mobility solutions to be trialled in a uniquely diverse and controlled environment. Plexal was founded by clients of specialist real estate investment advisory company Delancey.

Northumbria University's 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,

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<sup>13</sup> [Inclusive Innovation Consultancy | Plexal](#)



for example autistic entrepreneurs. Ravensbourne University in London is supporting disabled student entrepreneurs

Support is more widely available for BAME entrepreneurs. The largest centre is the Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship, CREME, at Aston, led by Professor Monder Ram. It is a Centre of Excellence in research and teaching on ethnically diverse entrepreneurship and offers practical support for BAME entrepreneurs. Professor Ram is well connected to policy-making communities and to networks of ethnically diverse 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 to establish the network. As these are both within the university enterprise outreach departments, this suggests that the universities provide practical support. Similarly, a network in Wales which supports ethnically diverse entrepreneurs has developed close links with Swansea University's enterprise programme.

Both networks for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs in the West Midlands that were interviewed 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 Businesspeople, and for Inclusive Entrepreneurship. Academic involvement is viewed as increasing the legitimacy of their activities.

One of the networks for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs 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 the 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 ethnically diverse student entrepreneurs in its programmes and also works with ethnically diverse non-university entrepreneurs.

A recent player is the Oxford Foundry at University of Oxford's Said Business School. In July 2021 it launched an Entrepreneurial Fellowship Initiative designed 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 were expected to undertake an eight-week summer internship placement 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, networks have employed PhD students as interns. This is for example the case with an ethnically diverse network in the North West and one in Wales.

The data here are only a snapshot of the kinds of engagement that universities currently have with ethnically diverse 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 and where they are as indicated by the presence of formal organisations which support ethnically diverse 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 no programmes have 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 policymakers who might be able to find financial and other incentives for more links to be in place.

An increasing trend is for co-authoring of reports and academic articles by practitioners and academics, nationally and internationally.

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 3 are specifically focused on ethnically diverse 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. Overall, there is a reasonable match between where the networks are and links to the universities.

University	Location	Activity	Connection
<i>East Midlands</i>			
Nottingham	EM	Disability entrepreneurship support and research, Dr Tom Coogan <a href="#">Dr Tom Coogan - Nottingham University Business School</a>	Innovate UK project
Leicester	EM	<a href="#">Africa Research Group   University of Leicester</a>	Network
Northampton	EM	<a href="#">University awarded grant to fund enterprise programme for BAME students   University of Northampton (2018)</a>	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 <a href="#">Diversity Research. Enterprise and Diversity Research Cluster (EDRC) - University of Birmingham</a>	Network
Birmingham City	WM	<a href="#">Centre for Enterprise, Innovation and Growth - Birmingham City Business School   Birmingham City University (bcu.ac.uk)</a>	Network
Aston, CRÈME <a href="#">Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME)   Aston University</a>	WM	Research centre and active support for BAME entrepreneurs led by Monder Ram, MBE Eva Kasperova undertakes research on disabled entrepreneurs <a href="#">Eva Kašperová — Aston Research Explorer</a>	2 BAME Networks
<i>Yorkshire and Humberside</i>			
Leeds Beckett	Yorks & Humber	Research and Enterprise Service <a href="#">Simon Baldwin   Leeds Beckett University</a> <a href="#">(99+) Canon Simon Baldwin, FEEUK   LinkedIn</a>	Network
University of Bradford <a href="#">Business &amp; Community - School</a>	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	Network

<u>of Management - University of Bradford</u>		<u>Dr David Spicer, Senior Lecturer in HRM at the University of Bradford</u>	
<i>South East</i>			
Oxford University Saïd Business School	SE	<u>Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses UK   Saïd Business School (ox.ac.uk)</u>	Network
Oxford University Saïd Business School	SE	<u>New Oxford initiative to ensure inclusion in entrepreneurship   University of Oxford</u> 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>East of England</i>			
Cambridge University	EE	<u><a href="#">Cambridge Social Ventures - Cambridge Centre for Social Innovation - Cambridge Judge Business School</a></u>	Network
<i>South West</i>			
Plymouth	SW	DBI is a business incubator based at Plymouth University <u>Champions Networking - University of Plymouth</u>	Network
<i>North East</i>			
Northumbria	NE	In the <u><a href="#">Business Clinic</a></u> 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"> <li>• Autistic Entrepreneurs – to encourage / support people with autism to establish and run their own business.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• We also undertake consultancy projects for charities, schools and social enterprises addressing a range of disabilities.</li> </ul>	Enterprise Educators respondent

<i>Wales</i>			
Swansea	Wales	Student enterprise team <u>Student Enterprise - Swansea University</u>	Network
<i>London</i>			
Birkbeck	London	Research and engagement with disabled and ethnically diverse entrepreneurs and networks which support both groups, and with policy-making bodies.	Regional Studies Association funded project research
Kings	London	Accelerator programme. Strong support for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs	Network

**Table 3 Universities' links with ethnically diverse and disabled entrepreneurs**

Source: Authors

#### **4. Primary Data analysis**

As mentioned above, 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted with BAME and Disabled Networks in the period between January 2020 and July 2021 (see Table 4 for more detail). The detailed interview guide is available in Appendix A.

For this study, data collection involved several sources and two iterative rounds. The first round relied on secondary data such as observations, archival sources, up-to-date news reports and an extensive review of secondary data and literature on BAME and Disabled entrepreneur support in the UK. The second round relied on field interviews as the primary source of data, as well as up-to-date secondary data analysis.

Field interviews, as the primary sources of data, were transcribed and analysed (using coding, themes and extraction). Themes were produced in relationship to the background of the organisation, its excellence, the effect of location on activity, as well as evident policy implications. To triangulate the interviews' analysis, secondary data such as archival data, news and public reports were gathered and analysed in each individual case.

Computer-based analysis for this research was used using NVivo 12 Plus. NVivo is a qualitative analysis software program that is designed for the systematic analysis of qualitative data. The software has powerful tools to create open codes (free nodes), and more advanced code structures with nested sub-codes (tree nodes) as well as relationships between codes (Bazeley, 2007).

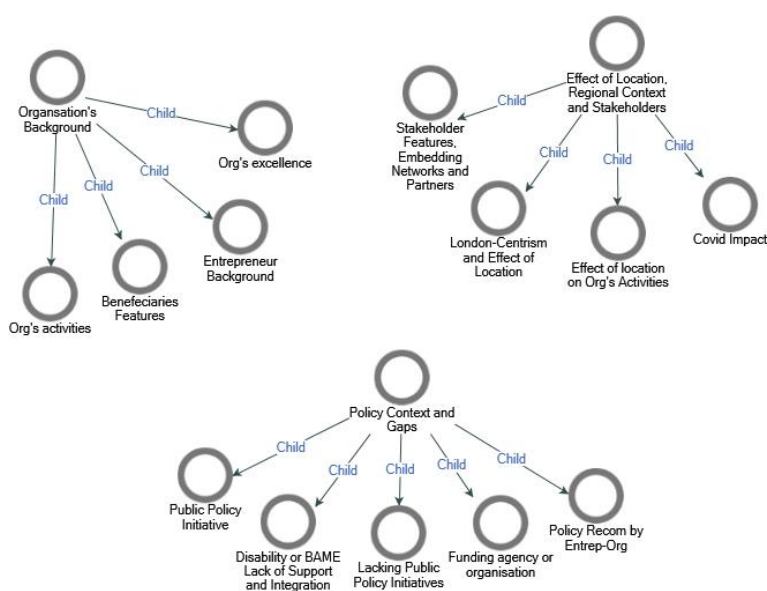
The researchers first identified a group of principal categories of data related to the lines of inquiry of the study. This is in line with Strauss and Corbin's (1994) argument that a priori definition of certain baseline concepts in a study supports a grounded theory approach to data gathering and analysis, which is applicable for an interpretive portrayal of the world (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012).

The a priori codes are codes that are developed before examining the data (interview transcripts). Some of the identified open (initial) codes included:

- Organisation's activities and excellence
- Lack of public policy initiatives

- Lack of BAME or Disabled support
- Stakeholder and beneficiary features
- Effect of location and London centrism

Figure 2 illustrates the project map of codes that NVivo produced.



