# ISBE RAKE Report: Developing a collaborative space to challenge gendered structural issues in entrepreneuring in the North East of England.

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**In Partnership with**

**Executive Summary**

Women led businesses comprise 21.3% of the North East business population, a figure which has sparsely altered in the last decade. 40.2% of women led businesses in the North East cite obtaining access to finance as the major obstacle to success in their business (Tiwasing, 2018). The need for a more sophisticated co-ordination between public and educational figures to engage with practitioners (entrepreneurs and business support providers) to develop collaborative communities which drive economic vibrancy (Mitev *et al*, 2019) has become an ever-dominant discourse in the UK. This is particularly relevant for issues of gender and other categories of social difference in the North East of England where much of the existing data available on entrepreneurship does not segment by gender or other categories of social difference. Consequently, there is a lack of understanding of the entrepreneurship landscape, namely what is happening, to whom and how we might attempt to change this from a structural perspective.

The project aims to; i) understand the challenges and opportunities in developing a collaborative space fusing academic, policy and practice to enable gendered structural issues in "entrepreneuring" in the North East of England to be challenged and changed; ii) create a collaborative space which brings together researchers, policy makers and practitioners to advance issues of gender in entrepreneurship in the North East of England which will culminate in a clear place for a community of practice beyond the projects lifespan, namely Gender and Entrepreneurship North East (GENE hereafter).

A stakeholder map was devised to support with partnering and identifying potential research participants for the project. Eight scoping events, five regional university based events and three community-based events, were conducted with an open call to researchers, practitioners and policy makers in the region to consisting of were conducted to understand what a collaborative space such as GENE should do and how it should do this. This was supported by ten interviews with regional stakeholders who did not participate the scoping process. Key findings indicate that dismantling existing gendered regimes can only come from a responsible, co-ordinated knowledge exchange within and across different groups regionally, to enable people to make informed choices about when, where and how they can make contribute which are inclusive and progressive in entrepreneurial ecosystem. The intended work of GENE more broadly is to provide collaborative

space which provides the much needed insights to breed resistance through micropolitics of gendered practices which lead to macro politics to provide alternative inclusive regime with social justice at the core which influences and shapes women's enterprise policy and practice.

With the gendered impact of COVID19 and the Black Lives Matter movement, the need to demonstrate a commitment to mainstreaming inclusive practices has never been greater and potentially more transformative by placing social justice at the centre of all enterprise policies. However, to do so requires a commitment for collecting, reporting and sharing disaggregated data by protected characteristics and other categories of social difference. GENE will champion this call alongside working with practitioners of entrepreneuring (business owners and those who support those that do) to understand how their own practices maintain rather than disrupt the gendered entrepreneurship space with the potential for learning through collaboration to close the gap rather than fill the space with individualised  GENE, provides a means of supporting and understanding their lived experiences as well as helping others to do the same whilst also providing an opportunity to shape the landscape they are part of.

# Contents

## 1. Introduction

This 'End of Reward Report' for the ISBE Rake project "Developing a collaborative space to challenge gendered structural issues in entrepreneuring in the North East of England" will outline the project aims and objectives before providing a background to the work. The methodology will be delineated before the findings from the research are presented alongside an analytical discussion with concluding comments outlining how the aims and objective were met and the challenges encountered. Further research opportunities are highlighted alongside the implications for both practice and research before finally outlining knowledge exchange and current and future outcomes from the project.

The aims of the project were to:

- understand the challenges and opportunities in developing a collaborative space fusing academic, policy and practice to enable gendered structural issues in "entrepreneuring" in the North East of England to be challenged and changed
- create a collaborative space which brings together researchers, policy makers and practitioners to advance issues of gender in entrepreneurship in the North East of England which will culminate in a clear place for a community of practice beyond the projects lifespan – GENE (Gender and Entrepreneurship North East).

The project objectives were to:

i. Conduct stakeholder mapping at regional, national and international level
ii. Interview 10 key regional stakeholders who might not otherwise engage in this agenda as actively in order to mainstream issues of gender in entrepreneurship
iii. Deliver three scoping events to engage as many researchers, policy makers and practitioners across the region to explore and identify the purpose, priorities, and means by which GENE achieves its goal
iv. Identify GENE advisory board to set the strategic direction with clear terms of reference
v. Deliver a launch event to coincide with the ISBE 2019 conference taking place in Newcastle
vi. Disseminate findings of the interviews and scoping process in creating a collaborative space and share reflections on best practice across sector, nationally and internationally

## 2. Project Background

This project emerged from the lack of understanding of the co-ordination between educational figures, policy makers and practitioners (entrepreneurs and business support providers) to develop a collaborative entrepreneurship landscape, which both advances issues of gender (e.g. Ahl et al. 2019; Arshed et al. 2019; Benschop, 2009; Jones, 2014; Jones et al. 2019; Pecis & Priola, 2019; Vayreda et al. 2019; Jones, 2014; Henry et al. 2017) and other categories of social difference (e.g. Essers et al., 2010; Essers & Tedmanson, 2014) and drives economic vibrancy (Mitev et al. 2019). This is no less true in the North East of England (Tiwasing, 2018). Specifically, women led businesses comprise 21.3% of the North East business population, a figure which has sparsely altered in the last decade (ibid.). 40.2% of women led businesses in the North East cite obtaining access to finance as the major obstacle to success in their business. This is significantly higher than the national figure of 26.5% and greater still than the figure of men led businesses in the North East of 22% (ibid.). Policy and consequently business support offerings have taken a post feminism/neo-liberal perspective by focusing on what women can do to improve themselves. Unsurprisingly, perpetuating discourses of meritocracy and individualism (Gerodetti & McNaught-Davis, 2017) through such initiatives has done little to revise this figure more positively. Hence, it our contention that through better co-ordination and collaboration of academics, policy/public figures and practitioners, a meaningful place can be created which values feminist knowledge, opening up the possibility for greater intersectional appreciation which is not solely driven by economic measures.

