

# East of England

## Women's Enterprise Strategy

*2005 – 2008*



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## FOREWORD

I am very pleased to be able to introduce the first Women's Enterprise Strategy for the East of England. With the right support, women's enterprise can make a considerable contribution towards the growth of the region. Women already play a significant role in the UK economy, with more women opting to start their own business. However, there is still a long way to go before the number of women starting and growing a business is comparable with counterparts throughout the world. Currently, in the UK female entrepreneurship is less than half (46%)<sup>1</sup> of male entrepreneurship and only 12 – 14% of businesses are wholly owned by women, compared with 28% in the USA<sup>2</sup>.

Much good work takes place across the East of England to encourage women to start a business, and significant progress is being made. In 2004<sup>3</sup> total female entrepreneurial activity increased by 25 %, however, our overall level remains below the national average. We must ensure that by working together we develop a more co-ordinated and coherent approach to tackle issues that will enable more women to start a business, and help those already in business to grow their business.

This strategy demonstrates the commitment that the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) and its key partners have in driving forward the women's enterprise agenda. Our vision is to make the East of England a great place for women to start and grow a business. In doing this we will need to challenge existing thinking about women in business, promote the concept of enterprise to women, and ensure that services and support meet the needs of women.

The development of this strategy involved a comprehensive consultation process with a range of organisations and individual women, and I would like to thank each and every one of you for taking the time to express your thoughts. I would especially like to thank the members of the Women's Enterprise Strategic Partnership who have so willingly and enthusiastically supported the development of this strategy.

As Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer said at the Advancing Enterprise Conference in February 2005, if the UK could achieve the same levels of female entrepreneurship as the US, Britain would gain 750,000 new businesses. This is what we must strive to achieve and in doing so make the East of England the best region in the UK for women to start and grow a business.

David Marlow  
Chief Executive East of England Development Agency

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<sup>1</sup> Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2004, UK Executive Report, Jan 2005

<sup>2</sup> A Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise, DTI, 2003

<sup>3</sup> Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2004, UK Executive Report Jan 2005

## The Regional Women's Enterprise Partnership



Part of the Department  
for Work and Pensions



The Regional Women's Enterprise Partnership comprising EEDA, the six Business Links and other key stakeholders, was established to develop this strategy in consultation with support organisations and directly with women in the Eastern Region.

The strategic partners are ideally placed in their local economic and delivery partnerships to provide a powerful insight into the needs of women in their local communities.

To date, the partnership has been at the forefront of research into women's professional development, regionally, nationally and internationally. Leading the way to develop a more cohesive and co-ordinated approach to women's business support, it recognises the value of a strategic approach to maximise women's active participation within local and regional economies.

In taking this strategy forward, the partnership's role is to ensure that the East of England remains co-ordinated and forward thinking to enable seamless delivery of relevant quality support. However, in order to achieve its aims and objectives, there needs to be a much wider involvement of stakeholders, delivery organisations and women in business. To this end, sub-regional partnerships led by representatives from the Regional Women's Enterprise Partnership have been established to engage with the wider community.

## Introduction to the East of England Women's Enterprise Strategy

The East of England is a relatively wealthy region, but it is not performing as well as comparator regions such as Silicon Valley and Baden Wurtemberg. This needs to change. Despite being a cradle of ideas and innovation, with internationally respected centres of excellence and the highest employment rate in the United Kingdom, the region is not making the most of its potential.

There are a variety of reasons for this which the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) and its partners are working to overcome. This includes focusing on making the most of the skills and talent already available and in particular, ensuring that hard to reach groups have their voices heard and the opportunity to utilise their abilities.

One of these important groups is women. Despite being over 50 % of the region's population, women face significant disadvantage compared with their male counterparts when it comes to fulfilling their economic potential. Research findings from the region's extensive local, national and international research programmes<sup>4</sup>, combined with the experience of practitioners and business support organisations, highlights the issues and provides the rationale for this Regional Strategy and the supporting Regional Action Plan.

