

# Enterprise In Place

## POLICY BRIEF

Lessons for policy from place-based enterprise programmes for underrepresented entrepreneurs.

# PARTNERS

A huge thank you to our participants, funders, delivery partners, Community Connectors and the project team.

## FUNDED BY



## LOCAL HUBS



## SUPPORTED BY



## NATIONAL PARTNERS



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A SCOTLAND WHERE  
**ENTERPRISES ARE THRIVING**  
AND NO ONE IS EXCLUDED  
FROM ENTREPRENEURSHIP

That is the vision behind the Enterprise in Place approach. The community of organisations involved in this project believe that this vision could be realised through **a place-based approach to enterprise support** that weaves together local insight, national ecosystem integration and responsiveness to community needs.

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# INTRODUCTION



Enterprise in Place was a pilot of place-based enterprise support programmes for women and underrepresented groups delivered in Dunoon, Glasgow and East Kilbride between November 2025 and March 2026.

This was a collaboration between community hubs Glasgow Collective, EK Collective and POP Shop Dunoon and national partners Connected Hubs Scotland, The Melting Pot, Firstport and Elevator. The project was funded by Scottish Government's Pathways fund. It engaged over 85 underrepresented entrepreneurs through tailored parallel programmes in each area.

The target groups were:

- Dunoon – Women returners to work and unpaid carers
- East Kilbride – Young women and non-binary people aged 18–30 who are exploring enterprise for the first time
- Glasgow – Women aged 50+ who are navigating redundancy or career change.

The programme had 4 pillars of development designed to ensure it was fit for purpose for these underrepresented groups:

### **Local navigation through Community Connectors.**

Each location had a dedicated Community Connector, trusted, embedded facilitators who understand local contexts and can reach those who might never self-select into enterprise support. Connectors provided outreach, one-to-one guidance, and personalised signposting, addressing participation barriers at source and ensuring that participants remained engaged and motivated.

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## Co-creation in context.

Delivery plans were shaped in “Listening Labs” at the outset, enabling participants to influence the structure, content, and scheduling of the programme. This ensured alignment with care patterns, health needs, and transport constraints.

## Pick-n-mix programme flexibility.

Each cohort chose their own journey from a menu of interventions blending national expertise with local delivery. This gave cohorts access to the interventions they need and reduced the capacity required for delivery by ensuring none of the local hubs are reinventing the wheel, where the enterprise support already exists elsewhere. This flexible approach ensured relevance, accessibility, and personal ownership.

## National ecosystem integration.

This programme was delivered by a strong team of local and national partners to ensure that beyond the programme, participants will be connected to Scotland’s wider entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The programme delivered:

- In person session focusing on skills development and peer connection
- Online sessions that provided a range of business development tools, exercises and resources
- A cross-cohort Challenge Weekend brought participants together for applied problem-solving and action planning.
- Online community and resource hubs via Community Lab and WhatsApp to support relationship building between participants and maximise access to learning
- 1:1 mentoring and signposting with Community Connectors to facilitate connection to the national enterprise ecosystem and provide tailored business support

This policy briefing sets out to examine the lessons learnt during the delivery of the Enterprise in Place programme at a local and national level and to apply these to the policy context. It draws from the report [Pathways: A New Approach for Women in Entrepreneurship](#) published in 2023. The Pathways report provided a powerful, evidenced based framework for identifying and eliminating barriers to entrepreneurship for underrepresented groups that informed the development of Scottish Government’s Pathways Fund that resourced the Enterprise in Place programme.

# HARDER TO REACH GROUPS

Enterprise support tailored to underrepresented and harder to reach groups is crucial to supporting the enterprises Scotland needs to thrive. The economic case for change is compelling. Closing gender gaps in entrepreneurship could add up to £8.8 billion to the UK economy, with proportionate benefits for Scotland.<sup>1</sup> To achieve this, interventions must be rooted in local realities, flexible in design, inclusive in delivery, and connected into the wider ecosystem so that impact continues.