By large, social network research in entrepreneurship spans multiple levels of analysis to challenge gender regimes, from academic networks (Jones et al. 2019; Pecis & Priola, 2019; Vayreda et al. 2019), enterprise policy (Ahl et al. 2019; Arshed et al. 2019; Henry et al. 2017; Jones, 2014) to working spaces (Benschop, 2009; Essers et al., 2010; Essers & Tedmanson, 2014; Hampton et al. 2011; Santos et al. 2019), and multiple methods for data collection and analysis, integrating qualitative, quantitative and graphical data. Networks are the main forms of work organisation (O'Carroll & Millne, 2010; Foss, 2010). Walby (2011, p. 8) linked networks "to informal, flexible working practices that enable nimble responses to rapidly changing economic opportunities". The increase in the networked forms of organisation is associated with the increased significance of social capital as compared with human capital: 'who you know, not only what you know' (ibid.). In turn, networks have complex and contested implications for gender relations (Foss, 2010). Nevertheless, only recently have scholars in the entrepreneurship area undertaken studies to shed

light on gendered contours of networks (e.g. Ahl et al. 2019; Arshed et al. 2019; Benschop, 2009; Jones, 2014; Jones et al. 2019; Pecis & Priola, 2019; Vayreda et al. 2019).

Interestingly, Jones et al.'s (2019) collaborative auto-ethnography analysis explored the formation and development of UK-based organisation for feminist entrepreneurship scholars, namely Gender and Enterprise Network (GEN), as a means of collective resistance to the perpetual removal of gender expertise from broader debates and enforced its marginality. Across business schools, where feminist knowledge workers are viewed as oppositional and feminist values, and concerns are positioned as non-productive or even counterproductive, GEN constitutes a collaborative space and 'micropolitics of resistance' that articulates an alternative gender knowledge regime to emphasise transdisciplinarity, collectivism and equality.

From the enterprise policy perspective, Jones (2014) critically analysed a set of policy-related documents to identify discourses that constructs the social reality of HE entrepreneurship education reproduced in the UK. She found that these discourses of entrepreneurship are saturated with gendered meanings and implied a traditional linking of entrepreneurship and masculinity. Specifically, these discourses offer a template of an entrepreneur which is more accessible to white, male students who are positioned as naturally embodying the desired behaviours and abilities of a successful entrepreneur. Potentially, these discourses position female students (and male students who do not accept this form of masculinity) as deficient and mask their struggle to negotiate symbolic representations within the gendered discourses at play.

Pettersson (2012) and Henry et al. (2017) catalogued the role of policy and governance in influencing women's entrepreneurial endeavours in a cross-country context. Specifically, from a gender perspective, Pettersson (2012) entailed the design of national support programmes, the different policy goals and portraying women's entrepreneurship in the Nordic countries (i.e. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden). Through a textual analysis of 14 policy documents and ministries' and governmental agencies on the internet, Pettersson (2012) concluded that most of the Nordic countries promote special programmes for women which encompass explicitly gender equality as a goal with either short or unclear time frames. In addition, Henry et al.'s (2017) analysis mapped and compared 38 documents' provisions and practices of the Global Women's Entrepreneurship Policy (Global WEP) Research Project issued by 13 country teams, including Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Norway, Pakistan, Spain,

Sweden, Tanzania, the UK and the USA. They found that country teams tended to discuss core policy to address regulative pillar (e.g. preventing overt forms of discrimination against women entrepreneurs) and/or the cultural/cognitive pillar (e.g. targeting the skills and attitudes of women entrepreneurs). In doing so, the Global WEP sought to recommend developing women's business centres to facilitate women training, mentoring and networking with crucial resource providers. In the meantime, the country teams paid less attention to encompass the growing numbers and contributions of women entrepreneurs into the broader ecosystem and environment in which women operate. This indicate a weakness in the normative pillar of the Global WEP.

Most recently, Arshed et al.'s (2019) ethnographically studied institutionalisation and legitimisation process of the UK women's enterprise policy to shed light on how the social positioning of women in enterprise policy can influence their entrepreneurial activity. They found that there is a reification of gender stereotyping of male and female businesses in policy and support services, which is problematic for successful policy implementation. In a similar vein, Ahl and Marlow (2019) examined government policy initiatives which aimed at expanding women's entrepreneurship and the assumptions underpinning such initiatives from two developed but contrasting economies, Sweden (i.e. social-democratic welfare state) and the UK (i.e. a liberal welfare state). They found that both the UK and Sweden policy agenda acknowledge that women experience gendered barriers constraining their entrepreneurial potential and participation. Nevertheless, the policy initiatives articulated a discourse underpins a linkage between entrepreneurship as a good option for women and a moral dimension by which women should be entrepreneurial, they should address their entrepreneurial shortcomings deficits such as poor self-confidence and should adopt appropriate attitudes and subjectivities.

Hampton et al. (2011) drew attention to the networks of female entrepreneurial practitioners operate in the science, engineering and technology (SET) -based ventures, which are viewed traditionally as male-dominated, in Northern Ireland. They interviewed 18 SET female entrepreneurs to investigate network type and composition through the business lifecycle and nature and frequency of engagement. Hampton et al. (2011) found that women operate in technology-based ventures adopt a more sophisticated, deliberate, thoughtful and proactive approach to their networking practices. These practices range from developing a personal network (e.g. family and friends) at very early stages of business to develop different contacts and indirect ties (e.g. network brokers, enterprise centre, personnel and other professionals) once these women strove for

business growth. Hence, Hampton et al. (2011) contented that women and men appear to establish and utilise their networks as an entrepreneurial resource in mostly similar ways. Hence, further policy support will be needed to embrace forming mixed-gender networks and participating in broader and more diverse networks to enable the long-term viability of female high-technology entrepreneurship.