The numbers of women starting their own businesses is slowly improving and research has shown a recent increase in the proportion of female owned start ups in the region rising from 29% in 2002 to 38% in 2003<sup>5</sup>. Despite this increase we must continue to breakdown barriers, challenge outdated perceptions and provide women with the support needed to start, develop and grow businesses.

The barriers women face hinder the development of a modern and diverse Britain. This Strategy and supporting Action Plan actively aims to break down those barriers and enable women to excel at their chosen career. We in turn, will make every effort to provide the necessary support and assistance to help women achieve success.

By working together, not only will individuals and companies grow and harness previously untapped talent, but the East of England can finally realise its potential.

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<sup>4</sup> *Women Entrepreneurs: issues and barriers, A Regional, National and International Perspective, Exemplas, 2004*

<sup>5</sup> *Barclays, NOP start Up Survey, The Regional State of Women's Enterprise in England, Prowess, 2005*

The strategy aims to assist business and women's support organisations as well as other interested agencies to work together to deliver sustainable enterprise, business growth and development services for women. It supports the continuation of the many excellent existing services and paves the way for new, demand led services to encourage greater access and participation for all women across the Eastern Region.

The strategy will be implemented by many partners and stakeholders, adding value to the work of local agencies and influencing policies that impact upon the development and sustainability of women's entrepreneurship. It will be regularly reviewed to ensure that it remains an active and relevant tool for future planning and growth.

# A Strategy for Action

## Vision

Our vision for the Women's Enterprise Strategy is to make the East of England:

**“A great place for women to start and grow a business”**

## Aims

Our aims are:

- To establish the region as a centre of excellence nationally and internationally for the support and development of women starting and running their own business;
- To champion economic opportunity for women in order to enhance their contribution to the regional economy;
- To promote and encourage sustainable enterprise, business growth and development amongst women;
- To improve opportunity, social inclusion and wealth for women;
- To develop a greater understanding and recognition of the needs of women, by continuously researching and reviewing needs and measuring the relevance and impact of services;
- To raise awareness of and increase access to support.

EEDA, together with the Regional Women's Enterprise Strategic Partnership will be responsible for measuring the achievement of the above aims.

## **Strategic Objectives**

The strategy includes objectives to address nine key areas, which have been identified through comprehensive research and consultation with key partners, organisations and individual women. These are not listed in any particular order: many are interlinked and should not be taken in isolation.

### **1) Promotion and Awareness**

To increase women's entrepreneurship by:

- 1.1 Promoting appropriate and locally based case studies and role models of women entrepreneurs and women in business
- 1.2 Promoting the concept of enterprise
- 1.3 Promoting the benefits of self employment and entrepreneurship
- 1.4 Raising awareness of services available to women
- 1.5 Sharing best practice
- 1.6 Ensuring target groups remain the focus of support

### **2) Business Start-up Support**

To develop and improve business start-up services for women by:

- 2.1 Widening access to pre-start up support
- 2.2 Improving quality of pre-start up support
- 2.3 Increasing awareness of business support services
- 2.4 Ensuring equal access to appropriate business support
- 2.5 Improving access to one to one support
- 2.6 Increasing appropriate high growth provision
- 2.7 Promoting the Women's Enterprise Strategy to key stakeholders

### **3) Business Development and Growth**

To enable women owned businesses to develop and grow by:

- 3.1 Widening equality of access to appropriate, high quality business support
- 3.2 Making mainstream business development and growth services more accessible
- 3.3 Promoting business growth and development to women
- 3.4 Improving the provision of business and management skills
- 3.5 Providing high-growth support
- 3.6 Developing networks, clusters and supply chains
- 3.7 Building capacity to win and deliver public sector contracts

### **4) Finance**

To improve the funding and financial management of women's enterprise by:

- 4.1 Increasing the basic understanding of money and finance
- 4.2 Improving finance skills and money management
- 4.3 Improving awareness and understanding of all sources of finance
- 4.4 Increasing readiness and utilisation of funding
- 4.5 Influencing lenders to develop understanding of the needs specific to women

