

Ethnic Enterprise

Unlocking The Business Potential Of Ethnic Communities In Wales

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New key to mainstream markets



The respected Investors in People (IIP) standard could prove the key for many new and ambitious ethnic-run enterprises to unlock mainstream markets, according to a veteran IIP assessor.

The standard, first launched about 12 years ago, has become increasingly popular, both for improving business and showing potential customers how well a firm is managed. Gaining the standard is also of

growing value to firms submitting competitive tenders for large public and private sector contracts. It often features on pre-qualification questionnaires for such contracts.

Mid Wales-based human resources expert, Marion Straker, undertakes about 40 IIP assessments each year on businesses of all types and sizes. She said: "Ethnic minority employers would be attracted

to IIP for the same reasons as any other firms. That is to improve and progress their businesses. However, given that many ethnic firms are concerned about establishing their credibility in mainstream markets, it becomes even more important.

"Apart from the beneficial change it brings about, it is also a valuable badge in its own right. It says to the world 'this is a good company,'" she added.

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Unlocking Business Potential

EBSP helps members of Wales' ethnic minorities fulfil their enterprise aims. Our network of Business Support Officers provides tailor-made free support that meets the specific needs of people from different backgrounds.

We are a bridge between emerging ethnic entrepreneurs and mainstream providers of business support. We work closely with these providers to ensure each individual receives the most suitable package of support.



At the recent Meet the Buyer event in Swansea are from left (rear): EBSP chair Clement Benedict, Swansea director of regeneration, Phil Roberts and Minister, Andrew Davies AM. In foreground, business people Jannatul Tarafdar (left) and Dev Aswani. (Story page 8)



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In previous editions we've looked at how ethnic minority run businesses can break out of limited markets in their own communities and spread their wings.

The restrictions are partly self-imposed by lack of confidence or a desire to stay in a comfort zone. However barriers are also based on misconceptions about the way ethnic minority people run their businesses.

That's why standards like Investors in People (IIP) can play an important role in sweeping away such hurdles. The Investors standard has won respect from a wide spectrum of people – including the Prime Minister. It has always been hard to achieve and those who succeed justifiably enjoy the some kudos.

That blue plaque on the wall testifies to visitors or potential customers that staff in the business concerned have been trained and managed to deliver excellence.

Ethnic entrepreneurs who rise to the challenge can wear this as a badge of honour as they take their product or service into wider markets with much greater confidence. That doesn't mean they were any less professional before. It simply gives them valuable evidence to win over the sceptics.

In this edition we'll also be looking at the Chinese community in Wales. As an economist, I've watched with interest as China emerges to play a central role in world trade and investment. My feeling is that the Chinese community here will also move into a more pivotal role in the Welsh economy.

EBSP, which recently appointed a Chinese business support officer to its team, has been stepping up its work with this community. Several key outreach events have taken place over recent months and no doubt more will follow.

Clement Benedict
Chairman EBSP

Harnessing people

EBSP's highly diverse workforce have been warmly praised for the way they build understanding of each other's cultures and act as leaders within their own communities.

The plaudits were contained in the official report which granted the body the coveted Investors in People (IIP) standard, an award regarded as the hallmark of a well-run business.

Gaining the standard, confirms that EBSP develops and manages its people effectively to deliver its

Amanda finds the

Chinese MBA graduate Amanda Birkinshaw turned down a top job in industry, preferring instead to care for her baby daughter, Molly.

However, Anglesey-based Amanda, 31 (right), was still determined to pursue a business career, so she decided her best option in order to balance work and family was to start her own business. She hit on the idea of importing Chinese handicrafts such as handbags, wall hangings, and jewellery, to sell in north Wales.

Amanda taught Mandarin in China for several years before marrying her Welsh husband Daniel Birkinshaw and moving to Wales. Despite her business qualifications she had never run an enterprise so she lacked confidence and was unsure

New key to mainstream

The Investors in People organisation doesn't record the ethnic ownership of businesses it accredits. However Marion said she believed from contacts in many different business sectors that there is increasing interest in the programme among ethnic communities. She said local authorities in particular tend to use IIP as the sign of a well-run business.