Most recently, Santos et al. (2019) assessed motivations for and objectives in creating a network of entrepreneurial Portuguese women in a sector underrepresented by women compared to men with exceptional cases in which women are prominent. They interviewed seven wine producers and the network manager of D'Uva – Portugal Wine Girls, which is a formal, horizontal, and inter-organisational network of women wine producers. They found that two essential conditions played a role in calling for and formalising the D'Uva. First, the network tied young women-leaders who are heirs of an industry's traditions and professionals active who seek to stimulate a better performance in the changing Portuguese wine industry. Most importantly, "the fact that they were women in the wine sector was the condition that ended up bringing them together in a common project" (ibid., p. 306). Santos et al.'s (2019) results supported that open networks for entrepreneurial women promotes narrating feminine, cohesive, and united voice leading to creative and innovative sharing of knowledge, contacts, and experiences and the growth of an industry.

Previous studies have sought to illustrate the tension women entrepreneurs encounter because of 'the female ethnicity' (e.g. Essers et al. 2010; Essers & Tedmanson, 2014), a notion that interlaces working of gender and ethnicity as social categories of exclusion. In this view, identified networks of women entrepreneurs as a key strategy used to cope with these tensions. In this view, Essers et al. (2010) gathered life stories narratives of Muslim women who owned companies without a male involvement and who were proficient in the Dutch language through networks of immigrant women and then following up on references from research participants. They found that Muslim immigrant businesswomen in the Netherlands "develop agency at the crossroads of identity categories and come up with a variety of coping strategies that ensure their entrepreneurship practices" (ibid., p. 336). These strategies took various forms which span from gradual opting for aspirations for independence, self-determination and contact with the other sex; resistance to traditional norms/values held by the ethnic community while using ethnic identity as a marketing instrument; selective distancing; and transcending boundaries between the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity. The further in-depth stance by Essers and Tedmanson (2014) explored ways in which female Muslim entrepreneurs re-work categorising them as the 'Other' in a highly polarised context

of Muslim/non-Muslim relations in the Netherlands to affirm their multiple identities and gain agency. They found that women's "experiences reflect the 'double bind' of 'racialised sexism', whereby Turkish women face racism and sexism from the dominant society they live and work in, while also confronting sexism and patriarchal dominations in their own communities". Hence, women's strategic use of the 'female ethnicity' focuses on developing defensive tactics that construct in-between, transactional and/or strategic identities.

GENE itself is a collaborative space as Newcastle University Business School, International Consultants for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise, and the North East Local Enterprise Partnership work together to develop a regionally rooted space and place which collaborates with the national agenda and has a global reach. By opening up this space, a meaningful place can be created from which collective activism can be taken to challenge existing structures.

## 3. Methodology

This project sought to understand the challenges and opportunities in developing a collaborative space fusing academic, policy and practice to enable gendered structural issues in "entrepreneuring" in the North East of England to be challenged and changed (*Research Aim 1*).

To understand such challenges and opportunities, a feminist pragmatic realist ontology was taken. The purpose of the project is rooted in feminist values, namely, to develop a collaborative space to challenge established gendered social order (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004) to create new knowledge towards cultivating social and political change (Crasnow, 2008; Brooks, 2007; Fonow and Cook, 2005; Hurley, 1999) to enable equitable entrepreneurial experiences for women. Our pragmatic realist ontological position draws upon Watson's (2011) understanding acknowledging that there are no absolute truths, but relative truths with reality understood to emerge from human practices. The value of pragmatic realism for this project is its concern with how people learn the ropes to understand the "roles, rules, norms, unofficial practices, politics, discourses and cultures" (Watson, 2011: 209) which have created and shaped gendered structures for entrepreneuring in the North East of England.

### 3.1 Scoping Events

To garner an interest in GENE as a collaborative space exploration of the purpose and priorities of GENE were sought through scoping events to inform the questions to be explored in the interviews and enable knowledge exchange. The purpose of the events attempted to engage as many researchers, policy makers and practitioners across North East England. Three scoping events were planned to take place following an initial pilot session in September 2018 at Newcastle University. However, The principal of St Aidan's College, Durham University generously funded catering which enabled a further University event to take place at Sunderland University ensuring scoping events took place at each of the five regional universities. One of the outcomes of the knowledge exchange from the Durham University event in December 2018 was that participants highlighted that some communities and groups would never hear about or feel comfortable to attend and share their views at this type of event because it was taking place at a University venue and facilitated by people from a University/research/business background. In acknowledgement of this we partnered with a local charity (Millin) in Newcastle and a women's group (Assist Women's Network) in Teesside to conduct three further community based scoping events with people from the charity and women's network leading the event. By acknowledging the privilege of the research team and adjusting the methodology we attempted to be more inclusive during the scoping exercise to increase the number and diversity of voices heard. As a result the project held eight scoping events, four more events than had been anticipated (see below table 1 for an overview of the scoping events).

| Date | Location | Stage | Event attendance | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 06/09/18 | Newcastle University | 1st stage, initial scoping event to garner interest leading to the | 14 | Conducted pre ISBE RAKE Funding |
| 12/12/18 | Durham University | 2nd stage scoping carousel | 23 | Planned as part of the ISBE RAKE proposal objective iii |
| 28/02/19 | Teesside University | | 19 | |
| 30/04/19 | Northumbria University | 3rd stage scoping discussing the results of the Alison Rose Review with the scoping themes to date | 18 | |
| 03/07/19 | Sunderland University | | 16 | Part of the ISBE RAKE project but in addition to the proposed three scoping events |
| 11/07/19 (am) | Millin Charity, Newcastle | | 8 | |
| 11/07/19 (pm) | Acklam Green Centre, Middlesbrough | | 11 | |
| 12/07/19 | Gateshead | | 3 | |

*Table 1: Scoping Event Overview*

### 3.2 Semi Structured Interviews

Ten semi structured one-to-one interviews averaging 60 minutes were conducted by the Principal Researcher with individuals who have regional influence (in)directly in the entrepreneurial/small business sector in the North East of England who might not otherwise have engaged in this agenda as actively in order to mainstream issues of gender in entrepreneurship (Objective 3).