### **5) Networks**

To enable women to utilise and develop their skills to increase business sustainability by:

- 5.1 Developing networking skills
- 5.2 Promoting the advantages of networking
- 5.3 Improving awareness of and access to networks
- 5.4 Linking to and from mainstream provision
- 5.5 Ensuring linking between networks
- 5.6 Encouraging collaboration between networks

## **6) Personal Development**

To support the personal development of women by:

- 6.1 Increasing the accessibility and availability of soft skills training and development to raise women's self esteem, levels of assertiveness, confidence and understanding of what it means to be successful
- 6.2 Improving the provision of information and development to understand and manage risk
- 6.3 Raising women's educational skills level where appropriate
- 6.4 Raising awareness of transferable skills
- 6.5 Improving communication networking skills training
- 6.6 Improving provision of information on work life balance

## **7) Learning Opportunities**

To improve access and take-up of appropriate high quality learning opportunities by:

- 7.1 Improving local information sources
- 7.2 Linking to national accreditation programmes
- 7.3 Creating more opportunities for learning
- 7.4 Promoting the needs of women entrepreneurs and women in business to training providers in the region
- 7.5 Linking to mainstream training and education providers
- 7.6 Developing the Women's Enterprise Strategic Partnership and identifying best practice

## **8) Influencing Policy**

To create an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship by:

- 8.1 Highlighting issues relevant to women's entrepreneurship to policy makers
- 8.2 Promoting flexible working practices to policy makers
- 8.3 Ensuring that the Women's Enterprise Strategic Partnership represents the needs of the region
- 8.4 Enabling women entrepreneurs and business owners to take part in decisions of policy makers
- 8.5 Ensuring a coherent approach to funding, research, strategy, delivery and measurement of services
- 8.6 Supporting a long-term approach and proven programmes
- 8.7 Making research available and known to policy makers

## **9) Cross Cutting Themes**

To raise awareness and support the development of:

- 9.1 Linkages to, and influencing of, other relevant strategies
- 9.2 High quality delivery services
- 9.3 Creating objective and unbiased routes to appropriate and accessible support
- 9.4 Improving the integration of policy and practice
- 9.5 Making best use of Information Communication Technology and training where necessary
- 9.6 Organisational and individual responsibility to ensure efficient use of environment resources
- 9.7 Working to ensure sustainable development
- 9.8 Environments that encourage innovation and creativity
- 9.9 Equality of opportunity and awareness and promotion of diversity
- 9.10 Influencing funding priorities and policy makers

## Target Groups

This strategy is designed to bridge the gap between needs and services in order to provide opportunities and economic independence for women, and to ensure that resources are targeted appropriately to meet the region's economic and social inclusion objectives.

Detailed consultation and research<sup>6</sup> has provided a clear indication of the issues and barriers facing women in the East of England. In addition, a detailed mapping exercise to identify existing support has been conducted by Prowess and EEDA.<sup>7</sup> From this, the following target groups have been identified: -

- Women in all stages of business – pre-start, start-up, development and growth
- Self employed women owners and managers of businesses in the key sectors for the region<sup>8</sup>
  - Agriculture and food
  - Automotive and sport
  - Construction and the built environment
  - Creative and cultural industries
  - Energy
  - Environmental
  - Finance and business services
  - Health and social care
  - High-tech manufacturing and advanced engineering
  - ICT
  - Life sciences
  - Public sector modernisation
  - Social enterprise
  - Tourism, heritage and leisure
  - Transport gateways

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<sup>6</sup> *Women Entrepreneurs: issues and barriers, A Regional, National and International Perspective, Exemplas, 2004*

*Women In The Workplace: Under Representation and Exclusion; A Regional, National and International Perspective Part One Women in Management, Exemplas, 2004*

*Women In The Workplace: Under Representation and Exclusion; A Regional, National and International Perspective Part Two Rural, Minority, Family and Co-Owned Businesses, Exemplas, 2004*

*Improving Opportunities: Access and Choices to Work for Women Who Are Disadvantaged, Hard to Reach or Socially Excluded, Exemplas, 2004*