IIP helps organisations improve performance through better management and development of people. It can be adapted to any organisation to help boost productivity.

power' for business success

business goals. It has not only aided their mission to promote enterprise, but EBSP's directors, officers and staff also hope it will encourage ethnic firms generally to seek IIP.

Following its recent assessment, EBSP was awarded the standard in recognition of its leading-edge training, its consistent commitment to developing employees and promoting best practice. EBSP Director Akmal Hanuk explained: "We committed ourselves to this nationally recognised standard to

demonstrate how much we value staff, giving them the confidence to move forward individually and as a team."

IIP assessor Marion Straker said: "I was most impressed with how skilled and motivated EBSP's diverse workforce was and how they shared their different cultures and experiences with one another. Clearly the directors recognised the value of a skilled and professional workforce, in order to meet targets and maintain a good reputation within ethnic communities."

Balance

of her options, particularly as she was outside her home country. However that changed after she spotted an item about EBSP in her local newspaper.

Amanda was so keen to gain expert advice that she travelled by bus from her home in Menai Bridge and walked through the cold and rain for her first meeting with Business Support Officer Abdul Aziz, at Bangor's JobcentrePlus office.

Abdul recalled "I have never seen such a determined young person. She lived on a shoe string to save enough money to get started. It has finally paid off." He added: "Although Amanda had all the business theory from her



MBA, she was still unsure about the practicalities of setting up an enterprise. We held one-to-one counselling sessions where I was able to explain the advantages and disadvantages of being self-employed. I also briefed her on key issues such as accounting and quality control procedures."

Amanda said: "Abdul was extremely helpful with his practical advice. He gave me the confidence to go ahead and set up the business. I felt he was better equipped to help me because he is from an ethnic background and understood how I felt."

With the help of EBSP she opened her business in June 2005, allowing her to maintain the work-life balance she desired. She is considering expanding the business within the next two years by moving to Bangor's High Street where larger premises are available. She also hopes to employ another member of staff.

markets.. Continued from Page One

Marion's view about the value of IIP to ethnic firms was shared by EBSP Director Akmal Hanuk. He was heavily involved in helping his own organisation achieve IIP (picture page 1).

He said: "EBSP has helped hundreds of people to start new businesses. We now want to see them breaking into wider markets. IIP helps change perceptions and boosts a firm's reputation, that's why we encourage business people from minority communities to seek IIP status. It helps improve quality, drives the company forward and breaks stereotypes," he added.

Entrepreneur's Viewpoint: Derrick Izilein

Proving Excellence Comes in All Shapes and Sizes



Ethnic minority entrepreneurs building businesses in non-traditional sectors often face a credibility gap. Their service or product may be better than average, but they still need to overcome the underlying scepticism of potential customers or even suppliers.

However those who succeed in "new" fields such as finance and IT are those who have found ways to bridge that gap and win people's confidence.

Former professional basketball player turned website design entrepreneur, Derrick Izilein (above), has four golden rules for building credibility, based on his own experiences in setting up web design firm Presto Solutions of Abercynon.

He advises entrepreneurs to:

- be persistent to get appointments
- show them what you can do and provide proof of your achievements
- offer incentives to encourage people to give you a try
- follow through on everything you offer

Derrick, whose parents are Nigerian, explained: "We certainly don't fit people's image of what website designers should look like. First I am 6'10" tall and my business partner is 6'6". There is a look of disbelief when they see me with a laptop coming into their office and they are probably saying that 'this guy is not going to be very smart.'"

"What carried our business through was making extra effort to take care of people. That might mean going to see them four or five times instead of twice, which is more normal in the industry," he said.