Semi structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide (see appendix 1). Adopting a semi-structured interview approach provided a structure that ensured the key issues of concern for the study are covered whilst providing sufficient space for each to be explored without being constrained and enabling participants to voice their subjective understandings of their experiences (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).  The interview guide (see appendix 1) begins by exploring their view on the key challenges for small business and entrepreneurship generally in the North East of England followed by further discussion exploring the involvement and relationship of policy and research in their areas of work which allow issues of gender to emerge implicitly or explicitly before following up with overt questions on issues of gender as the interview progresses. The questions then focus on what their respective organisation do/commit to doing currently and ask what else they could be doing. Their view on how a collaborative space could be co-ordinated in the North East is also explored as well as asking whose voices should be heard in this research. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriber, anonymised and returned to research participants to ensure resonance and approval.

### 3.3 Purposive Sampling Approach

As outlined in the original research proposal the purpose of this data collection was to access participants identified as key regional stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem who might not otherwise engage in this agenda in order to mainstream issues of gender and/or entrepreneurship as a primary activity (Objective 2). Consequently, a purposive sampling approach was employed, informed and drawn from the project's scoping process which asked whose voices were not being heard at each event (Objective 3) and a regional stakeholder mapping exercise (Objective 1).

The stakeholder mapping was conducted to identify the dominant and influential voices in the entrepreneurial ecosystem from the  research team's networks, understandings and experiences of working in this space that would a) inform the sampling approach for the stakeholder one-to-one interviews and b) identify who from a national and international perspective we could partner with

to learn from working in this space albeit in different contexts. The mapping exercise was conducted to include regional (predominantly), national and international organisations or contacts. A very inclusive approach was taken at this stage particularly at the regional level to ensure that stakeholders whose primary focus was diversity or entrepreneurship but not necessarily both together were also included. This ensured that all those who contribute to the entrepreneurship ecosystem directly or indirectly were included in acknowledgement of the need to mainstream issues of gender within entrepreneurship therefore not always speaking to people and organisations that might be deemed "usual suspects". Each were then analysed amongst the research team to understand their perspectives and interests before being categorised to ensure geographic reach and cross-sector perspectives. Stakeholders were then prioritised in relation to their relevance, influence and diversity in relation to gender and entrepreneurship with a specific North East focus.

The research participants, five men and five women, were leaders in organisations which support and encourage entrepreneuring in the region. Some individuals were employed, self-employed or volunteer in their specific roles. Their organisations may solely focus on the North East region or have a wider geographical reach with the North East region included within their remit but all individuals are located in the North East of England.  In order to ensure anonymity for the participants involved we have been unable to disclose the organisations as by naming the organisation their identity will be revealed given their profile regionally and/or nationally.

Thematic analysis was adopted to identify and explore participants' perspectives on the need for a collaborative space in the North East of England, what the challenges are and how they see themselves and/or organisation working with GENE.

## 3   Project contributors and respondents

The project was led by Dr Nicola Patterson (Co-chair of GENE) of Newcastle University Business School and is a collaborative project with International Consultants of Entrepreneurship and Enterprise (GENE Co-Chair and ICEE Director, Dinah Bennett OBE) and the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (specifically its Business Growth Director Colin Bell) who were Co-Investigators on the project.

Anne MacDonald, Project Manager Associate at Newcastle University throughout the duration of project, supported with the organisation and management of the scoping event process and stakeholder mapping.

## 4 Findings

This section will outline the identified themes emerging from each of the three stages of the scoping process as well as the interview data to date.

### 4.1 Stage One: Initial Scoping Themes

In the first scoping event prior to the ISBE RAKE award there was open invitation circulated through Dr Nicola Patterson and Dinah Bennett OBE's regional networks to discuss the potential for a cohesive regional voice to understand gender issues in entrepreneurship in the North East of England and drive innovation and change through an intersectional lens. The questions participants were asked were; what would you like "this" to be? What would it to do and/produce? The below are the identified themes drawn from the data.

i. **Legacy** – "That there will be one and that we can make a difference that lasts". The importance of this not being deemed passing fade/trend that would go away

ii. **Sustainability** – "It's got legs" that can sustain itself in terms of resources and support

iii. **Education and awareness** – a driving force to ensure that everyone has an understanding of gender and why it is important for entrepreneurship

iv. **Creating a place/ hub for the region** – Become an authority for the region on issues of gender in entrepreneurship

v. **Being disruptive/ challenge policy** – The need be noticed to achieve the above by being provocative to make difference to entrepreneurship.

These themes were taken forward to frame the conversations in the second stage of the scoping process.

### 4.2 Stage Two: Scoping Themes

During the second stage of the scoping events the themes from the first stage were used as points for discussion in small groups to change and build on the initial understandings.

| Themes | Understandings |
|---|---|
| **Challenge assumptions to change the conversation** | • Growth, funding criteria, success and failure, language, (social) media, who can be an entrepreneur, childcare responsibilities what it means to be successful or failure<br>• Engage the disengaged |
| **Best Practice** | • A GENE kitemark, standard, sign up to the GENE charter<br><br>• Awareness raising<br><br>• An independent voice who is a critical friend to other organisations<br><br>• GENE ambassadors/role models |
| **Create Spaces** | • Physical to enable face-to-face interactions<br><br>• Digital place for resources |
| **Regionally embedded** | • Into the regional strategy<br><br>• Supported by the regional universities, LEP's, Entrepreneurs Forum, Chamber of Commerce<br><br>• Importance of relationships and support from large organisations in the region |
| **Data** | • Disaggregated data by protected characteristics and other categories of social difference to understand the landscape to build a different ecosystem<br><br>• Potential to build momentum and impact<br><br>• Understanding the cost of doing nothing |

***Table 2: Second Stage Scoping Themes***

**4.3 Stage Three: Scoping Themes**

Stage three scoping events discussed the results of the Alison Rose Review (which had been published 8th March 2019) alongside the stage two scoping themes. The development of discussion matured in relation to the purpose of GENE and articulating its priorities in the challenge that it is presented with:

- Data driven education and awareness – encouraging the collection of disaggregated data protected characteristics and other categories of social difference

- Appreciating households as a backcloth – diversity within those households from an intersectional perspective to understand challenges and issues and

- Collaboration – an acknowledgement of the work and facilitation required to enable and maintain GENE from a regional perspective. The linear geography of the region, two Local

Enterprise Partnerships in the region and the fact there are many collaborations in the region but nothing which is holistic in relation to issues of gender and other categories of social difference for entrepreneurship.