This was a key principle of the Enterprise in Place programme, which was led by a team of local and national delivery partners all working to close the gap between different levels of enterprise support. As place-based organisations, the community hubs involved in the project and that make up key national partner Connected Hubs Scotland, the partners that led the Enterprise in Place know first hand that diversity is the biggest strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The Pathways report lays out a clear call to address the underlying sexism that leads to under participation. With powerful long-term recommendations to address this through the education system, diversity and inclusion training for the entrepreneurial ecosystem and the introduction of a Fair Society Champion accreditation that actively encourages employers to take actions that would build a fairer society.<sup>2</sup>

In the context of the Enterprise in Place programme pilot the biggest challenge of engaging harder to reach groups was time. The pillars of programme development were effective in addressing this through co-creation and tailoring, but there is no shortcut to building routes to and relationships with new demographics.

Building trust between participants and delivery partners and confidence in the identity or activity of entrepreneurship for participants are processes that require time. The short term and single project nature of the funding for programme delivery is at odds with the long term investment required to build pathways into entrepreneurship for underrepresented groups.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Long term and repeat funding for programmes that successfully deliver enterprise support for underrepresented groups.

1. UK Government, The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship, Mar 2019

2. Scottish Government, Pathways: A New Approach for Women in Entrepreneurship, Feb 2023

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# REFRAMING INNOVATION

Innovation in Scottish enterprise is key to the social and economic development of our nation. This requires us to support entrepreneurs at every stage of their journey to maximise their success and to ensure the people driving enterprises from different backgrounds are not facing systemic barriers. The enterprise support model should remain innovative through incorporating lessons learnt and a reflective and responsive approach. However, long term, consistent resourcing of tried and tested support is a far more effective model of support than requiring programmes to be novel and innovative in every new cycle of delivery.

We should reframe innovation in the context of enterprise support to acknowledge that the unique and new social impact comes from the alchemy of bringing together a new cohort of entrepreneurs. The innovation comes from the participants and their ability to develop and deliver on their ideas.

Reliable, consistent enterprise programmes that have a high level of awareness are crucial. Place-based enterprise programmes that connect the local context to the national ecosystem are inherently innovative because they facilitate the connectivity and relational work that systemic shifts in entrepreneurship requires to reach underrepresented groups.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Invest in innovative entrepreneurs through building capacity for consistent, place-based enterprise support



# PLACE-BASED ENTERPRISE SUPPORT

The Pathways report notes that “existing pathways into and within entrepreneurship largely operate on an informal, network-based support model, with largely male-dominated informal networks”. While this is deeply problematic with the current skews away from equalities, it also suggests that informal networks are an effective way of developing the confidence and skills that are required for people to approach entrepreneurship.

One of the recommendations to address the complexity of the enterprise ecosystem in Scotland is a centralised, online database the Entrepreneurial Pathfinder helping clearly define pathways for entrepreneurs at various stages of their individual journeys, to support them to connect with follow-on support and mentoring. The Enterprise In Place approach as well as the wider work of Connected Hubs Scotland would be a way to mobilise the opportunity provided by such an online resource.<sup>3</sup>

Connected Hubs Scotland is a network of over 30 independent hubs that support localised communities of enterprises, entrepreneurs and workers from brick and mortar spaces. The vision of Connected Hubs Scotland is a Scotland:

- Supported by a thriving Connected Hubs network in rural and urban places.
- A Scotland where every individual and business has access to high-quality, community-focused, independent workspaces.
- Enriched by hubs embedded in their local community that build inclusivity, safety, sustainability, and resilience.

This work in Scotland draws from Ireland’s Connected Hubs Network that began in May 2021 as a response to the growing demand for remote workspaces. Driven by a need for regional development, digital connectivity, and job creation, the network was initially supported by a £1 million feasibility study funded from the Dormant Accounts Fund in 2020. Since its official launch, Ireland’s Connected Hubs network has grown significantly, with 369 active hubs currently. The impact of these hubs on local economies has been substantial, contributing an estimated €1 billion annually in gross value added (GVA). The Irish Connected Hubs project has also included the development of digital infrastructure that supports the member hubs and communities.<sup>4</sup>