London-born Derrick, acknowledged the barriers for an ethnic minority person breaking into a non-traditional sector. "You have to be realistic. A lot of people will not be aware of your capabilities so you have to prove to them that you are worth every penny they spend with you," he said.

He advised other ethnic entrepreneurs to make intelligent use of previous projects they have completed. For example he regularly showcases work he has carried out for clients overseas - in Portugal, Iraq and the USA.

Ultimately, he maintained, ethnic minority people in non-traditional sectors can do a lot to lift barriers for others. "By giving excellent value and by following through on every single promise to a client, you are going to be doing a service for every other person from an ethnic minority background."

Derrick, whose business has grown significantly since it was set up two years ago, said he was grateful for the early support EBSP gave him. "I owe a whole lot to EBSP. Once they became involved the wheels started turning for me and they were able to press all the right buttons to get me the support I needed to get started," he added.

Asim Finds Cure for Ailing Pharmacy

When pharmacist Asim Ali heard about an ailing chemist shop in Newport's Pillgwenlly area, he saw a major business opportunity. He heard the shop had been losing its local ethnic customers but believed he could make it profitable by connecting with these communities. He spoke Punjabi and felt he could relate to them in a culturally sensitive way.

After eight years as a pharmacist in London, South Wales and Bermuda, he had technical knowledge but no experience of running a business. On the advice of a friend, Asim (right) approached EBSB and discussed his plans with Business Support Officer, Sam Gandiya.

He recalled: "Sam was a real help. He gave me a different perspective and offered me assistance and advice on the various avenues available for business and financial support. He then referred me to Newport & Gwent Enterprise (NGE), who helped me with employment issues and provided business mentoring. They also secured me a £500 grant towards my solicitor's fees."

NGE adviser, Rashad Ismael, put him in touch with Newport City Council's funding

department, who provided a £1,000 rent subsidy.

Asim and his brother Kasim feel they are now running a successful business that also serves the community. He said: "Previously the business didn't appear to be meeting local ethnic customers' needs. There also seemed to be issues employing pharmacists who could communicate well with residents. Being of Pakistani descent helped us to overcome that and integrate well." Asim and Kasim now want to expand by acquiring another South Wales pharmacy.



Former Company Boss Joins the Team



EBSB has strengthened its team by appointing Chinese-born, Lily Power as a business support officer. Before moving to Britain seven years ago, Lily (Above) worked with various foreign companies spanning the automotive, manufacturing and chemical industries.

While still in China, she ran her own health food, catering and cosmetics business for over

ten years, moving to the UK to work towards an MBA at Newport University. During and after the course, she had several jobs including that of youth worker with Newport Council. She now provides business support to ethnic entrepreneurs in Gwent and south Powys.

Lily, a fluent Mandarin speaker, said: "Having run my own company I understand first hand the difficulties ethnic entrepreneurs face in starting a business. With my linguistic skills, I also work in partnership with various organisations to build relationships with Chinese communities in Cardiff and Newport. In addition I encourage women to enter business via bodies like MEWN Cymru."

Community Spotlight: The Chinese

The rise of China as an economic superpower has boosted the profile of Chinese communities in Britain. Here *Ethnic Enterprise* gives an overview of this community in Wales.

Chinese people have settled in Wales since the early years of the 20th century, although it was the influx of Hong Kong farming families in the 1950s and 1960s that helped swell the figures to what they are today.

The 2001 census figure of 6,200 also comprises a rich mix of migrants from mainland China and Taiwan, people of Chinese ethnicity from Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam and, of course, British-born Chinese – or 'BBC' as they are known.

One in every ten Welsh residents of ethnic origin has a Chinese background, making this the third largest grouping after the Indian and Pakistani communities.

The community is widely dispersed across most urban areas. Though many have integrated into Welsh society, the Chinese in Wales remain tightly-knit and guided by traditional values such as family loyalty and respect for elders.

These bonds were reflected by the recent Barclays Bank survey in which 18% of Chinese entrepreneurs said their families made a big contribution to their businesses, compared to only 8% among all ethnic entrepreneurs.

