

# CROSS PARTY GROUP on WOMEN IN ENTERPRISE

## ANNUAL REPORT 2018 – 2019

**From the Convenor - Gillian Martin MSP**



It's been another hugely successful year for the Cross Party Group on Women in Enterprise, and our endeavours continue to draw attention to the issues that women face in business, and more crucially come up with ways in which we can address them. Particular highlights for me were the sessions we had on women with disabilities starting up in business, and we hope to do more sessions with women who traditionally have felt marginalised in enterprise.

We've attracted international attention too. One of our meetings was attended by members of the Pakistan Parliament, and I've spoken to the Ambassador of Chile to the UK who got in touch about our CPG!

Here's to bringing down more barriers and closing the enterprise gap to make Scotland the equal, prosperous business environment that it should be where women led businesses can flourish!

Thank you to the Royal Bank of Scotland who have sponsored the publication of this report.

### **Women in Enterprise**

Women-owned businesses are 20% of the business base and already these businesses contribute a staggering £8.8bn into the economy every year. That's more than many of the growth sectors including Food & Drink (£5.3bn); Creative Industries (£4.4bn); Sustainable Tourism (£3.9bn) and Life Sciences (£1.5bn). Latest figures show that majority women owned businesses in Scotland held 231,390 jobs – that's 13% of private sector employment in Scotland.

With needs based support, co-designed by women-owned businesses, this significant economic contribution could be boosted in Scotland - creating an environment where more women and girls can start up in business and enable those businesses to thrive and grow.

Yet women seeking to set up in business can be disadvantaged at various stages of development due issues such as under-capitalisation, gender blind policy making, and discrimination as a result of stereotypical attitudes towards women in business. This is why the Cross Party Group is important as it enables women in business and those organisations supporting business to come together to discuss the issues and widen the conversation on how best to address the gender gap in enterprise participation, and growth. The Cross Party Group (CPG) for Women in Enterprise was set up to –

- Establish a forum for the sharing of experiences and information on the position of women in enterprise in Scotland;
- Enable discussion and debate on the gender gap in enterprise, and seek solutions on how this might be tackled;
- Bring partners together with an interest in women and enterprise to develop a collaborative approach towards working together.

Each year a number of themes are chosen which are important to the discussion on women in enterprise and speakers and guests are invited to take part in the meetings. Organisations and individuals with expertise and interest in each theme are invited to attend and participate in the CPG. This enables relevant and structured discussion on a thematic basis and allows for varied attendance at each meeting.

This year, meetings focussed on

- Internationalisation;
- Unlocking Economic Potential;
- Brexit; and
- the call for a National Women’s Business Centre in Scotland.

## 6 November 2018: Internationalisation



The meeting heard from the Royal Bank of Scotland who reported that the UK Treasury has commissioned Alison Rose to lead an independent review of female entrepreneurship. The review will look at the barriers faced by women starting and growing businesses and aims to identify ways of unlocking this

untapped talent. This review will also involve round table events with women owned businesses to capture their views and experiences. The bank has 60 women in business specialist staff in Scotland and there are entrepreneurship hubs in Edinburgh and Glasgow where 40% of businesses are owned by women. It is hoped that the report of the review will be launched on International Women's Day 2019.

Blaze Manufacturing Solutions presented on how the business had diversified into new international markets to survive the oil and gas sector downturn in the North East of Scotland. Issues with Brexit may mean that business from European markets will be lost and therefore, the company have targeted new markets in Africa. In Zambia they successfully gained new business and part of this opportunity creation was a mutual focus and interest in supporting women owned businesses.



Part of the discussion focussed on the need for effective networking and support that would help to build confidence in seeking new markets across the globe.

And, with Brexit on the horizon, efforts to encourage businesses to increase their international trade are lot more important, but maybe a lot more difficult.

## 6 March 2019: Unlocking Economic Potential

Radiant and Brighter made a presentation on issues that were faced both personally and professionally as a family from Uganda moving to Scotland. Trying to find work was very difficult if not impossible. Having been unemployed for five years, the founders of Radiant and Brighter decided to set up their own support by developing a company that could support people in a range of employment situations. Radiant and Brighter focusses on the diverse needs of communities. They provide diversity training; employability support; and run a successful women's group.