**4.4 Interview Themes**

In order to challenge the discriminatory gender knowledge and hierarchies (Jones et al, 2018) the views of individuals who have the power to define knowledge, shape structures and influence practices should be included and engaged. Through the interview data collection, the intention was to, firstly, seek to understand current processes and practices within entrepreneurship to reveal and secondly explore how these processes and practices can begin to  dismantle (Ahl and Marlow, 2019)c  the gendered nature of entrepreneuring. The key themes (identified to date as we intend to conduct further interviews outside of the scope of this project) are presented below with an illustrative participant quotation included to demonstrate the theme.

| Theme | | Understanding | Illustrative power quote |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Reveal Current Processes and Practices** | Elevate Voices | Recognise the need to represent their members/audience etc | "trying to reflect everybody's views is, look it isn't lecturing or hectoring or whatever, that it is that everybody's part of the community and everybody's got to feel… got to be made to feel welcome within the community so they can have that confidence to express their views, and not sort of hide them" *Participant 2* |
| | Understanding "the" issue | Understanding that there is an issue from a gender perspective. Lack of understanding and appreciation of the intersectionality | "The trouble is we all live in our own bubble and you don't see how it impacts in other areas….it's simple things that, just through ignorance, and innocent ignorance, people cause things to happen." *Participant 4* |
| | Lack of resources | Everyone does own research, no co-ordination where is the collective, frustration at the different pace of University based research | "insight into the target market, however you want to segment, but seen through the prism of, you know, of gender and ethnicity, disability, whatever. Then whoever the organisation is, using [us] as an example, we can see that as, if we have a relationship with GENE or we're part of GENE, that is going to give us empathy with the target market. We can then better serve our target market as a result of that empathy and insight. And that also means that … we keep up with the times, are able to keep alive, so we can use that as a comparison with the other types of information we get, which is direct [our research], etc. And also, from an element of objectivity, if GENE has the resource to survey |

| | | | the market where we can't, then you may get information that we don't anyway because somebody's talking to a third party not directly with [us]. And you always need that with research, don't you, I mean that's what people are always struggling for" *Participant 6* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Northern legacy | Grit and determination coupled with the remnants of old industry | "we're good at fixing and like hard work, grafters, erm again like very traditional family where like the man goes out uses his brawn like down the mines or steelworks, whatever, ship building. But even now that's still there, that psychology is still there" *Participant 1* |
| ***How can processes and practices be dismantled?*** | "moving the needle" | Closing the gap (not filling the space) | "about closing gaps into … the mainstream. We, because we don't deliver services, we don't … identify gaps and then deliver services in those gaps. What we do is we identify gaps and then try and close the gaps. Through change in policy or through improvement in the competency or arrangement of the services that they're supposed to be delivering for that need, or that issue. So that's our target is full integration through mainstreaming, and not through advocating for specialist separate services. We just try to say to services that they need to be able to respond appropriately to the needs of the whole community. And the whole community has different types of needs and they need to configure that." *Participant 7* |
| | Responsible Story Telling | The for a diversity of realities (good and bad) of entrepreneurship and small business to be shared from all backgrounds to make it more relatable and achievable rather than setting up what is mostly unattainable aspirations. Allow people to make informed choices of | "the aspirational side is really important. And like you say, they need that, they might never be the [woman a] or [man b], but actually seeing that kind of does push them and inspire them, which is positive, but then it's kind of tempering that as well isn't it" *Participant 6* |
| | Create the space to galvanise | Large organisations make this everyone's responsibility | "I think the best way to galvanise any movement or any information, I think people need to be generous and share their knowledge, and do it for the greater good. Obviously all big organisations have got to be mindful about their, you know, their bottom line and their, you know, what they're about. Their ROI and all this kind of stuff. But, ultimately, and I think this 100% works in the North East, you know the bringing together of your Accenture's and your DWP and your [organisation a] and your Nissan and …" |

| | | | academia and your small business organisations and your [person a] of the world … I think you bring people together with a purpose. And, you know, and with a clear kind of goal, it's got to be ambitious I always think otherwise why bother." *Participant 5* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Insight needed | A resource, knowledge centre from which organisations and people draw upon to support and develop their work to become more informed and inclusive | "You know, so it depends, but I would say that, they're broad generalisations cause we don't have enough data to sort of like be really clear about that. Clearly we know that the traditional role of women who are, you know, carers, parents and carers, and carers of older relatives has an impact on their inactivity levels in employment. And that … is always the most sort of perpetuating challenge." *Participant 3* |

## 5 Discussion

This project has sought to understand current processes and practices within entrepreneurship to reveal and secondly explore how these processes and practices can begin to dismantle (Ahl and Marlow, 2019) the gendered nature of entrepreneuring.  In doing so we have explored this with entrepreneurs, business support organisations, policy makers, and researchers which identified themes through the scoping and interview process. Aligned to Ahl and Marlow's (2019) call to reveal and dismantle, the discussion is structured in this vein.

Through the reveal it was clear there was a commitment across the region to *elevate voices* of those who are not being heard, from their members, network or space in which they represent. This is coupled with the *Northern Legacy* theme which speaks to a regional identity perspective of having regional grit, determination and getting on with things which is used as discourse from which to make sense (un/consciously) of the struggle and regional variation experienced. It is interesting to explore and understand this regional entrepreneurial identity further from an intersectional perspective as we contend this presents multiple issues for categories of social difference.

