

Female Entrepreneurship

What constitutes “female-friendly”
business support?



University of
East London



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University of East London

The University of East London is a long-standing anchor institution which has offered opportunities for education, research and employment for over 120 years. The university has been a key part of the regeneration story of east London including the building of new education infrastructure, physical business space and the delivery of socio-economic development projects supporting over 1000 SMEs.

The Research and Enterprise team run a number of start-up and growth programmes for students, alumni and our local communities. The university hosts the Knowledge Dock Business Innovation Centre which houses 50 SMEs in dedicated office and co-working space. Our work is underpinned by a commitment to support all of our communities embracing the principals of enterprise for all and research informed practice.



Pink Shoe Club & Economic Blueprint

The UK Economic Blueprint for Women (EB) enables women to achieve their maximum potential and participate fully in the country's economic growth. It aims to stimulate the growth of scalable women-owned businesses in the UK and become the definitive hub for the UK's female entrepreneurs.



The Economic Blueprint is spearheaded by Pink Shoe who are an influential and innovative business network operated by the Pink Sky Foundation that works to positively impact life-long development of women. Its founder is Helene Martin Gee and Patrons are The Rt Hon Theresa May MP and Tessa Sanderson White CBE. The Pink Shoe Senate, which drives development and strategy, is chaired by Jill Pay.
www.pinkshoeclub.com

Foreword

It has been estimated that with targeted support female entrepreneurs could contribute a £100bn boost to the UK economy over the next ten years¹. How we define and develop business support for female entrepreneurs in the future will be key to unlocking this enormous economic potential.

Background

Female entrepreneurship is on the rise in the UK. The proportion of women going into business is increasing and closing the enterprise gender gap. However, the number of women engaged in entrepreneurial activity in Britain is comparatively low with men still twice as likely to be early-stage entrepreneurs as women². This disparity represents an opportunity for the UK, as increasing female participation in entrepreneurship to the same level as men could have a substantial economic impact.

Barriers to successful female enterprise such as accessing finance, confidence in business skills and lack of visible role models are well documented. However, the business support landscape for female entrepreneurs in the UK appears uncoordinated, driven by a patchwork of self-organised networks and short term funded initiatives.

About the project

The University of East London and the Pink Shoe Club are working in partnership to enable women to achieve their maximum potential and participate in the country's economic growth through fostering, supporting and accelerating female led entrepreneurship.

The long-term purpose of this research is to define what 'female friendly support' means via the lived experiences of female founders. We asked female business owners how they discovered about support provision, what services they used and if the organisation they received support from was perceived as 'female friendly'.

Martin Longstaff
Director of Research & Enterprise
University of East London

¹ deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/growth/articles/women-entrepreneurs.html

² gemconsortium.org/country-profile/121

Methodology

The definition of a female owned business was self-articulated by the respondent. The majority of businesses were micro in size employing one person (50%) or one to five people (40%). Time dedicated to business was full-time (56%) and part-time (44%).

The research was carried on from September 2018 to December 2018 under the supervision and ethical processes of the University of East London. The study was conducted using an accredited online survey tool using a blend of closed and open questions.

Research Team

Giulia Trevisanello, Final Year Sociology Student & Principal Researcher

Giulia is a final year sociology student who undertook a Research Internship within the Research & Enterprise Team. She is passionate about gender inequality and how research can influence policy and is currently undertaking a dissertation on mumpreneurs.

Martin Longstaff, Director of Research & Enterprise & Research Supervisor, UEL

Martin has oversight of the Research & Enterprise function at the University of East London and is interested in how research and knowledge exchange can inform practice within entrepreneurship and business support.

Rebecca Moodie, Enterprise Manager & Research Supervisor, UEL

Rebecca leads the enterprise work at the University of East London. She holds a degree specialising in gender inequality and has a background in supporting entrepreneurship amongst those from a low socio economic background and as a result she is passionate about identifying and removing the barriers for underrepresented groups to access entrepreneurship.