**Figure 2 Project Code Map**

Source: Authors



Legend:	<u>A</u> : Consulting/Mentorship/ Networking/Alliances <u>B</u> : Advocacy and Public Policy/Activist <u>C</u> : Capacity-building, business advice and possible funding <u>D</u> : Social Enterprise/supports social enterprises <u>E</u> : Charity		
	<u>BAME</u>	<u>Disabled</u>	<u>Generalist/Activists</u>
<b>Northwest England</b>			1.( <u>D</u> ); (BAME) [Manchester]
<b>Yorkshire and Humberside</b>	2. <u>A1</u> [Yorkshire]		
<b>West Midlands</b>	[Birmingham] 3.( <u>AB1</u> ) 4.( <u>AD</u> )		
<b>Wales</b>	5. ( <u>AE1</u> ) [Wales]		
<b>East England</b>		6.( <u>A2</u> ) [Essex]	7.( <u>A3</u> ) [East Anglia]; (General entrepreneurship support with a track for refugee entrepreneurs)
<b>Southwest England</b>	8. ( <u>A4</u> ) [Devon]	9.( <u>AE2</u> ) [Bournemouth] 10. ( <u>C</u> ) [Bristol]	
<b>London</b>		11.( <u>AC1</u> ); there is a program solely dedicated for SMEs in West England to employ more disabled people 12.( <u>AC2</u> ) 13.( <u>AC3</u> )	14. ( <u>CE</u> ); there is a special track for refugee entrepreneurs) 15. ( <u>AB2</u> ); business consulting service for government and local councils with special track for microbusinesses) 16.(disability activist) (B)

**Table 4 Interviewed networks and organisations**

#### **4.1 Organisations' background and type of activity**

The organisations interviewed undertake a wide range of activities in helping entrepreneurs in either the disabled and BAME groups, or mainstream entrepreneurs.

##### *4.1.1. Disabled entrepreneurs*

The suite of services provided for disabled entrepreneurs ranged across personal coaching, finding employment and networking as well as occasional transport and food vouchers. Some organisations worked with the local councils to identify and help target beneficiaries.

Our analysis indicates that some networks are more focused on disabled individuals than on disabled entrepreneurs. As such, programmes dedicated solely for disabled entrepreneurs are limited, especially given that disabled entrepreneurs are mostly engaged in necessity entrepreneurship.

For example, a network in Bristol I focuses on working with the local councils and industries to deal with disabled individuals in general, while focussing on learning difficulties. The organisation also provides business coaching services for disabled people.

AE2 provide a wide range of services for disabled individuals, starting with helping them find employment opportunities, to network with other disabled individuals to helping them set up their own business (business plan, marketing, etc). AE2 also observes the mental health of their clients through personal meetings or phone calls, especially as many of them have withdrawn from their local communities:

---

*We have got a lady who is Community Housing Association. And she sits in their communities' team and gives out grants but also looks at support. We have a lady with a guide dog who is fully blind, who is also a qualified nurse. She lost her sight about five years ago due to a disease..... Oh, we have got a lady who is a mental health worker, and therapist.*

---

ACI provide a programme for young disabled people, but it is not purely entrepreneurial in nature.

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*So we have a programme called change 100, which is an internship programme for disabled undergraduates. But they're not entrepreneurial in nature, you know, more and more skills based through the virtuals, and then helping them find and secure*

*employment, rather than helping them start their own business or develop an idea or you'll take the idea and turn it into a business plan and maybe apply for funding to do that.*

---

One of the programmes organised by AC3 targets disabled individuals in the LGBTQ groups who want to start their own business:

*Believe it or not, we have a lot of LGBTQ that approached us as well, from the disability perspective, you know, and that's previously a community that haven't really wanted to come forward very much and admit, you know, what they're sort of different types of labels are, but they are becoming a bit more open now. So, you know, we already touch so many different types of disabilities. And the funny thing is, we don't even advertise [...] I don't have any marketing. We just do this through word of mouth.*

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#### 4.1.2 Ethically diverse entrepreneurs

Many networks provide mentoring and coaching to entrepreneurs directly or through intermediaries. Different business models are employed by the organisations.

AI for example work through a membership-model where the clients pay membership and obtain access to a wide range of services. They also have partners in different sectors to widen their clients' networks:

*What we do is that we've got partners, such as the FSB, the CBI and the Institute of directors, who are always wanting to reach out to the Asian business community, and I sit on all their boards and on what we do is that we don't replicate, what they do is that we give access, so we become the intermediary to get members to get good quality, well researched access to content and high level events, because they're not ready for it at the moment because they're too busy working in their business.*

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D have just begun mentoring sessions after the great success of their group meetings and newsletter that provide a wide range of business information.

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*[...] things like the mentoring, so the mentoring is not yet fully developed, because that came later on. And so, we trained about six people to be mentors for the network. And they are just starting to get going and getting matched to those who have said they wanted mentoring.*

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A3 provide a wide range of business support services, but the organisation has a special track for refugee entrepreneurs.

---

*If you were to think of an inverted triangle, at the bottom, it's for those which are disadvantaged communities, so your ex-offenders, those who are refugees, migrant workers, those who need further from the labour market, etc, etc. So that will always need some form of government intervention, which we are happy to support.*

---

AEI also provide support for refugee entrepreneurs, among other business advice services.

---

*(we also have a) community transport project, which basically we have a van that transports people, they have vulnerable people, e.g. asylum seekers and refugees given the Universal Credit they receive is very small, i.e. not having the ability to buy enough food or afford transport to where you can buy food so we provide community transport support in terms of being able to go to a store if they need to.*

---

ABI broadcast a service they provide through local TV and Radio targeted at non-English speaking communities. The service entails a hotline available in several Asian languages for entrepreneurs who want to start a business and do not have the required knowledge.

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*[we] would be telling them what they need to do or how to apply for grants and forms because we found some businesses will pay money to third parties to apply for grants that were available to [your] local schools. And we want to cut that middle person out. So, what we decided to do, we had a hotline. And we were allowing businesses regardless of membership to call us. And I was signposting them to people who speak their language to give them pro bono free advice.*

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London-based CE also work with refugee entrepreneurs. The organisation published a report on their insight upon working with them.

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*The report will give quite concrete guidance to organisations seeking to either create explicit refugee entrepreneurship programmes or at least consider how they can strengthen their existing business support to engage in including refugees. I think it is an interesting topic... [it is] very much kind of working with LEPs and local authorities under the other funding bodies to help them understand the realities of funding refugee entrepreneurship programmes rather than more general business support.*

---

CE also work with a niche of entrepreneurs which are refugees with disabilities. Their research uncovered interesting insights.

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*Most of the refugees with disabilities and others, most will set up small businesses, the 5% that will go on and start high growth businesses are require slightly different support. I think one of the interesting findings and outcomes from the refugee pilots that we have looked at that we were able to fund and have a nice range of different organisations,*

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Also working with refugees, A4 recognised the long red tape that the refugees must work with. Thus, they developed an alternative route.

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*Because the main route advices you get from either the Citizens' Advice Bureau or the Job Centre Plus or the schools or even the Home Office itself, when you're on that journey as a, an asylum seeker or refugee, there are two routes, if you go for employment, and you join the queue, at the job centre, or you go for education, which also there's a long queue as well, but also the outputs, those were finishing, there's a big number of individuals. So that third option of starting your own business or entrepreneurs, it is not much accentuated within the BAME community. So that is why we have been developing from there...*

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AD is a “non-profit organisation that focuses to address socioeconomic issues that affect the African and black professionals and entrepreneurs in the UK.” They offer a suite of services on business startup, growth, and skill development.

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*[we aim to] to create and a business ecosystem that will support African business community. So, it has two missions one is to empower African business in the UK to*

*drive and participate, productivity in the economy. Second, promote multilateral trade between the UK and Africa,*

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#### **4.2 Location effect in each region and regional context**

When it comes to location and context, an important gap emerges, London-centrism and the uneven/disproportionate geographic dispersions for both the BAME and disabled groups.

AB2 remarks:

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*And we've been quizzing a couple of the universities that we've spoken to about their, their community and who it is that they support. But yeah, there does seem to be a big disparity. And, you know, more naturally in other parts of the country, London's faring a little bit better. But I think that's, you know, that's just volume of different demographics, as opposed to [making] things even more accessible or open to different communities.*

---

A3 draws the attention to the importance of local differences in terms of introducing support programmes.

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*And at the moment, the government nationally does not have any programme or idea of business support apart from prem (?) products out there. And what we should be doing is having a three-year programme, which is non-government biased, which is then having its own local nuances, and where we need to drive certain effects into, into the country. And right now, there's a lot of people going to be looking at self-employment, how we do that within our locality areas, because Cornwall will be very different from London.*

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##### **4.2.1 Disabled entrepreneurs**

Interviewees have highlighted the centrality of London when it comes to disability support as opposed to other areas.

B remarks.

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*Yeah, I couldn't imagine. I bet you finding a lot of it. Quite traditionally London or London-centric. Yes. The number of networks in London compared to anywhere else.*

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AE2 argues that in London they could even access more funding, whereas other areas tend to be ignored.

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*I think if we were in London, we'd probably get more funding. [...] We're in Bournemouth, which is one of the top 20% deprived areas. And we see quite a lot down here of nastiness, don't we? But I think if we weren't London centric funding available, if I could get an office in London, I'd be a happy girl. Because I look at the funding streams and what's out there and most of it is based in London or Liverpool [and] that's where the government are focusing their money. And unfortunately, our areas not one of them.*

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Not surprisingly, AC3 highlights the importance of London as a central hub for disability and disability support.