Discussion included why there is a need for a more 'culture specific support', and why we need more inclusivity of people who understand the issues involved in the design of the support systems that are meant to support them and their communities. Structurally in Scotland there is an issue about how BME people are supported, but are we acknowledging this?

The Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society then gave a brief introduction to the work of the society in Scotland including some statistics - around 100,000 in UK are living with MS; around 11,000 in Scotland. People are affected very differently by MS. 2 in 3 people affected are women. Supportive employers can make a huge difference, and a key aim for the MS society was to help reduce the number of years that people lose in terms of work as a result of MS. The meeting also heard a personal story of how two women's lives were affected since one was diagnosed with MS. The personal account explained how one woman tried to keep her job, while dealing with the difficulties of living with MS. Support at work is often not available, and many people with MS are made to change jobs or withdraw from employment altogether. 80% of those with MS have to retire within 10 or less years of their diagnosis. Developing a business has been found by some to be a way of continuing to work and stay in employment. It can also provide the flexibility which is lacking in the mainstream labour market to enable people with health conditions to remain in work.

Discussion that followed showed that there are similarities with a number of groups whose needs are currently not met by the mainstream labour market.

Also there appears to be a gap in service provision for different types of business support for diverse groups. There were clear parallels across the experiences of all speakers which showed that a one size-fits-all approach for business advice and support just doesn't work.

## 21 May 2019: Brexit and Market Effects

Fraser of Allander Institute made a presentation on the economic impacts of Brexit, including statistics on exports and the link to jobs in Scotland supported by exports. The presentation highlighted the importance of EU member nations as top Scottish export destinations with Scotland exporting more to the EU than to N. America, Asia, S. America, Middle East and Australasia combined.



There are currently 230,000 EU nationals living in Scotland, and the uncertainty for individuals as well as business is proving to be very difficult.

The Federation of Small Businesses gave a presentation on Internationalisation and Brexit from a SME perspective.

While access to EU employees is important, it is equally important to consider the impact of migration to entrepreneurship in Scotland.

A recent FSB report highlighted –

- one in ten SMEs in Scotland is immigrant led;
- immigrant led SMEs provide 107,000 jobs in Scotland;
- migrants in more remote areas are more likely to be entrepreneurial.

Preparation for Brexit has proven to be very slow moving, with only one in seven (14%) of small businesses reporting that they had starting planning for a no-deal Brexit in early 2019. Also, of the 86% who hadn't done any prep, 43% expect Brexit to impact upon their business, while 42% felt Brexit wouldn't impact upon their business at all.

How businesses recruit workers is about to go through the biggest change in a decade. SMEs in Scotland need a Post-Brexit immigration system that supports business growth but also one that is easy to use and affordable for employers.



Discussion included concerns around the lack of detail available and the ongoing uncertainty for businesses with the need for action on critical areas such as trade, immigration and access to staff. There was also concern expressed about the lack of any gendered insights and detail on the impact of Brexit for women.



## 17 September 2019: Women's Business Centres



The meeting began with a presentation made by Midlothian Women's Aid on proposals for a centre to support women's economic empowerment.

Such a centre would provide 'a space for change' in which women could develop confidence and skills within a peer supported environment with the possibility of developing skills for enterprise – leading to employment and income generation. The centre would sustain change in the longer term – providing well-being and a gendered approach to holistic support.

Women's Enterprise Scotland presented on their proposals for development of women's business centres in Scotland. The women's business centre model of operation would have a national headquarters with a number of regional hubs

that would ensure that services were embedded in local communities, flexed to local needs and work in partnership with existing business support services.

Discussion was held on what kind of services women would look for from such centres and what impact such a service could make to the development of women in enterprise, with women business owners commenting on the need for business support for women



at the early stages of start-up, the importance of support for micro business and the need for growth support. Examples were given of the huge success such centres have been in Canada and the USA.

Both presentations shared a vision of centres based for women locally and being built on evidence based needs, supporting the varied alternative paths to enterprise, that can assist in opening doors to a more flexible and independent employment for women.



Delegation from Pakistan who were visitors to the Cross Party Group in 2019.

For further information on the Cross Party Group on Women in Enterprise or on Women's Enterprise Scotland, please contact [anne@wescotland.co.uk](mailto:anne@wescotland.co.uk) or visit [www.wescotland.co.uk](http://www.wescotland.co.uk)