Background of sample

Age

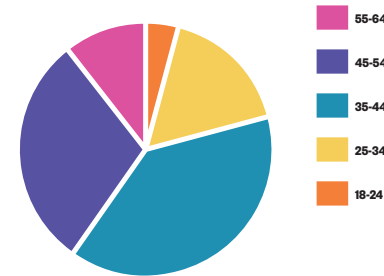


Fig. 1.1 Age of respondent

Children

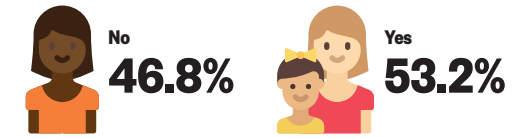


Fig. 1.2 Percentage of respondents with children under 18 years old

Business Stage

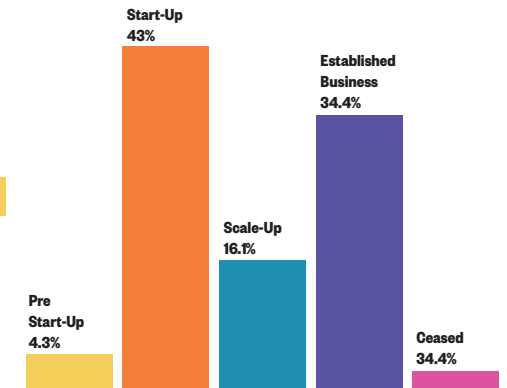


Fig. 1.4 Stage of business at time of completion

Education

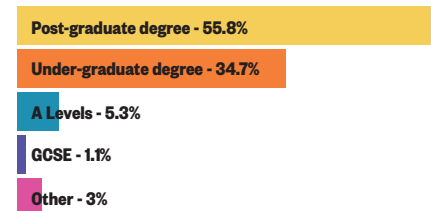


Fig. 1.3 Highest level of education reached by respondents

- The sample consisted of 96 women entrepreneurs nationally.
- There was equal representation of Business to Business (B2B) and Business to Consumer (B2C) organisations. A majority of respondents are from service based industries such as professional services (22.1%) and education, training & coaching (21.1%). In comparison, less than 10% were from STEM industries.
- The survey was promoted to respondents via partner business support networks, social media and online platforms.

Highlights

Fig. 2.1 Challenges experienced by respondents who have accessed business support

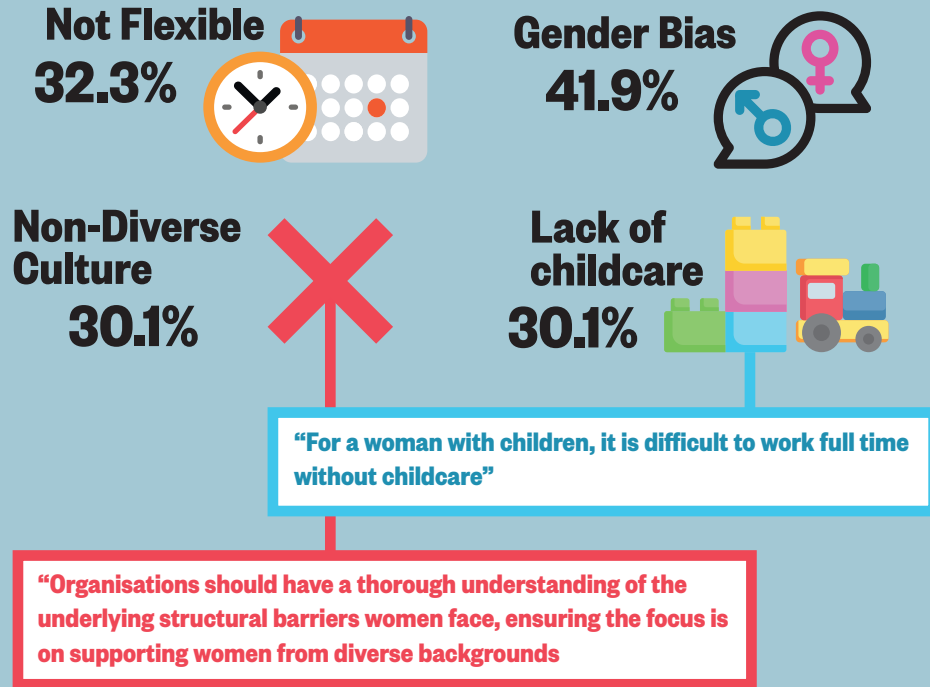


Fig. 2.2 What constitutes female-friendly support?

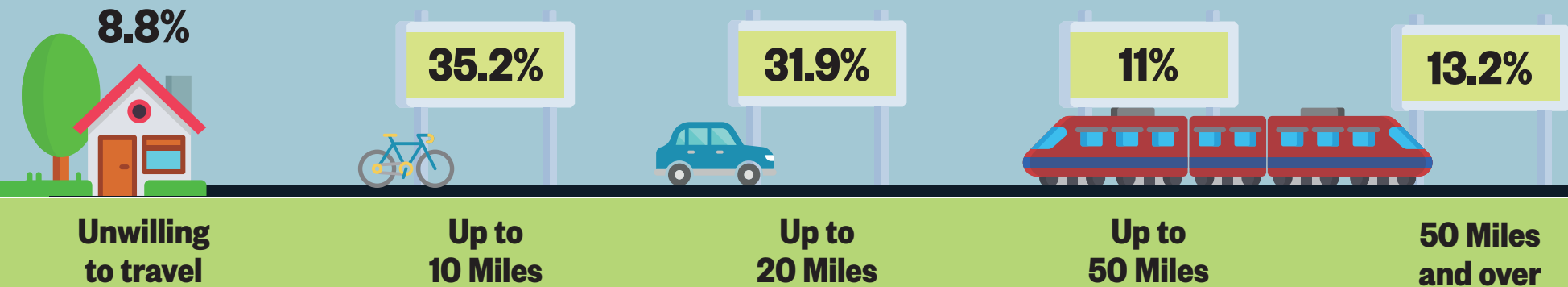


Fig. 2.3 How far respondents are happy to travel to access business support

Key Research Findings & Sector Recommendations

1

The first barrier encountered by female entrepreneurs was identifying and accessing the right type of support for their business.

