

<b>Institution:</b> University of Dundee		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 17 Business and Management Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Shaping women's enterprise policy in Scotland: Delivering an effective and sustainable model for women's enterprise support		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> October 2018 – December 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Norin Arshed	Senior Lecturer in Entrepreneurship and Innovation	October 2017 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		

### 1. Summary of the impact

Arshed's (2019) research has changed Scottish Government policy on women's enterprise. Recommendations have been adopted by the Scottish Government, resulting in (a) the creation and implementation of a Scotland-wide collaboration of local women's business centres embedded in existing public facilities, and (b) the establishment of a national panel of experts to advise on women's business growth. The research recommendations form a vital evidence base for the work in establishing a new model for the delivery of women's enterprise in Scotland. Arshed's research was fundamental to her appointment as an Independent Government Advisor to the Minister for Business Fair Work and Skills to research and make recommendations on policy for sustainable support for women's entrepreneurship in Scotland.

### 2. Underpinning research

The increasing importance of women in self-employment and business ownership, both in terms of their numbers and their economic contribution has been a key priority for the UK government for the last 20 years. However, women are still starting fewer businesses than men. In Scotland it is estimated that around 21% of Scotland's 339,000 small to medium sized enterprises are majority-led by women and a further 22% are equally led by women and men. Men are still almost twice as likely to start businesses as women. Furthermore, women-owned businesses in Scotland account for 13% (231,390 jobs) of the private sector total employment. Despite efforts to increase the quantity and quality of women-owned businesses, enterprise policy has enjoyed only modest success.

The work undertaken by Arshed and colleagues (2019) [R1] has tried to unravel the puzzle as to why women's enterprise policy has struggled to increase the rates of small business ownership by women entrepreneurs by looking at the enterprise policy process and the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The research seeks to make direct links with the policy itself and the entrepreneurial ecosystem (actors within the policy process as well as the women entrepreneurs themselves) to ensure enterprise policy for women is influenced and shaped by the findings from research, in particular in Scotland.

Arshed et al.'s study [R1] explored how and when individual stakeholders evaluated and influenced the legitimacy of women's enterprise policy within the enterprise policy 'ecosystem', comprising of policy-makers, delivery agencies and women entrepreneurs. The key finding highlighted the lack of legitimacy accorded to women's enterprise policy by policymakers and emphasised the gender stereotyping of women entrepreneurs. Their findings showed how the top-down reproduction of stereotypical gender norms triggered 'bottom-up' legitimacy responses

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from women entrepreneurs and other stakeholders. They concluded the subordination of women had led to key actors engaging in practices that destabilised women's enterprise policy and undermined the effective delivery of policy objectives. The specific findings with policy implications were:

- Instability within the policy ecosystem i.e. shifting strategic agendas that involve ministerial imperatives rather than seeking to formulate effective policy which often comes at the expense of women's enterprise policy.
- A lack of legitimacy assigned to women's enterprise policy by policymakers, implementers and women entrepreneurs themselves.
- A lack of resources to support women's enterprise policy because key policymakers and business advisors within the entrepreneurial ecosystem championed mainstream policy instead of specialised women's enterprise policy.
- The argument around fairness framing resulted in some contestation around why women as a category deserved additional support at the expense of other groups who are similarly marginalised.
- No 'hard' impact evaluation of women's enterprise policy.
- Women entrepreneurs often rejected specialised support and assistance, and women's enterprise policy more generally, because it undermines their status as competent businesspeople.
- No consistency in how and who delivers women's enterprise policy initiatives.

As a direct outcome of these findings, Arshed was appointed as an Independent Government Advisor in April 2019. This led to further action-research involving key stakeholders including Women in Enterprise Action Framework Group members; start-up and growth women entrepreneurs in 11 Scottish regions; representative of support agencies within the entrepreneurial ecosystem and; 12 case illustrations of 'promising practices' that deliver and advocate advice and support at grassroots level.

The main findings from this research, were published in a 90-page report to the Minister [R2]. The most important of these were:

- Most women entrepreneurs were critical of the generic and frequently inexperienced advice given by the current system of support;
- A strong demand for localised and contextualised support and advice, which is both personalised and tailored to women entrepreneurs;
- A demand for expert mentoring and networking, and;
- A balanced infrastructure of local, regional and national support was seen to be critical, with a strong desire on the part of start-up entrepreneurs and those at the early stages of growth for local support and advisors with greater expertise in business growth.

### 3. References to the research

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[R1] Arshed, N., Chalmers, D., & Matthews, R. (2019) 'Institutionalizing women's enterprise policy: a legitimacy-based perspective', *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 43(3) pp553-581. DOI: [10.1177/1042258718803341](https://doi.org/10.1177/1042258718803341)

[R2] Arshed, N. & Knox, S. (2019). *Understanding the Needs of Women Entrepreneurs in Scotland: A Case for a Scottish Women's Business Centre*. Scottish Government.