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*London has always been a fantastic hub for us to be able to operate out of. [...] We've been approached by over 1000 people across 63 different disabilities from 28 countries, right. [...] And so there is great demand. And I think for those people, the perception of London, being a hub has always been it's always been a positive. [...] Being in London has always been very convenient. However, post COVID I think we're in a very different world right now. Doesn't matter where we are.*

---

AC2 indicates that moving to London from the Midlands was a decision they made to have easier access to contacts, events and other organisations.

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*..Because travelling is a challenge for me, because of my disability. If I was in the Midlands, I wouldn't be doing this kind of thing. So it'd be remote meetings or email or telephone calls. Whereas my competitors were turning up at events and chatting to people and going out for a drink afterwards, and going to their offices and meeting people. And, and I couldn't do any of that. And that really did impact on, I felt at impact or not impacted on our success. And so I moved to London five years ago [...] I could go to those events, I could make those informal connections, I could turn up at people's offices and have that face to face rapport building. Because most*

*of the work that goes on happens in London, so you know, any big conferences or seminars or exhibitions would be in London, most of the headquarters of the big organisations we were working with are in London, so and I can travel within London, it's that's easier, I can use the public transport. So actually, for me, geography was huge in terms of what I was able to achieve.*

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### **4.3 Policy context and gaps**

Several organisations mentioned the issues of continuity and programme sustainability conditioned by funding.

Some organisations work closely with the local councils to advocate and consult on specific support programmes. London-based AB2 have been working in Gloucestershire.

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*I'm doing some work in Gloucestershire, with their skills and employment team. And they're particularly looking at people with disabilities. So, they're taking their corporate parent role, and trying to understand which of their residents or communities might need that extra bit of support to get either into employment or self-employment..[..]*

*And what I'm trying to do with them is to try and link into as much of some of the cyber and tech activity that's happening down in the county. I think there's some good examples of things happening for more of a skills and employment side. And but I think in, you know, maybe 12 months time that will translate better into self-employment.*

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Similarly, A3 mentions the one-dimensionality of the government-funded programmes.

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*..And it's one of the things which I absolutely hate about a lot of the government funded programmes and a lot of the local authority funding programmes, because it is very, very one dimensional for their clients. You've been on it, see you later, we've got your number 12 hours, tick, tick, tick free workshops, jobs are good, and we get paid. That's not how we work as an organisation. And we're finding that there are more products being brought into the market, which are quite confusing for that individual.*

---

AI shared their experience in partnerships with universities. However, academic collaborations do not come without challenges such as chain of command, defined roles and “*sluggish*” operations.



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*So, when I worked at Santander and it, were developing the Breakthrough programme, that's when I realised the value of university partnerships in terms of access to knowledge, and access to content, access to resources, research and development. So, for me, I've made I've always made a beeline for university partnerships, Leeds, Beckett have been brilliant. And now we're working quite closely with the University of Bradford. The problem that I have is that they're so massive in terms of you know, bureaucracy, and their work.*

---

A3 added that LEPs<sup>14</sup> have been focussing on growth far more than job creation when the latter should receive more focus. In A3's opinion this arises from a lack of communication between current government programmes, e.g. DWP and self-employment programmes. In their opinion, the government programmes are not talking to each other as they are working in silos, rendering support programmes repetitive or contradictory.

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*[..] For Work and Pensions, that's their siloed ambition. And then we move into the self employment agenda saying we need business support. Well, now we leave you see you later move into this space, one penny.*

*[..] Many businesses can progress without having to take 10 20 30 people on, you got to look at the kickstart programme to see how that's being implemented. Because you'll be taking people from disadvantaged backgrounds to support that. And that's a word obviously, from 16 to 24 year olds, but we need to look at an older person's kickstart as well. So how do you engage with older people across all communities, into working environments or into a progressive environment where they can feel supported? And I don't think that's been done as well.*

*[..] I think that there is a big question mark about if someone has a disability, and it's recognised whether or not a hidden disability or not, they probably wouldn't know where to access support from. So they would probably come through to our programmes, through a range of different channels. But they wouldn't necessarily say there's a programme of business support, which is helping people of BAME communities. There's lots of good work out there. But there's so many organisations trying to help similar communities. But it doesn't always fit. [..] And I think actually people get confused by that. Sometimes it's not completely joined up.*

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<sup>14</sup> Local enterprise partnerships

#### 4.3.1 BAME entrepreneurs

A3 is in the East of England, founders mention that there are coastal areas where there is a lot of “deprivation.”

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*There is also a lot of deprivation there. And there's also a lot of migrant communities there. But there's also a lot of work around the port and supply chain aspects as well. So, there's interesting stuff, we've then got large, which is a very interesting space, because you've got the universities, you've got creative arts [...] not dissimilar to London.*

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At the same time, the founder indicated that from a national level the area seems to be “forgotten.”

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*And the other thing I'd say about East Anglia as well, is that this from a national level, it sometimes it often feels like it's the forgotten region. So, you hear quite a lot about sort of support for businesses in north and the northeast and northwest, certainly here, support around, you know, things that then in the southwest, that the east, sometimes overlooked, I think because of its close proximity to London, people sort of almost see that as it's an outreach of London, but actually, it has sort of very different needs, wants.*

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ABI discusses that not only do the areas outside London tend to be ignored, but business support programmes there are under-marketed.

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*Every time I get approached by any of the government, bodies, really all departments are saying, look, you're coming to us, and asking, what are the business needs, you got to keep this off, because I do sometimes feel everything is London-centric. And it's not being rolled out to the other cities. So I feel that sometimes things are all London centric, but there is a world outside of London. [...] There is a world outside London, you know. [...] the government are pushing more black Asian minority ethnic businesses to do that as well to go for it. But we can't, we can't promote, or we can't make people businesses aware of things if we don't know.*

---

AD also brings up the London-centricity issue when it comes to support programmes.

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*I think maybe because my business is based in Birmingham. Second, Birmingham boasts a huge, diverse community of business I think of after, after London, Birmingham is the second in terms of in the catchment area. If you look at in the catchment area like Coventry, the Hamptons, Leicester, also Birmingham, you can easily tap into the Midlands community, which is one of the second biggest after London. London I noticed they have a lot of support. There's a lot of activity going on and moved around has been neglected for quite a long time especially for the BAME community. And as the government changed our strategy in terms of economic regeneration, they are looking to see how they can engage these communities.*

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A4 is in the southwest of UK and they explain that much is yet to be done to help the BAME in general, however deep-rooted changes have to occur at first.

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*They [city council] could do more. It's the way it's structured. It's that composition top to bottom, when it comes as on the national level, the agenda is ABCD and they have to see it happening in the regional levels. It's just to make sure it's not a box ticking, they're gonna end up as an exercise where they'll have to free people just representing by not delivering the change. So that's the risk but it has to be more of a demand to the regional, first holders and decision makers saying "What is it that you are doing concretely and having that data available for everyone?"*

*[...] we started looking at solutions. Let's work on collaboration, especially with this time where we've had this movement of BLM<sup>15</sup> and what is happening around the world, the opportunities here now [...] if a city council in an organisation come forward saying we are supporting the change or our action towards making sure we don't have much or we listening to the voice of the members of our community, you're not going to get much of sticks or bad people throwing bad words to you compared to if there was no movement happening already. So, I think there's an opportunity for a change if we push in it.*

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#### 4.3.1. Disabled entrepreneurs

When it comes to disability support, several interviewees highlighted that the disabled are being treated as one category regardless of their type of disability.

AC2 discusses this frustration, especially in comparison to the BAME groups.

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<sup>15</sup> Black Lives Matter

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*We talk about the disability community. I don't actually think there is such a thing because we're so diverse. You know, the only thing we all have in common with other disabled people is that we have something that gives us barriers, but you know, it could be an 18 year old young woman with down syndrome and a returning veteran from Afghanistan with two limbs missing, you know, there's not much they've got in common other than they both face barriers to getting work. And so, you know, you don't always have a network of people like you that you can turn to that says, Where do I go to for this? And where do I go to?*

*For that, you know, I mean, normally, if you're in a BAME community, and there are communities, you know, then there will be people in that community who might be small business owners who might be able to give you some tips or guidance or say, here's the local, whatever it might be. But if you're disabled, you're not any more likely to be in a family of disabled people, then, you know, it's a different community, you just whoever you were before, but now you've become disabled, or you were born disabled into a non-disabled family.*

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The founder also discusses how some programmes are a mere “tick box policy” by the government as they are not designed by disabled persons to serve other disabled persons.

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*The government asked people what they want. [...] I've filled in the questionnaire. It doesn't give you much opportunity to really say what you need and what's not going well, and what is going well, and it's very tick box. Sadly.*

*Irritating because it's not being designed by disabled people, for disabled people. It is some well-meaning individual who makes assumptions about what they would like, and it's over there, you know, rather than “Why don't we get disabled people together to decide what we need to decide. And then we can design the questionnaire?”*

---

AE2 draws the attention to another disability-specific problem related to young adults after reaching 25 years of age ([EHC](#) scheme). It is at that age that some supported internships and health care programmes come to an end and then young adults are left to their own devices.