Education is strongly encouraged in the



community. Assembly Government research on ethnic minority pupils in Wales found that Chinese children tended to perform better than the national average.

Ancient religions such as Taoism and Buddhism, or the traditions associated with them, are still popular among the Chinese in Wales. Regular festivals are still observed, particularly Chinese New Year, when colourful celebrations take place and people give family and friends "lucky money," in red envelopes.



Such celebrations are particularly visible in centres of high Chinese concentration, for example Swansea where 1,700 live and where an active community life is promoted by the Chinese Co-operative and Community Centre.

Chinese involvement in business has changed over the years. While 30% of Chinese-run firms are still in catering, an estimated 20% are now in business and professional services.

UK research shows that one in every five Chinese in the workforce is involved in law, medicine and other professions. According to Andrew Lui of the North Wales Chinese Society, this is true in Wales also: He said: "The community here is well-integrated. Many Chinese people work as pharmacists, teachers, university lecturers or accountants. For the first generation, language was a problem, but not for my children's generation."

Business culture is changing. Barclays found that more than one in three Chinese-owned

businesses is a limited company, indicating that they are well-established in their markets.

However, despite the community's progress and its reputation for self-sufficiency, there remains a need for help in bridging the cultural and linguistic gap between them and mainstream business support agencies. EBSP is making significant inroads into the Chinese community, encouraging them to pursue their business ideas and supporting them in developing new enterprises.

Wales-based Chinese people who have become prominent in business include EBSP board member, Meng Yap, Managing Director of the 400-worker Swansea-based food manufacturer Ethnic Cuisine, and innovative

restaurateur Alice Cheung OBE, who won the "Women as Entrepreneur" title in Welsh Woman of the Year 2002. Her high profile Thai / Chinese restaurant, In-Fusion, is in Cardiff Bay.

In addition many Chinese academics have built strong reputations in Welsh universities and these institutions in turn are building links with China. For example Lampeter set up a Centre for Chinese Studies in 1997 and Cardiff last year established the new Chinese Academic-Business Club to facilitate networking between Welsh universities and China. Through these and other business links, China is now Wales' 10th largest export customer.

Year of the Dog Marks New Community Partnerships

This year, EBSP extended its links within South Wales' Chinese community by helping stage recent celebrations in Newport to welcome the "Year of the Dog."

This inaugural Newport event builds further upon four successful years working with the Chinese Community Centre in Swansea.

The 2006 New Year events, took place at Swansea's Brangwyn Hall and the Newport Centre, with EBSP business support officers mingling with guests to spread the enterprise message and offer support.

Celebrations at both centres consisted of lion dancing and other traditional entertainment as well as children's choirs and craft displays.

Speeches were given in Swansea by the city's Lord Mayor Councillor Mair Gibbs and in Newport by Deputy Mayor Councillor Roger Jeavons and local Assembly Member Rosemary Butler AM. Swansea Chinese Community Centre chairperson, May Ling Evans also spoke at the Brangwyn Hall.

Saleem Kidwai, Chief Executive of EBSP who attended the Newport event with Programme Director Akmal Hanuk, said: "We were delighted to collaborate once again with Swansea's Chinese Community Centre and to build new relationships with Chinese people in Newport.

"As well as giving members of the community the chance to celebrate New Year together, both events gave people the opportunity to discuss their business ideas with our advisers."



Unlocking public sector markets



Business people trying out the sell2wales website during the Meet the Buyer event in Cardiff.

Hundreds of ethnic minority entrepreneurs turned out in Newport, Cardiff and Swansea recently to hear how they might improve their chances of winning public sector contracts.

The popular events were organised jointly by EBSP, the Welsh Assembly Government plus Newport & Gwent Enterprise and The Business Centre Swansea.

The business people heard how contracts totalling nearly £4 billion are issued by Wales' public sector each year. They were briefed on how the system for buying goods and services is tightly regulated to guarantee fair play but is

being modernised to make it easier for small firms to compete. This updating includes the introduction of online tendering.

