

ACH hosts BAME Business Focus Group, Bristol, 27/10/16

Article by:
Zara Nanu
Director @ Gradient DM

In September - November 2016, Gradient Data Mining was commissioned by the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership to conduct research into women and BAME led businesses in the area. The research approach taken for this project was primarily empirical. That is, a large number of businesses were consulted via surveys (120) focus groups (4) and informal discussions. The focus groups were organised in an informal manner, in order to provide a safe space for business leaders to voice their different concerns and views. A large number of identified challenges were then ranked in order of priority and linked to BAME or women-led businesses.

One of the focus groups took place at Easton Business Centre, in partnership with Ashley Community Housing. It was attended by 22 business owners who openly discussed their challenges in enterprise in the area.

BAME businesses operate within a wider national framework of disadvantage. National research shows that throughout the UK, people from BAME groups are much more likely to live in poverty (i.e. an income of less than 60% of the median household income) than white British people. In 2015 Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities were the most likely to be in 'persistent poverty,' followed by Black African and Black Caribbean communities.

These disadvantages have a direct impact on the way businesses in the BAME communities operate and the issues they struggle with.

The following key themes were raised by focus group participants, and they are in line with what other respondents in the area had to say:

- There is an over-representation of ethnic minority entrepreneurs in businesses that have a low profit (e.g. restaurants, hairdressing, retail, cleaning, etc.).
- There is an over-representation in sectors that offer low paying jobs and are labour intensive (e.g. restaurants, hairdressing, retail, cleaning, etc.).
- Under-representation of businesses that are high growth and high skills in these spaces of high concentration of BAME communities.
- Under-development of infrastructure that supports business growth and development.

"It's not keeping customers satisfied that's the challenge, it's red tape" Language Services UK.

"BME and small business are not well represented in procurement & commissioning in Bristol. Time for change." Fuad Mahamed, CEO Ashley Community Housing.

"The cost of childcare is prohibitive for female entrepreneurs." Councillor Afzal Shah.

"We have missed out on grants but we want to grow!" Bristol Sweet Mart.

