Achievements

Exceptional Achievements and projects

This section illustrates the continued impact of CREME's activities on important, yet sensitive, areas of the diversity and enterprise agenda: access to finance, access to markets and approaches to business support. The Centre has advanced knowledge in each of these areas through its excellent research, engagement with key stakeholders and commitment to changes in practice.

14th Annual Ethnic Minority Business Conference, Coventry, October 2010

Unique Collaborations

The Minority Ethnic Enterprise Centre of Expertise (MEECOE) was a consortium led by CREME which worked with public and private sector stakeholders to enhance policy and practice for ethnic minority enterprise in the region. The consortium created a Centre of Expertise and its aim was to develop an integrated approach to diversity for all involved.

This exciting two-year project (Dec 2008 – Nov 2010), funded by Advantage West Midlands, delivered a program of workshops, seminars briefings and events aiming to promote innovation and knowledge exchange in the field of ethnic minority entrepreneurship.

An innovative feature of MEECOE was its Legacy Group. The group was made up of high-ranking national figures from the private and public sectors who agreed to collaborate with MEECOE to take action to improve relationships between their organisations and ethnic minority businesses. The Legacy Group included: the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), Barclays Bank, Business in the Community (BitC), the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS), the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Staples Advantage, West Midlands Minority Business Forum, Business Voice West Midlands, and Business Link West Midlands.

CREME is now building on the experience of a number of initiatives around enterprise and diversity that were delivered over the course of this project.

Access to finance: promoting productive bank/small firm relationships

Commercial Property Workshop organised with Barclays, February 2010

CREME was responsible for the first and largest research project on ethnic minority businesses and banks in the UK. This two-year project was funded by the British Bankers' Association (BBA), which represented the main high street banks, the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI), and support from the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). The findings, which were welcomed by the BBA and DTI, were an important reference point for financial and business support stakeholders working with ethnic minority entrepreneurs. They also acted as a catalyst for a number of initiatives to improve relationships between the banks and ethnic minority businesses.

CREME was at the forefront of such activities, as exemplified with its engagement with the ACCA and Barclays Plc in the pioneering Minority Ethnic Enterprise Centre of Expertise (MEECOE) project. This project produced a number of interventions involving banks and small firms, resulting in benefits for both parties.

I have worked with CREME for many years. It is hard to believe that in the early/mid 1990s the scale of distrust between the ethnic minority business community and banking was very significant and was of real concern to politicians and bankers. It is with no exaggeration that I hold the work of CREME as almost entirely responsible for the positive developments in banks' relationships with their customers.

Others have helped on the way, but no group of researchers has been so focused and persistent in making the case for ethnic minority businesses' economic and social inclusion on equal parity with other business owners."

Dr Richard Roberts, SME Market Analysis Director
Barclays Bank

Access to markets: pioneering inclusive procurement practice

The Centre has led the way in the UK and Europe on how the corporate sector can develop commercial approaches to engaging diverse firms in their supply chains.

CREME has been engaged in a major programme of research and knowledge transfer activities on procurement and disadvantaged firms since 2003. The resulting activities have produced:

- A substantial research programme with awards from funding bodies -The European Regional Development Fund, Equality & Human Rights Commission (EHRC), Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC), Higher Education Innovation Fund, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Migration Policy Group. Pioneering initiatives involving the corporate sector (Supplier Development East Midlands), networks of minority entrepreneurs (12/8 Group and FYSHnet groups) and cross-sector collaboration (Leicester City Council). Long-term engagement (over a 10-year period) with policy-makers, including the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), CIPS, Business in the Community, East Midlands Development Agency (emda), Advantage West Midlands, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the Migration Policy Group.

- Practical benefits for ethnic minority entrepreneurs (including the facilitation of commercial contracts).
- A nationally disseminated "how to" guide on supplier diversity for the EHRC. CREME's chairing of the European Supplier Diversity Forum (comprising key influencers from government, industry and the public sector).

The production of a '**Handbook on Supplier Diversity in Europe (http://www.migpolgroup.com/public/docs/Handbook_on_Supplier_Diversity_in_Europe.pdf)**' in collaboration with Supplier Diversity Europe.

> CREME has a wealth of knowledge on supplier diversity that has been invaluable to the Commission… Working in partnership with CREME has strengthened the Commission's credibility and influence in promoting Supplier Diversity." Alice Teague, Policy Head Strategy Directorate, Equality and Human Rights Commission

Adding value to minority businesses and communities

The Centre has been instrumental in establishing (in collaboration with Lancaster University) two pioneering peer-to-peer networks comprising ethnic minority entrepreneurs: the 12/8 Group (African-Caribbeans) and FYSHnet (Bangladeshis). Funded initially by the ESRC, both networks have:

- Been cited as an example of best practice in a government review of business support and facilitated the growth and development of participating firms.
- Provided a novel and cost-effective source of business support, particularly important in the light of the government's approach to such matters.
- Proved durable and financially self-sustaining.
- Served as role models for the wider co-ethnic and minority communities.
- Produced ambitious growth plans that involve mentoring aspiring young entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Unlike other institutions, the team at CREME roll up their sleeves to practically apply their knowledge and expertise to enable minority led businesses to grow and succeed. Their fresh business thinking has facilitated FYSHnet's early growth and development, to make it recognised as an innovative business led network- an accolade we thank CREME for. Shihab Hossain, Chairman, FYSHnet

Understanding Entrepreneurship in New Migrant Communities

CREME completed its first study of Somali businesses in Leicester in 2008 as part of its broader commitment to address academic and policy issues arising from the arrival of new migrants to the UK. This process – known as 'superdiversity' – has transformed local economies, yet knowledge remains partial. The findings found surprisingly high levels of entrepreneurial activity and provided valuable information for policy-makers about how best to support, and benefit from, entrepreneurship among the new immigrant communities.

The project prompted a major action research initiative (2008 – 2009) involving CREME, the Economic and Social Research Council and East Midlands Business Ltd on new migrant businesses in the region. The initiative resulted in substantial academic and practitioner knowledge and the engagement of new migrant business in a business support system from which they had previously been excluded.

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