<sup>7</sup> *Mapping Exercise conducted by Prowess. Directory to be published early 2006.*

<sup>8</sup> *Regional Economic Strategy, pg 106*

- Women who have hidden roles within business i.e. family business
- Women who are disadvantaged or in danger of exclusion e.g. 3<sup>rd</sup> Age (50+), young, disabled, ethnic minorities, non employed, lone parents and transient workers
- Social/voluntary/community enterprises
- Women in science, engineering and technology sectors
- Women in traditionally male dominated sectors
- Women unemployed/economically inactive
- Women graduates

Research<sup>9</sup> shows that economic activity has a direct link to a woman's ability to fully engage in enterprise activity. There are a number of important issues and barriers that impact on this. We therefore need to ensure we work in partnership with other regional and local organisations that support or engage with women, such as:

- Health (including mental health) agencies
- Education and Skills providers
- Jobcentre Plus and other employment support organisations
- Employers

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<sup>9</sup> GEM, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, United Kingdom Report, 2004, Rebecca Harding, p27, 29, 31, 43  
 GEM, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, United Kingdom Report, 2004, Women and Enterprise, entrepreneurial attitudes and activity East of England, 2004.

# Background and Rationale

## Introduction

The Women's Enterprise Strategy has been developed in the context of:

- The economic, social and environmental realities of the East of England
- The UK Government, Women's Enterprise Strategic Framework
- The existing women's enterprise support infrastructure
- Developing Regional Partnerships
- Regional Economic Strategy
- The East of England Business Start up Strategy
- The Rural Development Framework
- The Social Enterprise Strategy for the East of England

## The Eastern Region

The East of England is one of the largest and most diverse regions in the UK. It comprises the six counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, together with the four unitary authorities of Luton, Peterborough, Southend and Thurrock, covering 7,380 square miles. It has a variety of medium-sized urban centres, market towns, extensive areas of coastline with major seaports (including some declining seaside towns), and a significant rural landscape comprising smaller, more isolated settlements.

The region has the fastest growing population in England, currently 5.46 million and is forecast to increase by around half a million by 2021.

The region has a thriving economy with areas of affluence, but there are also areas of great urban and rural deprivation. Small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) play a major part in the regional economy. There are particular difficulties for many of the businesses operating in rural areas, related to their remoteness, limitations of local markets, infrastructure problems and other issues in the region including long-term unemployment, high levels of benefit receipt, and poor levels of educational achievement.

## **The National Policy Framework - The UK's Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise**

The UK Women's Enterprise Strategic Framework was launched in July 2003. Its long-term vision is to create an environment and a culture that encourages more women to start and grow businesses; and where every woman with the desire to start or grow a business, has access to appropriate help and support.

The national framework has the overall objective of significantly increasing the number of women starting and growing business in the UK, to match or exceed the level achieved in the USA. It is estimated that only 12–14 % of businesses are majority owned by women, compared with 28 % in the USA.<sup>10</sup>

A broad reaching initiative the UK Framework prepares the ground for change in a number of areas that affect women's enterprise – from education to the financial and business support environment. It proposes ways of encouraging change and offers guidelines and targets. It also challenges existing Government policies in many of these areas, proposing re-examination and development of policies in support of the true needs of women entrepreneurs.

The UK's medium term quantitative targets are challenging. By 2006:

- Women will account for 40 per cent of customers using Government-sponsored business support services
- Women-owned businesses will account for 18–20 per cent of the UK total
- The number of women from ethnic minority communities receiving business support will be proportionate to their representation in the regional/local population

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<sup>10</sup> Department of Trade and Industry, Small Business Service, A strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise, p6

## The Regional Economic Strategy

The Regional Economic Strategy (RES) – A Shared Vision sets the long-term vision for the sustainable economic development of the East of England. The strategy is one of a suite of strategies and should be considered alongside these, the RES provides the framework within which many different organisations can work with businesses, communities and individuals to improve the region's economic performance and focus on issues that are important to the region.