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*You know, I think the best thing that the unit can do, and it's something that came up a few years ago, because I tried to get is actually sending some of the government officials, ministers in the disability unit to work with some of us charities, just kind of shadow us for a week. Just see what we do at grassroots level.*

*The other big issue that I have that is something I'm fighting is supported internships. Yeah. So as an apprentice, you can do that from 16 up to 100. And goodness knows how old if you're not supported in, you can only join one until your education health care (EHC) plan ends at the age of 25.*

*We have got disabled young adults who have been kept within the education system doing functional skills qualification Until the day after their 25th birthday, and then kicked out into the public. And they then are now ready to 27 or 28, to start thinking about work to start looking at doing a supportive internship. They can't because they don't exist anymore because they're too long. And they can't do a traineeship or an apprenticeship because they haven't got level two maths and English [...] So he got a whole host of young disabled adults between the ages of probably 20 and 30. That unless they stay in college until they're 20, they do an entry level one qualifications aren't getting any help.*

*Because there was a scheme that worked simply well, it was called bridge to work. And basically, it was a government scheme from a few years back where a new business or new organisation, the government would pay six months of a new member of staff salaries, six months would pay them outright. So you could have a new member of staff working with your bill for six months. And then after that, you know, if they were good, whatever that that business would hopefully take that person on, we need something like that back. Okay.*

---

AC2 remarks that the disabled community is “diverse” and cannot be placed in one box. There are several underlying factors such as being born with a disability versus gaining one later in life or being born into a disabled vs a non-disabled family. More complications are introduced in relevance to the relevant ethnic minority. Like other interviewees, AC2 also shares its frustration of the “tick box” approach by the government.

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*the government asked people what they want. But if you look at the, if you look at the I've done it, I've filled in the questionnaire. It's, it doesn't give you much opportunity to really say what you need and what's not going well, and what is going well, and it's very tick box. Sadly.*

*[...] Irritating because it's not being designed with, you know, by disabled people for disabled people. It's some well-meaning individual who makes assumptions about what they would like, and it's over there, you know, rather than why don't we get disabled people together to decide what we need to decide. And then we can design the questionnaire?*

---

B concurs on the generic disabled perspective when it comes to support programmes.

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*We have to remember that disabled people learn about disability through non-disabled people, quite often, the first point of call is a medical professional, then it's going to be the people around them, and the people around them are only influenced by their perception of disability.*

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It argues that support programmes themselves must consider disability access and friendliness of the application.

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*I've applied for Innovate UK funding, and I, I can't even.. I hate it, the application process is so difficult. And I think there needs to be considerations in accessibility for that, what that looks like, you know, if someone's deaf, if someone's blind, would they be able to still use that application in the same way? Do we need to have alternative methods of submitting applications in alternative formats, you know, some people can't sit there and write reams of information that just physically can't do that. But they will be able to give you that information in a different way. So that's one way of looking at the other types of support that disabled entrepreneurs might need.*

*So in addition to the money to put into the business, they might need support, to help to maybe get a support worker, for example, to help them do all the tasks that are needed. So that might be a no typing, getting to meetings, you know, all of that. All of the other things that disabled people have to consider.*

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The issue of “tick box” activities was mentioned again, especially when the source of funding is the government and reports have to be submitted. A3 comments.

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*For example, the tick box exercises that they must have 12 hours of support, okay? [...] that's the one that the government is going to prove that they've had that support. And we can do that, okay, that doesn't necessarily support us as an organisation. [...] We've got your details tick you don't need 12 hours. See you later. Yeah. And it's one of the things which I absolutely hate about a lot of the government funded programmes and a lot of the local authority funding programmes, because it is very, very one dimensional for the clients.*

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The interviewee suggests looking at the community holistically while considering the individual needs of the members.

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*And one of the things which I wanted to do was drive forward the power of enterprise within specific smaller communities so that they had a voice. And then that voice could be represented by the government...[.] we are driving for things like LEP subgroups around freestyling starts up and on those I'm bringing in your housing associations, you've BAME groups and those which are representative of women or migrant workers, because it is fundamental that we understand the demographic rather than just saying this is how business support is going to work.*

---

Furthering the gap, B points out that disabled people learn about disabilities from non-disabled people.

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*We have to remember that disabled people learn about disability through non-disabled people, quite often, the first point of call is a medical professional, then it's going to be the people around them, and the people around them are only influenced by their perception of disability.*

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#### 4.2.3. BAME entrepreneurs

Like other interviewees, ABI draws the attention to the “tick box” programmes. It suggests that starting new support programs to promote inclusivity is not necessary when the Chambers of Commerce in UK still have a long way to go in inclusion.

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*The chambers have a long way to being inclusive, and not, you know, chambers across the UK and say, we've got a long way of being inclusive. And as long as would I set up a [BAME] business Chamber of Commerce today? The answer would be no, I wouldn't. What I would do is work with in chambers to make ourselves more inclusive.*

*[.] We're not moving quick enough to be more inclusive. Sometimes it is just a tick box exercise. And there's no lie about that, that you always need experts in those areas to be at the forefront or within your organisation. If you don't have people within that organisation that you can have understanding.*

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Regarding the support policy ecosystem, AD explains the low effectiveness of several support programmes targeted at the BAME communities, especially when it comes to government support programmes.

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*There is policy in terms of how they engage small businesses, for example, a good example is Innovate UK. And they have a lot of funding available, some but majority of it is targeted high growth business. When we know around 80% of the UK, mainly small businesses and majority of them from the BAME community, either one or two three employees. And sometimes the target usually was around employing 10 people or more high growth. [...] But the requirement criteria is you're employing five people or more, which sometime exclude a lot of BAMEs, more business because of them, whether it's one or two, three people, or if they're recruiting more people, it's on an ad hoc basis or contracting.*

*BAME groups, just put in one group, but it's not clearly demonstrated over the years, that's why some of those support groups, the policy and the strategy has not been effective.*

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The interviewer adds the issues of digitalisation and access to finance.

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*So, one of the key issues that has been coming on for many years is slow adoption to technology by the BAME communities. So in terms of digitization processes, and the increased quality, productivity and all those things, especially when the digital economy. So, this is a major area that we hope to support our business community also to be to our device in this area. And of course, access to finance really is that is a major issue across A lot of them are still struggling to even access the government support.*

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As such more cooperation from the government bodies is needed as the support system is directly related to institutional issues.

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*Yeah. And also, participation in the economy. We want to see more engagement from local form of government in the local within the BAME community in terms of their engagement strategy, so more participation in some of our programs, and we want to see more visibility.*

*Some of them are innovative is just the support system is no is not the supportive system is not very conducive to support these groups. So, they might have good,*



*innovative idea. But support system is not very encouraging, to be honest, not very focused to these groups. So, they might start, they struggle, and then they fail, so the support system, which is to do the institutional issues, also, that tend to be biased on certain groups.*

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AEI held a programme for refugee entrepreneurs which came to an end when it was just beginning to achieve results.

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*We have another one called information refugees, where entrepreneurs, if they are interested in that, you know, they can get help and also gain help from our activities. So, in that regard, I would say it is pretty important. But then once again, like I said, it is an issue of continuity. So sometimes a project just ends abruptly, and you can't really continue.*

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D is located in the northwest of England. The interviewee claimed that they are unaware of any other BAME social organisation in their area. Like AD, they discuss the issue of sustained financing.

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*Like other funding organizations I was speaking to, that is about sustained funding, you know, it's not just about sustained large amounts of funding or resources as well in-kind. And that will then allow the sector to actually be able to stand on its own two feet. So, it's coming from years of kind of underfunding and years of where there's just not been enough of a focus on that. And, and I think in order for it, to be able to be capable of surviving and standing on its own feet, it needs that initial kind of sustained pots of money and resources to grow to, you know, get rid of the wobbly legs and actually stand on its own two feet.*

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In a similar vein, AEI mentions that EYST (See Table 1) mentor interested BAME individuals on entering public life.

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*There's an organisation called EYST. And they have a BAME, a mentorship scheme into public life. That means they have, you know, ministers, like the health minister, you know, I'm forgetting and you know, all these different ministers who actually just, you know, mentor individuals from BAME backgrounds were interested in going into public life, there's so much activity that it offers, I think that [the rest of the] UK does not do.*

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#### 4.4 Summary of Place issues

Regions matter because they differ in their economic history, they differ in populations in general and in the make-up of ethnically diverse and disabled populations. Specifically, they are different in the organisations that are actually or potentially available to provide support roles and which differ in outcomes they are seeking. Regions vary in their degree of diversity and openness to interaction with other regions and with national activity. They differ in the types of organisation that are or might be agents for change. What matters in the positioning of regions in processes of change is leadership and the networking capacity of the networks and their partners on behalf of minority entrepreneurs.

Table 2 provides detail on the geography of where there is support for some kinds of entrepreneurs and not others. Regions vary in the opportunities that are available to nascent or actual entrepreneurs. Expectations of where to access resources such as mentoring and finance also differ.