#### 4. Details of the impact

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The findings have been used to engage with women entrepreneurs working at grassroots level, and with key figures from policy and government in Scotland (Chief Operating Officer, Women's Enterprise Scotland; Head of Entrepreneurship and Enterprise of Scottish Government) and Westminster (Deputy Director, BEIS and Chair of the All-Party UK Parliamentary Group on Women and Enterprise). Press coverage (collated in E1) resulted in further invitations to Arshed to present her work at 3 national roundtables including: RBS Women in Technology (28/11/18); Alice Rose Review (20/03/19); The UK Economic Blueprint for Women Roadshow (25/03/19), ensuring that the work has been shared widely with key stakeholders.

#### Key impacts arising from the research

The grassroots engagement and subsequent press coverage led to Arshed's appointment in April 2019 as an Independent Government Advisor [E3]. Her initial role was to research Scotland's women's enterprise support landscape and develop recommendations to deliver an effective, consistent and sustainable model of business support across Scotland. The appointment was raised in the Scottish Parliament and minuted with the following statement:

*Norin Arshed, from the University of Dundee, has now been appointed as the minister's independent adviser on increasing women's entrepreneurship across Scotland. [The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills] will take an evidence-based approach to identifying the best concrete steps that we can take to deliver in that regard. Members should rest assured that the Government is very serious about making further improvements in the area [E2].*

Her work has enabled women entrepreneurs across Scotland to voice their concerns and the key challenges facing them in setting up and growing their businesses, and to engage in the research process at the grassroots level alongside public and private enterprise agencies, thus ensuring their voices are represented in subsequent policy development. The final research report [R2] made a total of 6 key recommendations, of which 5 have been accepted (recommendations 1 and 3-6):

1. To form a Scottish Women's Business Centre to create an umbrella organisation for local delivery of support.
2. Establishing eighteen 'new' local women's business centres to reflect regional variations in women entrepreneurs' needs but brings them together under the umbrella of the Scottish Women's Business Centre organisation.
3. Partnership working to deliver programmes of gender-tailored support in Scotland, comprising several existing agencies, individuals and Scottish Government.
4. Charging each Scottish Women's Business Centre with offering start-up programmes and growth (including early growth) programmes of support to women business owners.
5. Embedding local Scottish Women's Business Centres into the existing infrastructure, e.g., libraries, community centres, colleges, business centres, Business Gateway premises, etc., and not requiring new buildings, people and structures.
6. Establishing a governing board to oversee the strategic direction of the Women's Business Centre and to hold the executive management team to account for their decision making and actions.

As a direct result of R2, The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills committed funding in April 2020 to fully implement the recommendations in April 2021 over a 3-year period. He wrote:

*Your research and your report, 'Understanding the Needs of Women Entrepreneurs in Scotland: A Case for a Scottish Women's Business Centre', presented to the Scottish Government and our Women in Enterprise Action Group in January 2020 provided clear evidence-based recommendations for how a women's business centre approach could be developed to support Scotland's female-led businesses and women entrepreneurs. Those recommendations... will now form the basis of the Scottish Government's work to develop and deliver a practical model for women's enterprise in Scotland [E3].*

Publication of the report and the Scottish Government's formal response were delayed due to COVID-19. However, implementation of the recommendations began in December 2020 with substantial funding (amount confidential) being invested in achieving the model of setting up of a Women's Business Centre. The Senior Policy Advisor (Women in Enterprise) describes Arshed's work as "vital" in establishing "a new model for the delivery of our women in enterprise programme to increase the numbers of women starting and growing their businesses in Scotland" [E4].

The recommendations, and the Scottish Government's acceptance of them, has been warmly welcomed by stakeholders, as the Founder and CEO of Investing Women noted:

*Implementation of the resulting recommendations will bring a cohesiveness to the delivery of support for Scotland's early stage women entrepreneurs and easier local access within the community. The planned Women's Business Centre will by virtue of its focus on women entrepreneurs have great impact in raising the profile of Scotland's female entrepreneurs. This can only inspire other women throughout the country to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations; to the benefit of our economy [E5].*

Business Gateway (a publicly funded service providing support, advice and access to services for businesses across Scotland) also endorsed the work, commenting:

*We are very pleased with the framework set out in your report, we will be supporting the key recommendations in the coming months to ensure accessible support for women entrepreneurs. In light of the recommendation we are confident that this will increase the numbers of women starting and growing their businesses in Scotland. this will also allow for a more coherent and collegiate landscape of women's enterprise support in Scotland" [E6].*

Following on from her report, Arshed was awarded a Scottish Parliament Fellowship in October 2020 "to understand the state of women-led businesses during and after the COVID-19 crisis in Scotland and address their needs effectively with gender-driven support packages". Her ongoing engagement continues to inform stakeholders and policymakers, raising awareness and understanding of women's businesses in Scotland.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

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[E1] Compilation of press coverage (pdfs).

[E2] The Scottish Parliament, Meeting of the Parliament 22 May 2019, <https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12117&i=109580&c=2178351&s=arshed>

[E3] Letter of support: Minister for Business, Fair Work, and Skills, Scottish Government.

[E4] Letter of support: Senior Policy Officer, Women in Enterprise, Scottish Government.

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**[E5]** Letter of support: Founder & CEO, Investing Women.

**[E6]** Letter of support: Head of Business Gateway – Edinburgh and Chair of Business Gateway Operational Network.