In revealing current processes and practices key challenges have been identified through two central themes from the interview stage, *understanding the issue* and a *lack of resources*. It was apparent from the data from stakeholder interviews that addressing more than one category of difference

was complex and a reluctance to, when overtly asked, to comment on issues of other categories of social difference. Not feeling it was their place. This is interesting in relation to issues of GENE as for the *needle to shift* and the gap to close, we require a greater understanding and appreciation of intersectionality, the complexities this brings and ownership that this is everyone's responsibility to make a commitment to change not an identified minority group. This links to the *data driven education and awareness* theme from the scoping process as a potential approach to dismantle. Through disaggregated data we can understand difference realities to educate and enable a greater diversity of understandings to have the confidence to raise issues, to have a greater appreciation of intersectionality and to ask further questions of self and others as a means to close the gap.

The second challenge in the reveal stage was the *lack of resources*, in that many organisations conduct their own research but what is apparent is that there is no co-ordination of this from a regional perspective to enable learning across sectors from a regional standpoint. There is much to be gained from a co-ordinated research and resource strategy to address systemic regional gender issues through an intersectional lens.

In terms of how existing processes and practices be dismantled, the scoping process offered three themes i) data driven education and awareness, ii) Appreciating households as a backcloth iii) and collaboration.

Through themes of *collaboration*, *create space*, *creating space to galvanise* and *moving the needle* the study suggests the need to shift our gaze beyond the micro level to macro level issues in terms of what we collaborate on, who and how. A need to have an inclusive approach to tackle issues with people and organisations of various backgrounds and sectors to ensure everyone feels the weight of responsibility.

In the case of women's enterprise policy, Ahl and Marlow (2019) highlight the issue of whether entreprenurship is indeed a good option for women and suggest there could be better alternatives for example better paid public sector employment against the need for *responsible story telling* (interview theme) and appreciating the diversity of households and when and how this might be appropriate . *Understanding the issue* theme, is the need to appreciate the intersectionality and

difference. In doing so we can progress from continually highlighting perceived short comings/deficit of any category or group which leads to gaps being filled rather than a focus on closing a systemic gap.

Relating to Essers et al. (2010) work which highlighted that Muslim women developed agency at the crossroads of identity categories and come up with a variety of coping strategies which are enablers to their entrepreneurial practices. Creating spaces where people are able to talk, understand and appreciate other identity categories is a strength for the individuals but in cascading an intersectional understanding would provide a positive stride in appreciating where we can collaborate together in spaces of commonality for political change (relating to Santos et al 2011 common project), appreciate differences and the complexities this brings.  In doing so, it further illuminates where the power and privilege lies, to understand where new possibilities can be reimagined within entrepreneuring from a scholarly, policy and practice perspective

Consequently, it is proposed that what GENE should offer is a collaborative space which provides the much needed insights to breed resistance through micropolitics of practices which lead to macro politics to provide alternative gender knowledge regime (Jones et al, 2018) with social justice at its core which the intention to influence and shape women's enterprise policy.

Continuing to reveal and understand should be seen as process rather than an achieved state for GENE, as the context is constantly evolving. What is clear from the data and the process we have engaged with to date for GENE, is that dismantling can only come from a responsible, co-ordinated knowledge exchange within and across different groups to enable people to make informed choices about when, where and how they might contribute to the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

## 6   Conclusion

This project has addressed the original aims and objectives of the initial project proposal which will be each commented on in turn within this section.

**6.1 Research Aims**

1   understand the challenges and opportunities in developing a collaborative space fusing academic, policy and practice to enable gendered structural issues in "entrepreneuring" in the North East of England to be challenged and changed

Through the findings presented from the scoping processes and interviews the project has identified the key challenges and opportunities for GENE.

2   create a collaborative space which brings together researchers, policy makers and practitioners to advance issues of gender in entrepreneurship in the North East of England which will culminate in a clear place for a community of practice beyond the projects lifespan – GENE (Gender and Entrepreneurship North East).

A GENE advisory board has been identified, convened on three occasions with a launch event taking place on 13th November 2019.

**6.2 Research Objectives**

   i.   *Conduct stakeholder mapping at regional, national and international level*

A stakeholder mapping exercise was completed to identify and inform the purposive sample for interviews at a regional level as well as potential partners at a National and International level.

   ii.   *Interview 10 key regional stakeholders who might not otherwise engage in this agenda as actively in order to mainstream issues of gender in entrepreneurship*

Ten interviews have now been conducted with regional stakeholders as outlined in the methodology.

   iii.   *Deliver three scoping events to engage as many researchers, policy makers and practitioners across the region to explore and identify the purpose, priorities, and means by which GENE achieves its goal*

A total of eight scoping events took place as outlined in table 1.  Gender and Entrepreneurship North East (GENE) has a current working understanding of what it is, who it is for and its purpose outlined below. This is being reviewed with the Advisory Board.

*What is GENE?*

GENE is a collaborative space which brings together researchers, policy makers and practitioners to advance issues of gender and other categories of social difference in entrepreneurship in the North East of England.

The project is a collaborative space as Newcastle University Business School, International Consultants for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise, and the North East Local Enterprise Partnership are working together to develop relationships with regionally rooted businesses and support organisations.

The purpose of GENE is to enable a regional space for voices to be heard so that a place can be created where knowledge of gender and other categories of social difference within entrepreneurship to be harnessed, produced and transferred to enable social and structural change. Whilst GENE is regionally rooted, knowledge is nationally connected with a global reach.

*Who is GENE for?*

Researchers (academic and non-academic), educators (school and beyond), policy makers and practitioners (entrepreneurs, business supporters and advisors) with a stake and interest in entrepreneurship in the North East.

*What does GENE do?*

Through the collaborative collation of data and evidence focused on issues of gender and other categories of social difference in entrepreneurship, GENE will provide a regional identity to: i) educate through awareness raising initiatives; ii) drive policy change to foster more inclusive practices in entrepreneurship to enable greater regional equity for those engaging in entrepreneurship.