We next review support in each region, beginning with the devolved nations. What we see is differences between Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales in national level commitment to minority entrepreneurship, with Scotland some way behind the other two.

##### Scotland

While support for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs is increasing, Scotland as in Wales and Northern Ireland has a low percentage of self-employed people with disabilities. There is, however, little evidence of targeted policy support for either group. This suggests both that EDI in entrepreneurship does not form part of national agencies' remits and that they are not a key stakeholder in this agenda.

Scottish Enterprise was contacted but were not able to provide information directly and sent general brochures and directed attention to the Business Gateway website ([Business Gateway | Business Gateway | Business Gateway \(bgateway.com\)](#)). This site did not provide any information on specific support. Later Innovate UK provided detailed information on relevant networks in Scotland which helped to fill the gaps.

However, there are growing opportunities for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs, especially those for women: three of the 5 networks are **exclusively** for women entrepreneurs. Other groups included

Commented [JS1]: OK?

are BME refugee and migrant communities. The organisations collectively provide entrepreneurial support awards which bring profile, networking opportunities, training, mentoring and advocacy on behalf of their members' interests.

For people with disabilities there appears to be no specialised support for entrepreneurship so that they appear to be excluded from networking and other support opportunities as well as from advocacy on their behalf. The network listed on the Gateway website does not appear to be functioning

### **Northern Ireland**

Ethnically diverse and disabled entrepreneurship have traditionally been low on the political agenda in Northern Ireland. There has tended to be a gender and age focus with support provided for women and younger entrepreneurs. Part of the explanation might be that Northern Ireland has the UK's lowest percentage of self-employed people with a disability (2%). However, according to Disability Action, 1 in 5 people in Northern Ireland have a disability<sup>16</sup>.

Things are changing quickly. Enterprise Northern Ireland (ENI) has a commitment to EDI. *“Enterprise Northern Ireland’s primary aim is to grow the economy and enrich local communities through development of enterprise and entrepreneurship. All activity is importantly underpinned by a commitment to inclusivity as future growth of our society will succeed only if the rich diversity of our people and their entrepreneurial spirit is allowed to flourish.”* It has developed a NI Equity Taskforce which will develop a set of recommendations for action.

Following the launch of the British Business Bank, report (2020) [Alone Together: Entrepreneurship and diversity in the UK](#) a number of regional sessions were held to discuss the findings in the context of the local ecosystems including one in NI attended by ENI. Following on from this event, a small sub-group of 9 stakeholders agreed to reconvene and discuss what actions the region might now implement.

At the time of the study, little support exists for either group as there are only two targeted networks, both for disabled entrepreneurs. Support, however, has become available for disabled

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<sup>16</sup> [1 in 5 people in Northern Ireland have a disability | Disability Action Northern Ireland](#)

and ethnically diverse people to become self-employed. The national programme [Unltd](#) is an important stakeholder for providing funding for social enterprises funding for BAME and disabled entrepreneurs.

In Northern Ireland there is thus evidence of system change and more dialogue between institutional stakeholders at national level, with local stakeholders, and with the British Business Bank through its NI representative.

## **Wales**

The population of Wales is predominantly white (93%). The remaining 7% suffer from notable inequalities as they remain disproportionately concentrated in low-paid sectors (Owen et al., 2015). The proportion of self-employed people with disabilities is 6% as is the case in Scotland. Where Wales differs from Scotland is the active stakeholder involvement of national organisations including Business Wales (Welsh government) and the charity Disability Wales, which is the national association of disabled peoples' organisations in Wales.

Business Wales offers an accelerator programme designed to champion diversity in entrepreneurship in Wales. It aims to developing participants' core business skills and a 'success mind-set' webinars and masterclasses, one-to-one expert mentoring and coaching, from inspirational speakers, role models and business growth experts.

In 2020 Disability Wales launched a programme for disabled entrepreneurs (crowdfunding, training, and coaching). The Disability Wales Endeavour project seeks to inspire and support disabled entrepreneurs to establish their own businesses. No other fully dedicated support organisations for disabled entrepreneurs exist in Wales.

In South Wales, where there is a higher concentration of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds than in other parts of Wales, there is one network for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs which offers assistance and support with business idea development. It has partnered with Swansea University Enterprise Centre for a Global Entrepreneurship Week event and the youth entrepreneur programme which offers placements. At one of the workshops, a representative from the Welsh Government attended. The network works with Business Wales and Ethnic Minorities & Youth

Support Team (EYST), identifying that Wales offers much activity in support of minority entrepreneurship.

For the Network, the operational side's main policy issue was continuity of funding and becoming self-sustaining – and “maintaining relationships with people that we've helped and then incorporate that activity to become one of our core organisational activities”. It was suggested that greater transparency of options on Innovate UK website is needed.

### **North East England**

The North East of England has two entrepreneurship/business support networks, one for Asian businesses and a generalist one. The evidence suggests that there is an axis of support for Asian businesses in the North East and Yorks and Humberside but that the activities are not necessarily interconnected. However, disabled entrepreneurs appear not have local access to specialised support. The lack of networks may be a reflection of the fact that only 4% of the region's self-employed have a disability.

The generalist network which declined to be interviewed, on its website claims to give North East businesses direct access to new market opportunities, finance and sector expertise. It works with 60 partners, including all five regional universities and high-profile organisations across the public and private sectors, bringing together the innovation ecosystem to support economic growth. It claims to have a commitment to diversity.

A priority has been women but not yet explicitly ethnically diverse or disabled entrepreneurs. The linkages with regional stakeholders suggest that if diversity were high on the agenda, then there would be sufficient capacity in the region to address the deficiencies.

The other network is targeted at Asian businesses but not for broader ethnically diverse populations. The Asian network was established to help address inequality, promote community cohesion and address the lack of access from the Asian community to existing business support programmes.

## **Yorkshire and Humberside**

Like the North East, Yorkshire and Humberside has a very successful Asian business network. However, the only network that supported disabled entrepreneurs has ceased that activity following a withdrawal of funding. Where this region differs from others is in the profile and ambition of the Asian Business network. It is far reaching in its activities and early on identified the advantages and leverage potential from working with local businesses alongside national and region policy organisations. It is distinctive in its focus on international trade.

The Asian business network is physically in Yorkshire because that is where the organisers live. The leaders, however, realised that the pool of the Asian community is quite small and decided that the interests of members would be better served if its ambitions were linked and built around the Northern Powerhouse, which includes the North East region, and is focused around the economy and its politics. The network provides a voice for the Yorkshire Asian Business community at regional, national and international levels as well as upskilling, networking bespoke events, mentoring and support services. An important aspect of that is in the area of international trade. The Diaspora of returnees is used for building trade links with the Indian subcontinent. The lead organiser has always seen the advantages of university partnerships including with Leeds Beckett and the University of Bradford.

The network established the Northern Asian Power Group and then the Northern Powerlist<sup>17</sup> to provide a voice for business on a regional, national and international level was launched to broaden that spectrum. There was a gap in the market in becoming a voice for the Asian businesses. The Powerlist has an independent judging panel which gives the network more credibility because it fits in with the Northern Powerhouse agenda. The network has built its own power base as its board consists of experts from government, education, business and the voluntary sector as well as across almost every discipline.

The network has been accepted on the Innovate UK RTC programme and is becoming a bridge between Innovate UK and businesses. RTC North's remit is to deliver a business support package to high growth-potential SMEs to help sustain innovative SMEs through the COVID-19 challenges and the resulting longer-term economic impact.

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<sup>17</sup> [NORTHERN ASIAN POWERLIST | Yaba \(yabauk.com\)](https://www.yabauk.com)

In spite of all the activity, there are continuing challenges. These are because north of Birmingham the Asian BAME community are not doing as well as in other locations. The challenge lies in uplifting those communities and getting them to work together. The network suggests that a mark of success would be if it did not exist in 2026 because it would have overcome all the barriers to successful Asian entrepreneurship and so social capital will have been generated between Asian businesses. The major policy issue is that Innovate UK need to be engaging with BAME communities and having personnel that look like the community.

In the early 2000s the organisation that supported disabled entrepreneurs was part of the Local Economic Growth Initiative (LEGI) in Bradford. It helped people become more entrepreneurial. A consortium of stakeholders was established including the local Chamber of Commerce, Bradford Council and other independent sector organisations. The LEGI programme lasted a couple of years but the entrepreneurship arm lasted 9 years.

While this was an example of collaboration between local stakeholders around a common goal, it did not survive leaving a policy gap. The gap was identified as the need for Northern authorities to raise ‘the business can do’ – a purposeful agenda. Bradford was said to be a poor example at proposing agile initiatives, compared to its neighbour Leeds which was very go ahead. In Bradford there is very little new money and local authorities need to embrace an enabler role in helping micro-businesses through a range of support including infrastructure support, advice, short term catalyst support, bringing skills onto company boards and providing help with applying for business support. A perceived barrier is the lack of new thinking by organisations such as Chambers of Commerce and local authorities. There is scope for raising the profile of success stories. All this needs to include disabled entrepreneurs so that initiatives are disability-led entrepreneurial organisations. There needs to be an investment in training and more partnerships and collaboration especially for retraining post-pandemic.