3. Scottish Government, Pathways: A New Approach for Women in Entrepreneurship, Feb 2023

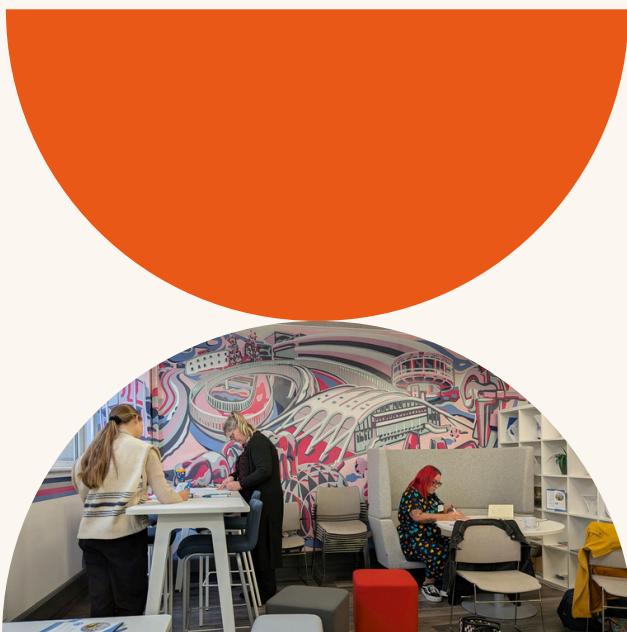
4. Connected Hubs Scotland, Connected Hubs Scotland: The Case for a network of connected coworking hubs in Scotland, Oct 2025

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The geographic spread of Connected Hubs Scotland across urban, rural, and island communities is not incidental to its impact, it is central to it. Independent hubs are rooted in their places in ways that national institutions cannot replicate. They hold deep knowledge of local economies, understand the specific barriers facing their communities, and have earned the trust of the people within them. At the same time, their connection to a national network means that no hub operates in isolation. Cross-hub learning, shared resources, and peer exchange between hub leaders amplify local impact and build collective resilience across the network. This model directly supports the Scottish Government's ambitions for a wellbeing economy, regional equity, and inclusive growth, recognising that thriving local economies are the foundation of national prosperity.

The combination of deeply embedded community-led hubs, with a place based approach to enterprise support that, like Enterprise in Place, connects the local to the national and a database of the Scottish enterprise ecosystem like Entrepreneurial Pathfinder would be a powerful driver to systemic shifts in Scottish enterprise. Local hubs are building these safe, fit for purpose communities with and for underrepresented groups in enterprise. Cultivating these informal networks and place-based hubs is crucial to provide clear, effective pathways into entrepreneurship that reach everyone.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Support Connected Hubs Scotland as a key partner for creating a joined up, inclusive, accessible enterprise ecosystem in Scotland



# IMPACT SNAPSHOT

## 86

Women took part across Dunoon, Glasgow and East Kilbride

## 100%

Said the programme had given them knowledge or tools that will be useful for developing an idea or enterprise

## 100%

Said they now feel more confident to pursue developing their own enterprise

"Being mentored by Lauren was a truly enriching experience. Her wisdom, professionalism, transparency, and depth of knowledge were both inspiring and humbling.."

"When I first saw it [the Enterprise in Place programme] I thought it was a scam: Free enterprise support for women over 50! But I believed it when I filled out the form. I'm here to find my tribe, confidence and to develop my skills"

## Who took part?

### Age range of Participants



### Diverse Backgrounds

Participants represented a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, lived experiences and accessibility needs

"I have been unwell for some time and the online workshops were the first opportunity i've had to discuss my ideas with people outside of my usual social circle. Really supportive people in the groups I met and interesting to hear their ideas too. Really great for anyone like me who is mainly stuck at home."

"I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting such a diverse community of strong women with talented skill sets, knowledge and awareness"

## 100%

Said they would recommend to other women

# CONCLUSION



The Enterprise in Place programme pilot shows there is a strong case to be made for place-based enterprise support delivered at a local level that also facilitates engagement with the national ecosystem. To reach harder to reach groups these programmes need to operate on a long term basis to build awareness, relationships and confidence. Innovation should drive entrepreneurship and innovation within the context of enterprise support programmes should be reframed as a powerful bringing together of entrepreneurs and support partners. Place-based enterprise support, in combination with strong national connections and a digital hub that maps the Scottish enterprise system, has the potential to address systemic barriers to entrepreneurship in Scotland.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Invest in innovative entrepreneurs through building capacity for consistent, place-based enterprise support.
- ▶ Long term and repeat funding for programmes that successfully deliver enterprise support for underrepresented groups.
- ▶ Support Connected Hubs Scotland as a key partner for creating a joined up, inclusive, accessible enterprise ecosystem in Scotland.

# GET IN TOUCH

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*"The Melting Pot is a container for a particular type of person. And if that wasn't there, there would be less of an impact because those people just wouldn't be getting together."*