

Polish entrepreneurship in Britain contributes to economic growth

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Birmingham researcher shows net value of Polish entrepreneurship to the West Midlands economy

A major new study of Polish migrants coming to the UK, shows that their business adds significant value to the economy of the West Midlands. The study also shows the huge diversity of businesses that this group of migrants has become involved with, moving beyond the stereotypes of construction.

The research by doctoral researcher Catherine Harris is the first significant study to investigate the experiences of Polish Entrepreneurs coming to the UK. The team interviewed 48 Polish entrepreneurs in the West Midlands who migrated around the time of EU enlargement in May 2004.

The research identifies three key areas to challenge traditional stereotypes:

- All of the entrepreneurs interviewed had a business idea before coming to the UK, although many worked in areas like construction or agriculture to raise the capital required to set up a business.
- Whilst some entrepreneurs work in the expected business types like delicatessens, hairdressers, construction companies and restaurants, there are, however, also a significant number of professional services including lawyers, tax advisors and mortgage advisors.
- Although businesses generally began by serving the Polish community, many have now expanded to employ staff from the wider community.

The study highlights that, in addition to generating employment, Polish immigration is a realistic potential source of income for the local economy as many entrepreneurs rely on funding from home to set up their business. The study shows that family finance is an important source of capital for Polish entrepreneurs with more than half the entrepreneurs interviewed mentioning family capital or financial advice as important in setting up a UK business.

Catherine said, "This research challenges the perceptions of Polish immigration in Britain, highlighting that Polish migration is making a significant contribution to the local economy. None of the entrepreneurs interviewed were unemployed on entering the UK. In fact many chose to work in agriculture or hospitality on arrival, despite having professional jobs and qualifications in Poland. Furthermore, these new businesses are generating employment in a time of austerity in the country"

Notes to editors

As part of her post-doctoral thesis, Catherine Harris conducted 48 in depth interviews with Polish entrepreneurs in the West Midlands, who migrated around the time of EU enlargement in May 2004. The aim of her research was to: understand Polish entrepreneurship in the UK by exploring Polish entrepreneurship in the West Midlands; explore the main factors that drive the timing of the migration of Polish entrepreneurs and their desire to establish a business in the West Midlands; examine the transnational relationships and the role of family and friends in the migration and running of a business amongst Polish entrepreneurs in the West Midlands; investigate the entrepreneurial environment of Polish entrepreneurs, and the local, regional and global entrepreneurial environment within which businesses operate, to understand the impact this has on Polish entrepreneurs' business aspirations and adaptations

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