### **North West England**

The North West region has some support for both groups of entrepreneurs. It has three networks, two for entrepreneurs with a disability and one for BAME-led social enterprises. One of the disability networks was not aware of the other organisation in the same region. However, that is not a locally focused organisation. In this region, both networks for disabled entrepreneurs downplay the importance of the local while emphasising the national in their operations. For one

the explanation in part is the lack of engagement with local business organisations with issues relating to disability entrepreneurship. In the other, it is because the national scale is more appropriate for delivering what its members need. In contrast, the network was recently established explicitly to meet the entrepreneurial needs of ethnically diverse entrepreneurs. Hence within the same region the experiences of support organisations are very different.

At the local level, the experience of the first network has been that that existing organisations are not particularly supportive of disabled entrepreneurs e.g. FSB and Chamber of Commerce. They are quite protective of what they do and had not responded to an offer of working with them. Although this network is based in the North West, it offers support to disabled entrepreneurs nationally and internationally, either face to face or digitally. Hence the network transcends the frustrations of location. By working with universities in the North West and in London, the network's members benefit from access to a range of professional expertise and insights including mentoring, networking and supporting Access to Work applications. The organiser is active at the national policy level trying to brief the right persons in government about the tension which often exists between the intent and the administration of initiatives to support disabled people in self-employment.

The network's specific recommendations are that Access to Work Award should be moved from the DWP into BEIS as this is the department that is responsible for enterprise support policies and could help for example with access to finance. Disabled entrepreneurs often fall off credit ratings. Innovate UK should understand that when trying to support people particularly with protected characteristics, disabled people more so, these programmes need to be longer term and need to incorporate health and well-being. Therefore, funding for these programmes has to be patient.

For the second network for disabled people, one that operates online, the conclusion was that regional networks were not what disabled entrepreneurs wanted because of the distances they would have to travel to meetings etc. However, unlike the first network, they find that Chambers of Commerce and other organisations nationally are becoming more aware of disabled people's needs. The continuing barriers to support for disabled professionals and entrepreneurs are jargon in grant awarding processes; small pots of funding; and accessibility.

A dedicated business network was set up in 2020 as a branch of a larger organisation to support ethnically diverse social entrepreneurs within Greater Manchester. Its purpose was to fill a gap in



the support for networking, training, and mentoring. In this case, location matters in the political advocacy for social enterprises. There is a social enterprise advisory group to the Mayor of Manchester although the impact of that is yet to be felt.

However, the network argues that not enough money is being given to or been spent locally on BAME organizations, or on social enterprises, even with the Growth Hub. The network does not yet have powerful backers such as successful enterprises, although local stakeholders are aware of its activities. The network has put effort into making connections through attending meetings of relevant local organisations. As a consequence, the Greater Manchester Combined authority know that the network exists but Covid has meant that potential opportunities have been lost.

The major challenges for the network are finance and devising a sustainable model with the right set of people capable of managing it. It is necessary to get people with the necessary set of skills such as mentoring skills, financing, and marketing and other activities including profiling successful social entrepreneurs.

### **East of England**

The East of England has one network dedicated to disabled entrepreneurs and one large network that targets entrepreneurs in both groups.

The former although based in East England, serves disabled entrepreneurs across the UK (webinars, mentoring, online events). It set out to be a national organisation with remote working with people in the North West, some of the Northeast some of the Midlands, Northern Ireland, Scotland, in London and in South East England. The network finds that what is needed is for coalitions of disabled charities, businesses, and even individuals to be developed nationally to enable signposting people appropriately when they get in touch with any relevant organisation.

At a national policy level, the Access to Work programme needs to be more sympathetic to what entrepreneurs, particularly disabled entrepreneurs are doing. Sometimes the language on the Innovate UK website is not appropriate for people with disabilities and can be inaccessible. There is a need for a disability steering group to advise on policy.

The large network's primary raison d'être is to deliver business advice for disadvantaged communities. It has a mix of industrial spaces, office spaces, and retail spaces. The network is

very well connected locally and delivers programmes of support for growth hubs and LEPS. It has a programme dedicated to refugee entrepreneurs delivered in coordination with the Centre for Entrepreneurs. Location matters as the network sees East Anglia as “the forgotten region”. This is perhaps because of its proximity to London which has very different needs.

This organisation identifies that change is now often being driven from bottom up, for example it was contacted recently by a Black Lives Matters group asking what it does for ethnically diverse communities.

The network’s view is that diversity should be embedded within national main-stream policy agenda, culture and in the work which is being undertaken and to recognise the importance of new bottom-up, cluster models in order to drive the power of enterprise within smaller communities. Therefore, workshops and activities need to be targeted at specific groups so that they can access the support that is being provided. The DWP and BEIS need to understand who is accessing funding and for what purpose. Self-employment as an option that needs to be explored.

### **West Midlands**

The West Midlands has one of the UK’s most ethnically diverse populations and has 5 networks for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs. Four of these are based in Birmingham. However, there are no targeted networks for disabled entrepreneurs with only very occasional events organised for this group, usually organised by one of the national banks.

The evidence from the interviews is that the existing ecosystem has not been inclusive or engaging enough to reach out to the BMA community, especially the Black and African community. There is thus a gap to fill. In spite of the extent of support for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs, the interviews suggest that there is limited interaction between the major networks. One Chamber of Commerce was set up in 2020 because the existing Chamber did not reflect the interests of a sizeable section of the ethnically diverse population.

A network explained that, “Birmingham boasts a huge, diverse community of business – but has been neglected for quite a long time especially for the BMA community. As the government changed our strategy in terms of economic regeneration, they are looking to see how they can engage these communities.” The network presents itself as being the UK’s business organisation representing African owned businesses and entrepreneurs in the UK, and as the collective voice of

African businesses in the UK. It organises events and runs a number of campaigns aimed at empowering and supporting the organisation, its members and the business community around the United Kingdom to accelerate growth, enhance productivity, access new opportunities, showcase products and solutions, and highlight the needs of African businesses in the UK.

Policy recommendations from the interviews were that ethnically diverse businesses needed to be included in decision making and that Chambers of Commerce need to be more inclusive so that diversity is mainstreamed. There is a need to try and understand the culture in which it works.

An academic who is expert in ethnic minority entrepreneurship, suggested that evidence shows that ethnic minority businesses are more innovative in their products and processes and are more likely to export. This should affect future policy agenda. LEPs should be providing interventions to build businesses needed for the future. However, policy needs an evidence base to provide the underpinnings for policy experimentation.

### **East Midlands**

The East Midlands has a long established and successful network which targets high growth ethnic minority business (not interviewed). It has had a network for disabled entrepreneurs. The region therefore underserves both disabled entrepreneurs and the majority of ethnically diverse entrepreneurs.

The network for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs was founded in 2006 and is a national and international network rather than a locally focused organisation with a specific focus on building inclusive supply chains. It also brands itself as “the UK’s leading supplier diversity advocacy organisation working for inclusion of ethnic minority businesses in corporate supply chains”. It targets high growth firms and provides business support at every stage of the business growth. It provides networking and coaching events for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs.

There had been a network for disabled entrepreneurs supported by the European Social Fund but the activity ceased when the three years of funding ended. The advice given by the sister organisation for the county and city councils is that they could provide better support and make sure that they provide accessible support for disabled people’s needs.

## **South West**

The region has four very active networks: two for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs and two for disabled entrepreneurs. The South West therefore offers opportunities to both groups of entrepreneurs but on a relatively small scale. However, a common challenge is sustainability.

The two networks which support ethnically diverse entrepreneurs are a business Hub for primarily BAME entrepreneurs (Plymouth) and a network which has a focus on black social enterprises (Bristol). The latter has a strong advocacy role which addresses system change through business development.

The former is a commercial venture and is based in the Plymouth University Incubator. Network activities are open to helping everyone in the south-west area. It helps assist individuals, business owners and start-ups with business advice, finding grant money, and helping them grow financially.

The local policy issues for this network are isolation, getting support from local agencies, and sustainability. It was suggested that there should be local representation within regional board of decision-makers in order to develop conversations about innovation with ethnically diverse entrepreneurs and their representatives. This would help address the problem of a lack of recognition of the broader impact of ethnically diverse entrepreneurship on society. The loss of continuity is a major problem. Programmes help entrepreneurs but then there is no more funding so progress is lost.

For the Black focused network, the over-arching strategic intent is to build dynamic, independent, and strong Black communities, businesses and organisations that are empowered to flourish while challenging systemic barriers and forging a path for themselves. The network sees this the only way to address racial inequality. The Network's work falls into three broad areas. These are cross-sector enterprise and innovation; Cultural Inclusion; Research and Knowledge. Scrutiny and accountability and Representation and Power are over-arching themes that cut through all of their work. The network also undertakes research.