Its vision for the East of England is to be 'a leading economy, founded on our world-class knowledge and the creativity and enterprise of our people, in order to improve the quality of life of all who live and work here' and highlights the need to 'improve areas of average or poor performance' in our economy.

The three main areas requiring improvement to achieve economic development and growth in the region are identified as:

- Enterprise and productivity – The region's strong reputation for research and development is not consistently translated into business success
- Skills and human capital - The region's skills base remains patchy, with areas of educational underperformance, skills gaps and shortages
- Deprivation and social exclusion – A number of communities continue to suffer from multiple deprivation and the pattern of exclusion is often not area based, but instead focused in particular population growth

To realise the vision the RES strategy focuses on eight strategic goals which address the sustainable economic development of the region. The women's enterprise strategy directly addresses the areas identified as required improvement, and links to:

- Goal one – A skills base that can support a world class economy
- Goal two – Growing competitiveness, productivity and entrepreneurship
- Goal three – Global leadership in developing and realising innovation in science, technology and research
- Goal five – Social inclusion and broad participation in the regional economy

The Women's Enterprise Strategy is a key element of EEDA's enterprise agenda, with the objective of making mainstream provision more accessible to all.

## **The Needs of Women in the East of England**

The East of England Women's Enterprise Strategy is needed because despite making up over 50 % of the region's population, women face significant disadvantage compared with their male counterparts when it comes to fulfilling their economic potential. Research findings from the region's extensive local, national and international research programmes, combined with the experience of practitioners and business support organisations, highlights the need and provides rationale for this strategy. (Please see Appendix 1 for summaries of the consultations conducted within the region and Appendix 2 for the full list of underpinning research used to support this strategy).

The research and statistics highlighted in this document and consultation with local partnerships consistently identifies specific issues which make starting or growing a business more challenging for women than men. These include:

- Limited skills and knowledge gained in the labour market that may be readily transferred to start a business
- Traditional views on women's roles
- Lack of knowledge and skills to raise and manage finance coupled with financiers perceptions of the abilities of women to run a business
- Poor access to formal and informal networks which, historically, have been dominated by men
- Lack of knowledge and training in business and IT skills
- Low self-esteem / self perception

Women running their own businesses are the most significant under represented group in the United Kingdom. As the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2001 UK Executive Report suggests:

**"One of the clearest ways for the UK to increase its level of entrepreneurship would be to encourage and support more women into business."**

This strategy is directly aimed at providing women with opportunities and choices for successful labour market participation, skills development and social inclusion as an antidote to the very real challenges faced by women looking to fulfil their economic potential.

Whilst the levels of female entrepreneurship are broadly similar to the UK average<sup>11</sup> research has identified specific barriers where the nature of entrepreneurship in the East of England is different from those more generically cited for the rest of the UK.

Women in the East of England are:

- Less likely to start up a business – in fact in some areas of our region women’s business start up rates are declining
- Less likely to grow or develop their business
- Less Likely to have a high qualification level
- Less likely to receive training if they are employed
- More likely to be in part time, low skill, low paid work
- More likely to have basic skills needs
- More likely to be economically inactive due to rural isolation, being a lone/single parent
- More likely to be suffering from financial /social exclusion
- More likely to be benefit dependant
- More likely to miss opportunities because they have care responsibilities

The issues are compelling and the Strategy for Women’s Enterprise is needed to drive and provide an impetus for policy makers, support organisations and stakeholders who need to break down barriers and make a direct impact on the Region’s economy. The issues raised in the GEM 2004 research will be directly tackled through the nine strategic objectives.

## **Support for Women’s Enterprise in the East of England – the picture in 2005**

Service providers across the region are currently delivering a wide range of services to women, offering a mix of flexible support that reflect the needs of women entrepreneurs; women in business - including leaders, managers and employees; returners and those who are economically inactive. The range of support is varied and includes coaching and mentoring,

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<sup>11</sup> GEM, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, United Kingdom Report, 2004, Women and Enterprise, entrepreneurial attitudes and activity East of England, 2004, presentation,

one to one information, advice and guidance, professional and personal development, counselling, leadership and management training as well as business creation support.<sup>12</sup>

To date, the region has been at the forefront of research into women's development needs - regionally, nationally and internationally (ref Appendix two), and is already in a strong position to drive a strategy and supporting action plan forward; indeed the region has already attracted national recognition for leading edge provision and good practice. We have, however, some way to go to ensure seamless and co-ordinated services to support women's enterprise, given a lack of consistency, access and variable quality of provision fragmented across the region.