Assembly Government representatives urged ethnic business people to register with the www.sell2wales.com and buy4wales.com websites to ensure they are informed of relevant contracts.

Minister for Enterprise Innovation and Networks Andrew Davies AM gave the keynote address at the final events, in Swansea's Marriott Hotel. He urged entrepreneurs to avail of the huge opportunities offered by public sector purchasing.

These events mark the latest move by EBSP to bridge the gap between ethnic minority businesses and the public and private sector procurement process. EBSP director Akmal Hanuk described this as a "win-win situation" because ethnic firms could have opportunities to expand, and both the public and private sectors would gain access to new suppliers offering value for money.

Welsh success highlighted in South Africa

Successful Welsh initiatives to boost the number of entrepreneurs from under-represented groups are being studied by top figures in South Africa, where the country's black majority still faces barriers to setting up businesses.

During a recent holiday in his homeland, EBSP's South African-born Chairman, Clement Benedict, briefed Mtholephi Mthimkhulu, Chief Whip of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature, on how the organisation enables people from ethnic minorities in Wales to overcome such barriers.

Mr Mthimkhulu focused strongly on work being done to build capacity within affected

communities in Wales. This he said was vital in South Africa. The South African Government is committed to the creation of an enterprise culture among black people in KwaZulu-Natal where many with business potential lack entrepreneurial skills.

Said Clement: "They face similar internal and external barriers to those EBSP has helped Wales' ethnic minorities to overcome. Obviously, South Africa falls outside EBSP's remit, but individual board members and Business Support Officers, in their private capacity, would be delighted to share what we have learned with KwaZulu Natal in order to promote enterprise in South Africa."

EBSP - At work in the Community

EBSP representatives have organised, co-hosted and attended a wide range of events over recent months to spread the enterprise message to many different ethnic minority communities.



During March a series of networking lunches and enterprise briefings were held in Swansea and Newport targeted at a range of communities.

The first, for the Chinese community, took place at Newport Centre, followed a few days later by a similar event for aspiring African entrepreneurs in the new African Community Centre in Swansea.

The following weekend Pillgwenlly Millennium Centre in Newport was the setting for a further networking lunch, this time for the local Somali community.

EBSP business support officers were also very active at Chinese New Year celebrations in Swansea and Newport during February.

The organisation collaborated with the Welsh Assembly Government and Newport & Gwent Enterprise to stage a

series of briefings in Newport, Cardiff and Swansea in March and April to explain how ethnic-owned firms can improve their chances of winning public sector contracts.

In April about 60 teenagers and young people from ethnic communities in Cardiff Bay received their own special enterprise briefing from EBSP officers Sam Gandiya and Loyce Matanda at the Butetown Youth Pavilion.

What it takes to win in business

EBSP are planning a link-up with Wales Management Council in a bid to uncover the X Factor which creates successful ethnic entrepreneurs. The two bodies want to create a working group of owners and managers of ethnic-run companies to explore why they went into business and how they created a winning venture.

Christopher Ward (Right), chief executive of Wales Management Council explained: "We and EBSP believe there is a wealth of business experience within ethnic communities. That should be captured and passed on to others.

"While there are many outstanding success stories, not enough attention is given to the route ethnic entrepreneurs have followed to achieve that success. It is from that journey the greatest lessons will be learned," he added.

The working group will comprise 10 to 15 business people who will focus on a range of questions including the barriers they faced and the lessons they learned in starting out. They will also explore the role of community, culture, religion and family in their businesses.

Akmal Hanuk (Below), Director of EBSP welcomed the opportunity to work with the Management Council. He said: "This builds further on our recent work with the BBC when we brought four leading ethnic entrepreneurs together to answer questions from the community on their business experiences."

Wales Management Council is an employer-led organisation funded by the Assembly Government to promote better management and leadership in Wales.



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