The first network of the two that support disabled entrepreneurs was founded in 2016 as a charitable organisation. It has taught self-employment skills to enable over 200 Dorset based disabled adults to gain further independence by creating their own income. The mission is to

alleviate poverty for disabled adults by narrowing the disability employment gap. It does this by supporting disabled adults to explore non-traditional forms of employment that will fit around their health challenges and reduce the barriers they face to employment opportunities.

The network is based in Bournemouth. It has a geographical coverage of Dorset, Devon, Hampshire, Somerset, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire and the Thames Valley with over two thirds based in Dorset. It expanded because there was a gap in support in those areas. It has an extensive network of regional stakeholders including the different charities Dorset, for example Dorset Mindfulness, with organisations that have got specialisms in disability, and the Dorset Chamber of Commerce which works alongside the Local Enterprise Partnership.

The network has access to the local council through the Chamber of Commerce and the police and the transport offices. However, it does not engage with the local FSB which sees itself as a national organisation and does not have local knowledge or an interest in small start-ups. Moreover, “the fees too expensive”. The network has quite good contacts with Bournemouth University which supports some of their events, but there is scope for universities to be more engaged.

A further aspect of location is that there is a problem in raising funding. Sustainability is a major issue. The network believes that if it were in London, it would get more funding. That people see the Southwest is quite an affluent area, but this is partly because that is where many Londoners have their second homes. However, there is extensive deprivation in the area, some concentrated. Local authorities lack the funding to support the charity. A policy suggestion is that government officials should shadow their work for a week so that what they do and what they need could be seen first-hand.

The second network is for people with learning disabilities. It is linked into the local ecosystem by supporting local authorities, voluntary sector organisations, disabled people and families. The network comprises researchers, developers and consultants interested in getting more people with learning difficulties into work and self-employment, including self-employment and small business development.

## **The South East**

The South East is a sprawling region with a large population and a lot of business activity. It covers several counties to the north west and south of London ranging from Oxfordshire in the north west to Kent in the south east. Most but not all of the region is prosperous. However, there is limited support for entrepreneurs in either group.

A network for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs in the west of the region offers networking opportunities for Black Business people in Berkshire, the smallest county in the region, with the aim of supporting business growth. A further SE based network offers support for self-employed disabled people and those setting up and running their own small businesses throughout England rather than being a locally focused organisation. It is operated by the Association of Disabled Professionals (ADP). The lack of support for disabled entrepreneurs in the region was a factor in the Dorset based SW network extending its activities eastwards.

## **London**

London substantially differs from the rest of the country because of the size of the population and its diversity and as the finance capital of the UK. In spite of this, there is fragmentation between support networks. Evidence here on support for disabled entrepreneurs comes from two networks that support disabled entrepreneurs, a disabled entrepreneur, and a network that supports entrepreneurs in general but has a focus on minority entrepreneurs. An interview with a network that supports ethnically diverse entrepreneurs provides evidence from that perspective.

For example, a commercial network that works with disabled entrepreneurs does not really link up with other organisations except with major charities including Leonard Cheshire, the RNIB and Disability Rights, UK. The head of the network has been a judge for the Leonard Cheshire Stelios Awards. The reason for not working with other organisations is the lack of interest in supporting the network's activities.

This network identifies that the single biggest hole in disability entrepreneurship support is mentoring because of the complexity of provision. This network wishes to share some of its learning and expertise on mentoring.

Neurodiversity receives very little attention with respect to entrepreneurship and innovation policy. A major problem is unconscious bias – people notice something different about neurodiverse people. This affects employment possibilities and puts people off applying for jobs. They self-exclude because they are not likely to get jobs or be promoted. Support organisations need to involve neurodivergent people in the design of programmes. Innovate UK and UKRI currently have no such programmes. Innovation is not just technological but also about process innovations and ways of working which can harness linear and non-linear ways of thinking.

A network that provides support for entrepreneurs in general and has a particular focus on refugee entrepreneurs and also works with disabled entrepreneurs highlighted the importance of seed funding to help organisations play with a model design before they scale and get sustainable funding to run something for three to five years. A model could involve pilot projects run with small amounts of money to allow experimentation and flexibility in best ways of supporting people with disabilities.

A disabled entrepreneur, who moved to London from the West Midlands to be closer to organisations that she worked with and to the centre of finance, argues that it is important that inclusion is mainstreamed into all provision. This would lead to local organisations such as the branches of Chambers of Commerce and the FSB being aware of the needs of a greater variety of entrepreneurs.

Currently there are few role models of disabled-run or black-run businesses. Those that exist should be showcased and shown to be participating in the mainstream support for entrepreneurs just as much as any other businesses.

A network that supports ethnically diverse entrepreneurs argued that Innovate UK is behind the curve on diversity. It could support networks to work with government on incentivising investment in diverse teams and better data collection on entrepreneurs with colour. On the issue of funding, there could be more support for connecting to under-represented communities and for work helping with existing stakeholders.

In summary, the interviews have demonstrated that is important across the country for there to be recognition of networks' roles as intermediaries working with entrepreneurs and with other stakeholders who may be local, or in adjacent regions or distant bodies, on entrepreneurs' behalf.

However, some business organisations do not see minority entrepreneurship as being within their remit.

There is thus a need to get stakeholders to buy into institutional change and unite around specific objectives through a dynamic and mutually enforcing environment between a community and inter-dependent actors that support entrepreneurship. This could be a local coalition or one which involves national organisations. To be effective, national policy makers and national business-facing organisations need to recognise regional differences, work with what is there and work out how to overcome gaps in provision. A key issue for networks which support both groups is sustainability. What might be working well now might not be available in the future.

### **General**

Overall, this is very much a story of fragmentation and churn, both within regions and across the UK. Churn of itself is no bad thing if it leads to improvement in the support offered but most churn is reported as not being user driven but arose instead from the whims of funders.

As part of our processes, our project had scope to engage directly in networking by making introductions and involving networks and entrepreneurs in CIMR events and in projects.

### ***5. Best practice from other countries***

Examples from North America include the US's Harkin Institute which informs policy and engages the public in issues relating to people with disabilities including more recently entrepreneurship<sup>18</sup>. The news organisation [About - Technical.ly](#) has a strong focus on EDI. The website *Respectability* lists support available to disabled entrepreneurs from Federal and state agencies<sup>19</sup>.

In Canada, the *Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program in British Columbia*<sup>20</sup> provides access to a network of business professionals and other resources through Pacific Economic Development

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<sup>18</sup> [The Harkin Institute | Connecting People With Policy \(drake.edu\)](#)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.respectability.org/resources/job-seekers-disabilities/entrepreneurship/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/pacific-economic-development/services/support/disabilities.html>



Canada (PacifiCan)'s Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program (EDP). The EDP provides business information, training and development, mentoring and one-on-one counselling services.

In Belgium<sup>21</sup> HAZO is the Flemish support centre for entrepreneurs with disabilities or chronic illness. The organisation receives funding from the Flemish Regional Government Administration as well as voluntary donations from the public.

The OECD's series of *Missing Entrepreneurs* reports examine how public policies at national, regional and local levels can support job creation, economic growth and social inclusion by overcoming obstacles to business start-ups and self-employment by people from disadvantaged or under-represented groups in entrepreneurship<sup>22</sup>.

In summing up the international comparison, the UK is good at some things but there is a lot to learn from other countries. These are notably the USA and Canada.

## ***6. Discussion and Policy Implications***

### ***6.1 Common frustrations***

Two themes emerge:

1. There is a need for more focus on disabled and BAME individuals than just on the self-employed of either category.
2. The geographical dispersion of BAME and disabled support services only seems in part to be associated with the concentration of BAME or disabled communities. The support that exists largely depends on resources and local government. London was cited by the majority of the interviewees as the centre of events, contacts, funding, organisations and sometimes government support, including financing, and business support for both groups.

Several interviewed support groups mentioned that they succeed in reaching their target communities through establishing partnerships with their local councils, LEAs, FSB, CBI, Chambers of Commerce, and sometimes also local TV and radio. However, some expressed

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<sup>21</sup> [https://wegate-eu.translate.google.com/support/women-entrepreneurship-support-organisations-networks/hazo-vlaams-steunpunt-voor-ondernemers?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=nl&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=sc](https://wegate-eu.translate.google.com/support/women-entrepreneurship-support-organisations-networks/hazo-vlaams-steunpunt-voor-ondernemers?_x_tr_sl=nl&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc)

<sup>22</sup> [The Missing Entrepreneurs 2021: Policies for Inclusive Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment | OECD](#)

frustration from not receiving up-to-date information on the support programmes available so that they can market them to their target communities in either the BAME or disabled groups.

Interviewed organisations noted that lack of long-term funding is a major stumbling block to long term sustainability. Entrepreneurs and owners find it difficult to follow their mandate when they are constantly writing proposals for grants on offer. Beneficiaries may be cut off in the middle of business progress, be referred to another funding agency, or to none at all. Sustainability of funding is a major pain point for both the organisations and their beneficiaries. This negatively impacts focus and certainty of the expenditure. While it is understandable that government need to constantly announce new initiatives and the repackaging of old money, the speed at which they do so and the constant recycling of limited funds impedes progress.