Creating a regional hub of stakeholders to develop a powerful database from which to generate data specific to issues of gender and categories of social difference for entrepreneurship.

*Why does GENE exist?*

Firstly, to provide a space and place for the North East region to have a voice given the unique nature and history of our region. Much of the existing data available on entrepreneurship in the North East does not segment by gender or other categories of social difference to understand *what* is happening and to *whom*. Consequently, without knowing the *what,* we fail to explore *why* this is happening and *how* we might change this.

*iv.*     *Identify GENE advisory board to set the strategic direction with clear terms of reference*

The GENE advisory board was identified from interested parties contributing to the scoping process and indicating their interest in continued involvement. One of the limitations of this project is our anticipated timing of when an Advisory Board might be required and how quickly they could be galvanised to create a clear strategic direction for GENE against the initial proposal timescales. The terms of reference are currently in draft form and under review in light of the current COVID19 context.

| Board Member | Role External to GENE |
|---|---|
| **Simon Allen** | Product and Investment Director, UMi |
| **Lucy Batley** | Director and Business Owner International Consultants for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise |
| **Dinah Bennett OBE (Co-founder)** | Creative Director and Business Owner JUMP |
| **Colin Bell** | Director for Growth, NELEP |
| **Yolanda Gibb** | Societal Innovation and Enterprise Forum (SIEF), St Aidan's College, Durham University. |
| **Billie Jenkins** | Communications Manager, PNE Group |
| **Paul Lancaster** | Business Owner |
| **Shamiso Machaya** | Business Owner, SME North East |
| **Anne MacDonald** | Dynamo |
| **Dr Nicola Patterson (Co-founder)** | Senior Lecturer, Newcastle University Business School |
| **Anne Stonehouse** | Business Owner, Assist Women |
| **Cissie Tsang** | Collaboratives Projects Manager, Newcastle University Business School |
| **Charlotte Windebank** | Business Owner, FIRST |
| **Ruth Winden** | Business Owner, Older Yet Bolder |
| **Lizzie Witherington** | Business Owner, Raised By |

*v.*     *Deliver a launch event to coincide with the ISBE 2019 conference taking place in Newcastle*

The launch event took place on Wednesday 13th November 2019 12:00-14:00 with 90 people registered from regional small business owners, representatives from large organisations based in North East England, Senior Management representatives from the regional Local Enterprise Partnerships, to academics and researchers regionally, nationally and internationally. The event commenced with a networking and welcome lunch at Newcastle University Business School followed by speeches from Dr Nicola Patterson and Dinah Bennett OBE discussing the origin of GENE, its philosophy, the work completed to date and the future plans. Professor Julia Rouse provided a

national context to the discussion and highlighting the State of the Art Reviews on Women's Enterprise due to be published at in March 2020. Dr Margo Thomas, CEO of the Women's Economic Imperative and Co-Chair of the T20 Task Force on Gender Economic Equity, then positioned GENE and its work in relation to global economic development and in particular the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) for Gender Equality. The Global Women's Entrepreneurship Partnership was invited to the launch and Newcastle University Business School hosted their annual meeting ahead of the ISBE Welcome reception.

*vi.    Disseminate findings of the interviews and scoping process in creating a collaborative space and share reflections on best practice across sector, nationally and internationally*

The dissemination of the findings has been delayed due to Principal Researchers ill health delaying completion of the project to the next appropriate and available point of the academic year, followed by the COVID19 pandemic was the most significant challenge of this project. The intention is to secure further funding to conduct a further 10-15 interviews to establish a greater data set for publication and incorporate and the contextual relevance of current pandemic. The plan is therefore to delay a dissemination event until December 2020/early 2021

## 7    Further research opportunities

The research team intend to conduct further interviews to increase the diversity of organisations and voices represented as well as appreciating the development of issues in a post COVID19 context. Also, through networking nationally and internationally GENE is being recognised as research partner to collaborate with to ensure the North East of England is represented for example we were included as a partner in a recent (but unfortunately unsuccessful) UKRI bid led by Professor Julia Rouse to develop a Covid19 and Small Firms Learning Lab for the Northern Powerhouse.

## 8    Policy and Practice Implications

More broadly, this project has implications for policy makers in terms of understanding how their role requires a collaborative approach to conceptualise and cultivate inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems which appreciate the intersectionality and complexities within entrepreneurship. With

the gendered impact of COVID19 and the Black Lives Matter movement, the need to demonstrate their commitment to mainstreaming inclusive practices has never been greater and potentially more transformative by placing social justice at the centre of all enterprise policies.  However, to do so requires a commitment for collecting, reporting and sharing data.

This project has implications for practice in relation to business support agencies in understanding how their own practices maintain rather than disrupt the gendered entrepreneurship space with the potential for learning through collaboration. For those involved in entrepreneuring themselves, GENE, provides a means of supporting and understanding their lived experiences as well as helping others to do the same whilst also providing an opportunity to shape the landscape they are part of.

## 9    Knowledge Exchange and Transfer

The research engaged with and demonstrated knowledge exchange from its design, implementation and plans beyond the scope of the project. The scoping events have provided a great source for knowledge exchange with one example shared earlier regarding additional community based scoping events as well as two advisory board members connecting through GENE (PNE group and Women Empowering Women Network) to collaborate. In July 2020, PNE and WEWN secured funding from local councils to support 48 BME migrant and refugee women in Newcastle and South Tyneside to explore and enter self-employment on a programme called "Engage and Excel". The programme was created to eliminate barriers to self-employment and professional progression faced by BME migrant and refugee women by providing access to business start-up information, professional development and mentoring from successful women with similar backgrounds. It will also seek to create a cohort of role models to inspire the next generation of BME women entrepreneurs. https://netimesmagazine.co.uk/news/wewn-and-pne-group-partner-to-deliver-new-project/

The GENE project itself has facilitated the development of a collaborative relationship with the North East Local Enterprise Partnership Developed and International Consultants for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise with knowledge exchange activities and conversations emerging in relation to issues of gender within entrepreneurship more frequently.