2

The sample considered 'flexibility', 'role models' and 'inclusive culture' as the key features they looked for in a female friendly support provision.

3

In parallel, key barriers and challenges preventing female entrepreneurs accessing business support included childcare provision, gender bias and 'lack of flexibility'.



A third of respondents didn't access any support when starting or growing their business

Being able to access business support and advice is crucial to starting, running and growing a business however a third of our respondents hadn't accessed any support. In 2016, the Federation for Small business cited that a third of women (33%) hadn't received support of any kind when setting up their business and it is concerning that 3 years on our findings show no progress in this space.¹ The business support landscape continues to be unconnected, reliant on short term funding and still largely subject to being 'in the know' and the sector needs to work together to help women access support.

Recommendations

- Creation of a live ecosystem map for Female Entrepreneurs
- Up to date, tailored signposting
- Collaboration amongst business support agencies
- One stop shop for information

¹<https://www.fsb.org.uk/docs/default-source/fsb-org-uk/fsb-women-in-enterprise-the-untapped-potentialfeb2016-4fa86562a286ff0000dc48fe.pdf?sfvrsn=0>



48.9% of respondents wanted flexibility from business support

More often than not traditional enterprise support requires individuals to jump through a number of hoops to enrol followed by a rigid, structured curriculum comprising of a mix of full day sessions, bootcamp's, 121's and after hours socials. Respondents demanded innovation on the current and outdated business support model with a focus on exploring out of hours and remote access as well as more flexible and tailored support options.

Recommendations

- Explore how support providers offer multiple entry routes to programmes
- Enable participants to self-select relevant elements of programmes
- Endeavour to schedule sessions around cohorts needs
- Use technology solutions such as Skype and Zoom to remove physical barriers and applications such as Whats App and Slack to build onsite and offsite communities



47.8% of respondents valued visible role models at every stage of business support

A lack of role models was one of the most commonly cited barriers for females in starting and growing their business. Respondents were keen to be able to connect with female role models they could identify with.

Recommendations

- Utilise female facilitators in the delivery of sessions
- Ensure role models are honest and transparent
- Actively recruit female mentors from a broad range of backgrounds
- Ensure females are represented in decision making
- Celebrate female role models in programmes



37.8% of respondents called for business support agencies to explore how inclusive their culture is

Within the past couple of years there has been a significant increase in the number of female only programmes which have been positively received by the sector and contributed the rise of the profile of female entrepreneurship in the UK. However, the voice of female entrepreneurs surveyed called for a commitment to evolve the existing culture bias within generic enterprise support programmes rather than attempting to 'solve the problem' with exclusive female only programmes.

Recommendations

- Consider language used in promotional and programme materials
- Consider participants with childcare and primary care needs when designing programmes
- Commit to gender parity at all levels of programmes from design, participation and decision making
- Explore offering non-sector specific strands to programmes
- Be transparent about opportunities – particularly about access to finance.
- Schedule some lunch meetings rather than drinks after hours
- Implement simple techniques at workshops such as 'One Voice'



30.1% of respondents cited the lack of childcare support as a key barrier to accessing business support

Whilst not an exclusive finding, childcare was a common narrative across our research with over 50% of respondents having children. Furthermore, the most commonly cited motivation for starting a business was 'independence' and was inextricably linked with the childcare narrative and the endeavour to carve a career that enabled women to have independence and flexibility. The gendered role as a primary carer is a widely documented barrier for females and there is a need for a policy review to explore availability, affordability and access to childcare. Whilst business support agencies cannot take full responsibility for this barrier they can support

Recommendation

- Schedule sessions with childcare in mind
- Host some 'child friendly' sessions
- Explore whether you can leverage relationships with local childcare providers and negotiate hourly rates or subsidised group discounts
- Explore whether you can offer crèche facilities onsite for core sessions

**With thanks to the following organisations who assisted us
in the dissemination of the survey:**

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Blooming Founders

City Business Library

Connected Path

Cuckooznest

Enterprise Nation

Hatch Enterprise

Federation for Small Businesses

London Higher

NatWest

Noi Club

Plexal

Pink Shoe Club

Whyable

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