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<sup>12</sup> *This activity is being supported in a joint project funded through ESF Equal and delivered by PROWESS to develop a Regional directory of women-friendly business support. The full regional mapping exercise will be completed by the end of 2005 and will result in the production of a women's enterprise business support directory being released in early 2006.*

## **Developing the Strategy**

The East of England Women's Enterprise Strategy has been developed in close consultation with the Regional Women's Enterprise Strategic Partnership, which has been chaired by Business Link Hertfordshire. The partnership is made up of key representatives from EEDA, Agricultural Development Eastern Region - ADER, Business Links, Regional Learning and Skills Council, Jobcentre Plus, Norfolk Network, Rural Action East, WEETU and other specialist providers, practitioners and women in business.

### **Consultation**

In order to develop a Strategy that reflects and meets the needs of women across the region, representatives from the Regional Strategy Partnership have consulted widely at local level. This process has ensured that target groups, barriers and gaps in service provision have been clearly identified and understood, and that the Strategic Objectives and supporting Action Plan meet the needs of the region.

Regional Strategy Partnership representatives have met with sub-regional business support organisations, stakeholders and women business owners to discuss the development of the Strategy. A summary of each consultation is detailed in Appendix 1.

### **Implementation of the Strategy**

The Regional Women's Enterprise Partnership, working with sub-regional partners will co-ordinate the channels of delivery to improve collaboration, help deliverers understand the issues and barriers faced by women and improve the standards of women's enterprise support. Tactical activity will be detailed in a rolling three year Regional Action Plan to address the aims and objectives of this strategy. The strategy will be supported by a combination of mainstreaming funding and discrete funding for specific activities where required in order to achieve lasting change.

## How Success Will Be Measured

The success of this strategy will be measured in the achievement of its aims and objectives in addition to meeting the national targets<sup>13</sup> which are:

- Significantly increasing the number of women starting and growing businesses in the UK
- Women accounting for 40 per cent of customers using Government-sponsored business support services
- Women-owned businesses accounting for 18 –20 per cent of the UK total
- The number of women from ethnic minority communities receiving business support being proportionate to their representation in the regional/local population

This document outlines the region's vision, aims and objectives. However, the Regional Women's Enterprise Partnership recognises that in order to achieve these goals a long term Action Plan is required, which is underpinned by effective regional collaboration, monitoring and evaluation and sharing of best practice. A Regional Action Plan is being developed by the Regional Women's Enterprise Partnership in consultation with key partners and stakeholders and will be available by the end of December 2005. Both the regional strategy and action plan will be reviewed by the Regional Women's Enterprise Partnership on an annual basis and this will include a review of performance to date.

The changes that are needed to achieve results will not happen overnight, however tangible improvements are expected to be evident and measurable by the end of 2006.

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<sup>13</sup> *The UK's Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise - 2003*

## Contact Details for Further Information

If you would like to contribute to the strategy or become involved in your sub-regional partnership, please contact one of the following:

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# Consultation to support the Regional Women's Enterprise Strategy

## Bedfordshire And Luton Consultation

Two consultation meetings were held in Bedfordshire. Both included women who were thinking of starting a business and those already running their own business, as well as key partners and other support agencies.

Those thinking of starting a business agreed that access to finance was a key priority, if not the most important. All of the women agreed that they did not require huge amounts of investment and felt that a small grant or even a loan would be hugely beneficial. The majority were unwilling to approach financial institutions but felt that if there could be a link, perhaps between support agencies and the banking community they would feel more comfortable. They did however, all agree that all support agencies/banks/other government support agencies need to have a better perception of women's roles/needs/priorities.