The GENE launch event in November 2019 led to an informal conversation between practitioners, policy makers and academics during the main ISBE conference at Newcastle which resulted in the now reformed Women's Enterprise Policy Group (WEPG) (Co-chaired by Professor Julia Rouse and Maggie O'Carroll, The Women's Organisation) which both Dinah Bennett OBE and Dr Nicola Patterson are members to voice North East perspective. The WEPG has published an open letter to the Chancellor regarding the Government's gendered response to business support and self-employment during the COVID19 pandemic as well as drafting a policy framework.

Dr Nicola Patterson was invited as a Keynote speaker to University of Regina in Canada in June 2019 to discuss GENE and the scoping process. The audience was a mixture of practitioners, province policy makers, politicians and researchers. The event enabled dissemination of GENE's work as well understanding what has worked in Canada and in particular in the Saskatchewan province.

The legacy of this project is the continuation and support for GENE supported by Newcastle University Business Schools commitment of two year fixed term a 0.3 FTE role to support this activity alongside the commitment of the Principal Researcher, International Consultants for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise as well as the NELWEP's continued involvement. The Advisory Board's next meeting is 7th August 2020 to continue GENE's work.

## 10 Outcomes

*Specific outcomes related to the initial project proposal*:

- Stakeholder mapping developed to support with partnering and identifying potential research participants
- Conducted eight scoping events; consisting of five regional university based events and three community-based events which is four more than anticipated in the initial project proposal

- A working paper "Challenging gendered structures in entrepreneuring through a collaborative space" was submitted and presented in the Gender and Enterprise track at the 2019 ISBE Conference in Newcastle

- The project paid for a member from the GENE community to attend the ISBE conference in Newcastle in November 2019 who would not otherwise have been able to attend. The participant wrote a summary of their experiences which was shared within the community space

- Delivered a launch event for GENE 13th November 2019 ahead of the main ISBE conference with over 90 people from various academic/research, policy and practice backgrounds from the North East region, nationally and internationally, in attendance

- The GENE Advisory Board was appointed in October 2018 continues to meet and refine the purpose of GENE in light of the current pandemic and how we continue to highlight and challenge gendered structures in the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the North East of England in particular.

- To replace our initial plan of monthly GENE blogs, the GENE LinkedIn page is used to share and update our community with research and initiatives was suggested as digestible for our audience a useful way to keep connected.

*Project proposal outcomes currently in progress/planned:*

- A future dissemination event on the process of GENE and the research will be offered which may be virtually given the current circumstances in December 2020/January 2021.

- The write up from this research is continuing with the development of a paper to be submitted to the International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship

*Additional/unanticipated outcomes from the project:*

- As a result of the GENE project, Newcastle University Business School committed 0.3 FTE for a new Collaborative Projects Manager post for a two-year fixed term period to work on the GENE initiative

- GENE has been invited as a partner organisation of Women's Economic Imperative (WEI) a globally focussed NGO based in Washington, DC which was developed from the work of the UN High Level on Women's Economic Empowerment

- Hosted an "In conversation with Dr Margo Thomas - Costs of inequity in the workplace November 12th 2018 in partnership with St Aidan's College, Durham University, Societal Innovation and Enterprise Forum(SIEF) and GENE. Raising the profile of GENE and the ISBE RAKE support.

- As a result of the GENE partnership with the Women's Economic Imperative the Principal and Co-Investigator co-authored (along with others) a policy brief for T20 Japan[1] 2019 "Women's Economic Empowerment: Strengthening Public and Private Sector Impact through Accountability and Measurement (SDG5)" Task Force 1: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,T20 Japan. https://t20japan.org/policy-brief-women-economic-empowerment/

- Both the Principal and Co-Investigator attended the Global Solutions Summit in Berlin in March 2019 as representatives of WEI and GENE

- The Principal investigator developed a conceptual paper to document the idea of the initial idea for a proposed inclusive collaborative entrepreneuring space which was published. Patterson, N. (2020) "Developing inclusive collaborative entrepreneuring spaces" *Gender in Management: An International Journal,* 35(3), pp. 291-302.

- Invited Keynote speaker at female entrepreneurship conference at the University of Regina 10th June 2019 raising the profile of GENE and the ISBE RAKE support.

- Chaired a session 'Women's Entrepreneurship in Non-traditional Sectors' at the Women's Economic Imperative conference in Edinburgh in November 2019

- Engagement and ongoing relationship development with the two regional Local Enterprise Partnerships in the North East.

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[1] The Think20 (T20) is the research and policy advice network for the G20 Japan Presidency.

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**Appendix 1**

**Interview Guide**

**ISBE RAKE Interview Structure**: Developing a collaborative space to challenge gendered structural issues in entrepreneuring in the North East of England.

Thank you for your time today.

The aim of this study is to understand the challenges and opportunities in developing a collaborative space fusing academic, policy and practice to enable gendered structural issues in "entrepreneuring" in the North East of England to be challenged and changed. Given your work… Consequently, the research question is how can a collaborative space such as GENE support the development of entrepreneurship and small business in the North East of England?

1. From your experience/work in this space, what are the key challenges for small business and entrepreneurship in the north east at the moment?

2. How would you describe the relationship/ involvement of how *research* informs the work that you do at….?

3. How would you describe the relationship/ involvement of *policy makers* in the work that you do?

4. What do you see as the challenges for issues of gender in small business and entrepreneurship in the north east?

5. Are there any specific issues for women?

6. Are there any specific issues for men?

7. Do you see any specific issues for any others categories of social difference?

8. *The goal for GENE is to connect researchers, policy makers and practitioners with the view to have an informed and co-ordinated approach to advance issues of gender and other categories of social difference for from.* In your view and experience working in this space in the North East what is the best way to do this?

9. What does your organisation do from a diversity and inclusion perspective?

10. What else could you/ your organisation be doing in this space to advance the co-ordination and/or greater diversity and inclusion?

11. Who else's voice should be heard in this research?