Thus some government programmes end too quickly and sharply (they are rarely tapered out) while not paying attention to local nuances and the nature of different places and target communities. There seems to be no political will to assess the impact of support programmes provided by government and local councils on self-employment rates, i.e. how much of the capacity-building programmes becomes translated into self-employment.

Local government programmes often seem to be one dimensional as they follow a “tick box” template. A problematic aspect here is leaving beneficiaries dangling midway through delivering after the programme has concluded. This in turn forces the support organisations to deploy their energy to finding additional grants which may or may not help the same group of beneficiaries.

There is also evidence of a lack of coordination between organisations in the same region in some parts of the UK. They try to help the same groups of beneficiaries, rendering the beneficiaries themselves confused and not knowing where to turn to.

The Education Health and Care scheme raised considerable frustration on where young adults should turn after reaching 25 years of age. This is similarly the case with supported internships such as the Bridge to Work.

**Commented [JS2]:** Do the readers know this acronym?

### **BAME and Disabled-specific themes**

#### *Disability*

The tendency towards putting disability in one bloc for example, not differentiating between explicit and hidden disabilities is a barrier to progress. For some disabled entrepreneurs, family background and ethnicity play a role. For example, if the person comes from a non-disabled family, then the family's ethnicity and the nature of the disability can decide the kind of emotional support. There is a further issue of whether it was acquired, caused by an accident or is a congenital condition.

Disabled support programmes need to be designed mainly by disabled individuals. Sometimes government questionnaires designed to screen disabilities show that they have been written by non-disabled people.

Furthermore, there are big gaps in the UK in mentoring of actual and potential entrepreneurs with disabilities. The system is yet to be efficient. Specific bodies need to be chosen to deliver actual services, especially sustainable ones to this very large community..

Vorley et al. (2019, 27) recommended that traditional business support organisations should actually partner with associations of disabled entrepreneurs and disability-led organisations so that they can provide support using the existing expertise as far as possible. What is needed is a mix of specialist and non-specialist advice.

#### *BAME*

The support system for ethnically diverse entrepreneurs is also not sufficiently focused for certain groups, thus limiting its effectiveness. Support organisations or intermediaries need to be able to communicate with the government more so that they are better able to market the support programmes to their respective target communities.

Partnerships between entrepreneurs and organisations that do have opportunities and routes in and entrepreneurs helps make the need for action more visible. Thus more young people in BME communities can find out about them. Younger people currently have fewer networks through which they can find out about support opportunities.

## **7. Conclusions**

While entrepreneurship is high on the policy agenda throughout the world, there is rarely a focus on diversity in a variety of societal groups, for example ethnically diverse and disabled

entrepreneurs. The context in the UK and elsewhere is an increasing appetite within policy-making circles for information and action to address weaknesses in the approach to equality, diversity and inclusion through entrepreneurship and innovation policy.

This study has shown that:

Overall, there has been and still partially remains a lack of connectivity between organisations of all kinds, with a silo mentality beginning to be broken down. The political agenda is changing but there is a need to build better systemic communities through institutional change. As this happens, evaluation of what works and when is essential so that successive generations of policy-makers can learn from previous experience.

Five areas of policy concern are:

1. Institutional challenges – both formal and informal have effects on social systems and social attitudes. How people see themselves and what they are capable of doing are influenced by how they see themselves positioned within society. Panels at public events should be diverse and inclusive.
2. Resources and how people get them – the networks of the kind discussed in this report are of critical importance and are under-recognised in policy communities. Churn is inevitable but needs to be managed and the transitions smoothed.
3. Ecosystems - disconnected ecosystems are common all over the world in all different kinds of context. Overcoming fragmentation requires political will, commitment and sustained investment. There is a need for organisations to identify and work to a common goal.
4. Data collection – ongoing data are needed on participation rates of minority entrepreneurs in order for there to be identification of which challenges are priorities. Action is hindered where there are information and knowledge gaps. This will enable better evaluation of initiatives leading to improvement.
5. The need to make disabled and ethnic minority entrepreneurs in the design and delivery of policy. This is to build into policy and programme design the specific needs of targeted groups that other groups do not have e.g. support workers for disabled entrepreneurs. Assumptions are made and “discrimination can be accidental” when people and

organisations that “don’t have lived experience” design policies that do not work for people for the intended recipients. Mainstreaming of support both groups is essential.

## 8. Acknowledgements

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## Appendix A

### *Interview Guide*

- Addressing regional inequalities in innovation opportunities for BAME and disabled groups
- Name and address of organisation
- Name and role of person interviewed
- Date of interview

### SECTION 1

#### 1. Background to establishment of the organisation, date formed, and main objectives

- What is the status of the organisation e.g. not for profit, charity, private sector organisation, social enterprise?
- How is the organisation funded?
- Does the organisation have a board of directors? If so, who are the stakeholders represented on the board? Are you aware of any missing types of board member?
- Please provide a profile of the organisation's membership (numbers by age range and gender) and their home location. Are all members local or is membership national/international?
- Are numbers increasing, stable or decreasing?
- How are people recruited and/or selected for support by the organisation?
- What are the organisation's priorities and targets (e.g. new innovators and entrepreneurs, early stage entrepreneurs, potential high growth entrepreneurs, or social goals of inclusion)?

### SECTION 2

#### 2. Activities:

What are the main support activities provided by the organisation to actual and would be innovators e.g. mentoring, helping innovators raising finance, networking events, providing role

models, helping with IP protection, prototype development, supporting scale-ups, e.g. through role models, develop future innovation leaders?

- What are the methods of delivery of activities e.g. one-to-one support, focus groups, in person and via the web?
- Is there a fixed duration of support activities for clients – is there a time limit?
- Are activities free or is there a fee to participants?
- What are the main challenges facing the organisation e.g. resources, continuity of funding, time?
- What are the major challenges facing the people your organisation is supporting?

### **SECTION 3**

#### **3. Local and regional engagement:**

- What links does this organisation have with other local organisations for the purpose of providing support?
- How does location affect ability of your organisation to deliver support to innovators?

### **SECTION 4**

#### **4. Evaluation:**

- What are your organisations' criteria for success?
- What are the successful outcomes for the innovator/entrepreneur?
- How sustainable is your organisation?

### **SECTION 5**

#### **5. Better policy support:**

- How could innovate UK provide better support for your organisation?
- How could local organisations e.g. city/county councils provide better support for your organisation?

## Appendix B

### *Dissemination/Networking*

	Details
Seminars, Conferences Presentations	<p>Lawton Smith, H. (2021). Presentation on Ethnically diverse women entrepreneurs' support initiatives: Experiences from the UK in CIMR debate in Public Policy on "Unlocking the potential of Black and Ethnic Minority entrepreneurs" October 13 2021 (Co-organiser with Professor Monder Ram) (30 registered).</p> <p>Lawton Smith, H. Presentation in "Supporting disabled and ethnic minority entrepreneurs: an engaged scholarship approach to inclusivity" at the EURegions Week conference (co-organiser with Monder Ram) (October 12 2021) (45 registered)</p> <p>Lawton Smith, H. (2021). Regional Geographies of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support: an "engaged scholarship" approach Presentation to Birkbeck Diversity Research Group May 13 2021 (15)</p> <p>Lawton Smith, H. and Owalla, B. (2021). Presentation on "Addressing regional inequalities in innovation opportunities for BAME entrepreneurs" Presentation at CIMR Workshop on <i>Diversity and entrepreneurship</i> March 17 2021. Organised by Prof. Helen Lawton Smith (Birkbeck) and Dr Ning Baines (De Montfort University) (RSA project outreach event) (50 registered).</p> <p>Lawton Smith, H. (2021). British Business Bank <i>NI Entrepreneurship &amp; Diversity – What Happens Next</i> Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> March 12pm – 1pm. In Conversation with 12 Northern Ireland stakeholders.</p> <p>Lawton Smith, H. and Mansour, D. (2021). <i>Regional Geographies of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support: An EDI Approach</i> Online presentation to Circle, Lund University Research Talk Series, February 17 2021 (35)</p> <p>Lawton Smith, H. (2020). Panellist Innovation Caucus Innovators' Breakfast Club: EDI September 30 2020 (50)</p> <p>Lawton Smith, H. (2020). Invited discussant, UKRI Expert Evidence Forum: 'Informing Development of the UK Place-based R&amp;D Strategy' September 11 2020 (50)</p> <p><b>Co-organised</b></p> <p>CIMR debate in Public Policy November 4 2020: Welfare State: A Facilitator or Inhibitor of Inclusive Entrepreneurship? Speaker: Eva Kašperová, Discussant: James Brook, Chair: Helen Lawton Smith (RSA project outreach and dissemination event)</p> <p>CIMR Workshop Wednesday March 17<sup>th</sup> – "Diversity and entrepreneurship" – Organised by Prof. Helen Lawton Smith (Birkbeck) and Dr Ning Baines (De Montfort University)</p>