Other perceived barriers were those of accessibility to advice and support. The location of support was high on their agendas. More "community" based support would benefit the majority of women, particularly those with childcare and primary care responsibilities.

Those women already in business put networking and mentoring at the top of their priorities. A chance to meet like-minded entrepreneurs as well as local entrepreneurs running similar businesses or others who have a similar background or circumstances, in a mentoring capacity would be valuable. A need to identify local women role models who, whilst not running multi-nationals, are a success in their own right would be helpful in overcoming perceived barriers.

Both groups agreed that in order to avoid chasing around various support agencies, access to a Resource Centre or One Stop Shop would be hugely beneficial. Information and supporting resources could include:

- Access to Networks
- Access to Mentors
- Information on premises
- Childcare
- Funding Opportunities

## Cambridgeshire Consultation

The Cambridgeshire consultation event was held in March 2005. Representatives from local organisations covering: business support, women and childcare support, career's agencies, women's networks, educational bodies, young enterprise support and councils attended.

The group defined the problems, barriers, and issues relating to different target groups and different levels of business growth. They then identified the actions that could be taken to remove barriers and ways in which women could overcome (where possible,) these barriers themselves.

The barriers identified were:

- Care issues
- Managing work and home
- Finance skills
- Accessibility of business advice and training
- Self confidence
- Perceptions of enterprise
- Cultural expectations

The target groups identified were:

- Young people
- Lone-parents
- Family/co-owned businesses
- Over 50's
- disabled women
- Women in rural areas
- Black and minority ethnic women

The group identified actions to be taken forward with an emphasis on quality and excellent customer service. These are summarised below. Actions 1 and 2 were considered to be a top priority.

1. Raise awareness through role models, networks, media, marketing of services and initiatives such as Young Enterprise. Particular attention should be paid to the language used in order to encourage alternative concepts of what business is all about.

2. Encourage and support partnership working among suppliers and agencies, also linking in with vocational courses and adult education.
3. Improve and develop the infrastructure to support women's enterprise. This includes child care provision, transport links for rurally isolated areas and issues around accessibility, i.e. taking the support to where the women are, whether specific geographical locations, ethnic minority communities or places where women meet.
4. Provide training to support business skills, life skills and confidence building. This could be provided through mentoring and small group activities. Timing and content should be tailored to the needs of the participants.
5. Identification of financial support needs and provision of financial support.

## Essex Consultation

A workshop was held in Chelmsford in January 2005. It was attended by representatives from agencies providing business support and support services for women.

The group looked at three key areas: barriers to women's enterprise; support required for women's enterprise in Essex and identification of target groups.

### 1. Barriers to Women's Enterprise in Essex:

#### Practical Barriers

- Caring responsibilities
- Self confidence/ self esteem
- Access to finance
- Finance skills
- Lack of awareness of what support services are available

#### Cultural Barriers

- Attitudes to, and perceptions of, a woman's role/abilities/priorities
- It often isn't seen as 'cool' for young girls to want to start their own business
- Often women have to work much harder than men to prove themselves
- The world runs to a male timetable
- Women often don't recognise that they have transferable skills
- Men are generally greater risk takers than women
- Lack of women role models

## 2. What support do women in Essex need?

- Need to promote benefits of starting a business
- Promotion of appropriate case studies – ‘real’ women
- Support required through the life of a business - not just at the start up stage.
- PRE – pre start support. Supporting women to realise a good idea or develop a past time into a business – skills identification/confidence building
- Accessible and suitable support – appropriate times/venues/format/deliverer
- Better promotion of existing services – simple and direct
- ‘Buddy-up’ women with those running similar businesses or who have a similar background/circumstances

## 3. Target Groups

- Focus on ‘life changes’ – divorce, grown up children, etc
- Economically inactive (through choice or circumstances)
- Get to know the audience through market analysis - business type, age, size location.
- Focus support at all levels not just disadvantaged groups. We need to segment women entrepreneurs - age/income/education/class/location (rural, urban)/etc

In addition to these points there was a real desire to achieve some quick wins so that people could see progress being made and then to follow this up with a coherent medium/long-term approach

## **Hertfordshire Consultation**

The Hertfordshire consultation event was held in March 2005. Delegates from local organisations covering: business support, services for women, careers agencies, women’s networks and educational bodies attended.

The group defined the problems, barriers, target groups and issues relating to different levels of business growth. They identified the actions that could be taken to remove barriers and identify (where possible) how women could overcome these barriers themselves.

The barriers identified were:

- Accessibility and appropriateness of business advice and training
- Poor finance skills
- Poor self perception and confidence
- Care issues
- Managing work life balance

The target groups identified were:

- Young people
- Lone-parents
- Family/co-owned businesses
- Women over 50
- Disabled women
- Women in rural areas
- Black and minority ethnic women

Specific recommendations included:

- Provide and publicise relevant world class services that encourage and support greater economic engagement by women
- Strengthen links and increase access to community and voluntary sectors, creating tangible benefits to partnerships

The consultation group were satisfied that the strategy document provided a broad framework under which each county could identify and agree solutions to the priorities in their area.

## Norfolk Consultation

The Norfolk consultation workshop was held in March 2005. Delegates from local business support organisations, enterprise agencies, carers advice services and women in business support groups identified the key barriers that exist to prevent from women starting and running their own businesses and how these can be addressed.

Major barriers identified included:

- Childcare issues
- Benefits trap (especially lone parents)
- Poor IT skills
- Lack of confidence
- Cultural expectations (gender)
- Not being taken seriously
- Lack of funding
- Women living in isolated areas

Childcare and travel support is critical to women start-ups as is bridging the gap between being on benefits and starting a business and sustainability.

Solutions include:

- Improving awareness and accessibility of local business support services
- Access to role models and local entrepreneurs to act as mentors
- Expansion of existing women only networking and business groups
- Time management training
- Financial skills
- Improve understanding at a local and regional level on the needs of women starting and running businesses

Norfolk stakeholders felt the need to promote a positive and joined up message, to engage with women who already run their own business and those thinking of starting a business. Access to support organisation requires major improvement in rural areas and for hard to reach communities.

## Suffolk Consultation

As a result of the Suffolk consultation, four main groups of women were identified - each requiring a different approach to support: -

- Women entrepreneurs who had or were confident enough to start a business who need mainstream business advice
- Women in rural areas of Suffolk who lack confidence – especially those who are at home without transport or ICT, are carers or belong to hard-to-reach communities. These groups require peer support and a significantly longer period of mentoring through out the start-up period
- Women in work: employment is seen as the safe career route but case studies and awareness raising is required to promote female entrepreneurship. This focus to extend to schools and colleges
- Women in the 50+ age bracket who represent a significant part of Suffolk's ageing population require training in business and financial skills

The support provided in all cases must be targeted and promoted in a way that reaches the various segments of the community. This is a challenge in Suffolk as a robust infrastructure of support for hard-to-reach communities does not exist and there are few existing networks or initiatives already in place on which to build.

Action is required to raise the collective esteem of women in business so that they do not feel at a disadvantage when presenting a business case to financial institutions. Support organisations also need to understand that success criteria for a woman at the start-up phase of a business may well be flexibility, low financial risk and independence as opposed to profit.

## Underpinning Research

- Women Entrepreneurs: Issues and Barriers, A Regional, National, and International Perspective, Exemplas Ltd, 2004
- Improving Opportunities: Access and Choices to work for Women who are Disadvantaged, Hard to reach or Socially Excluded, A Regional, National, and International Perspective, Exemplas Ltd, 2004
- Women in the Work Place: Under Representation and Exclusion, A Regional, National, and International Perspective, Exemplas Ltd, 2004
  - Part One - Women in Management
  - Part Two - Rural, Minority, Family and Co-owned Businesses
- A strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise, SBS, DTI, 2003
- Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2004 UK Executive Report
- The Regional State of Women's Enterprise in England, Prowess, 2005

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