

Making diversity and enterprise everyone's business

Celebrating 20 Years of Insights and Impact

“Over the past 20 years, I have been privileged to guide the Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME) from its beginnings as a ‘start-up’ to its current status as a well-respected international voice on diversity and entrepreneurship.”

The journey has had its fair share of challenges, but the rewards have been immense. Upon reflection, I attribute our success to the dedication, resilience in the face of obstacles, and efforts of my colleagues and partners. As we look ahead, the future bodes well for us, rich in even more opportunities for meaningful impact and growth.



Professor Monder Ram OBE DL,
Centre Director, CREME

Two Decades of Research and Engagement

When CREME was established in 2004, research into ethnic minority entrepreneurship largely remained confined to academic circles. But CREME managed to make those insights accessible beyond academia. In a brief period, we prompted a shift, transforming a niche academic pursuit into a widely discussed topic of public discussion. Today, CREME addresses the systemic barriers faced by ethnic minority entrepreneurs, and our influence is felt beyond academia, shaping policies and practices at both local and national levels. While we respect and contribute to the academic discourse, our mission extends to making tangible changes in the world beyond.

The following are some examples of our key programmes that embody our dedication to impact-oriented research.

Access to Finance: Our landmark research in the 2000s on ethnic minority businesses and banks catalysed improvements in relationships. We led initiatives fostering mutual understanding between minority firms and financial institutions.

Access to Markets: Through research funding and pioneering corporate collaborations, we have promoted inclusive procurement. This has brought practical benefits for minority suppliers, including commercial contracts.

Inclusive Business Support: Our long-term partnership with Citizens UK has developed innovative grassroots assistance for overlooked minority firms. Outcomes include awareness-raising, performance improvements and capability building.

Cross-Sector Partnerships: Our approach to supporting minority firms involves engagement and co-creation with diverse partners. We build collaborations between marginalised communities, enterprises, policymakers and support providers. This facilitates the translation of research insights into practical initiatives and policy impacts.

Ambitious Goals for the Future

As we embark on our third decade, CREME has set ambitious goals for maximising our impact.

A top priority is implementing the recommendations from our ground-breaking 2022 report, 'Time to Change', which sets out a roadmap for transforming support for ethnic minority businesses. We aim to catalyse change across sectors by establishing working groups, co-designing interventions, and mobilising partners behind the report's agenda. Our goal is cross-sector accountability for progress.

We will also implement a student engagement plan to strengthen synergies between our research and Aston's world-class teaching. Activities will provide entrepreneurial experiences for students via mentorship, new courses, pedagogical materials, and collaborations with the Aston Business Clinic. This will nurture entrepreneurial talent while enhancing the university's reputation.

Supporting early career researchers is another key priority. We're nurturing the next generation of engaged scholars by empowering our early career researchers to lead key initiatives with a range of key practitioners. In addition, we are developing a distinctive PhD programme centred on 'engaged scholarship'. By providing specialist training and creating projects with external partners, we will equip doctoral researchers with skills for impact-oriented research. This will ultimately build CREME's capacity for positive social change.

Reflecting on the past 20 years, CREME has made a concrete impact in the field of ethnic minority entrepreneurship. As we set our sights on the future, our commitment to empowering ethnic minority entrepreneurs remains steadfast. Our vision for the future is deeply intertwined with our mission—

'making diversity everyone's business'

—as we strive to keep pushing boundaries.



CREME's Guiding Principles

The Centre operates on the following guiding principles:

1. Engaged Scholarship

Applying the insights and findings from our high quality 'internationally recognised' research to 'real' business issues, such as capital and finance, supplier diversity, wages, migration policies, technology, and social inclusion.

2. Transforming Practice

Working with a host of stakeholders to influence policy and practice, including the private sector (large corporate, trade and professional), local and national government funded agencies.

3. Outstanding Engagement and Dissemination

Organising events to bring together local entrepreneurs, business policymakers and academics, to encourage networks and disseminate valuable information. CREME delivers workshops, seminars, and briefings throughout the year.

CREME's Core Values



1. Inclusive

For the past 27 years CREME had organised and hosted the Annual Ethnic Minority Business Conference, sponsored by Lloyds Banking Group. The annual conference is a high-profile series of events where the Centre convenes key stakeholders to debate key issues on diversity and enterprise in the UK and internationally. During the events we spotlight ethnic minority entrepreneurs who have made a positive contribution to Birmingham and the UK, inviting them to share their personal entrepreneurial journeys with delegates.

CREME's projects focus on generating advancement of knowledge while at the same time facilitating practical changes to build an inclusive business support ecosystem for ethnic minority entrepreneurs and businesses.

CREME has mobilised approximately £8.43 million of external funding since joining Aston University in 2018 with a core objective to inform the development of evidence-based inclusive enterprise policy and business support to address the specific barriers faced by the UK's EMBs.

- In 2022, we set out an ambitious plan to boost the growth potential of ethnic minority businesses (EMBs) across the UK in our Time To Change (TTC) report to address the specific barriers EMBs face

in accessing finance, business support and wider markets. Many national stakeholders have committed to the implementation of our recommendations, and the report's outreach continues to expand nationally. The Mayor of West Midlands, Andy Street, commits to using TTC in developing the regional business support ecosystem to promote the region as an exemplar in supporting inclusive entrepreneurship.

- CREME's Pathways to Enterprising Futures (PEF) project works with 600 ethnic minorities, economically inactive people, disabled people, as well as those with language barriers to help realise their entrepreneurial and employment potential.
- Since 2022, CREME has been collaborating with local partners, Birmingham City Council and ACH, to promote greater inclusion and diversity in policymaking as part of the EU-funded six-country project — Migrant Integration through Locally Designed Experiences (MILE). MILE aims to co-create Birmingham as an inclusive city by enhancing migrants' and refugees' involvement in local policymaking. A key outcome has been the creation of a new migrant consultative body that facilitates

direct interaction between a group of migrant residents and the local authority representatives. The group has since contributed to the development of council's City of Sanctuary policy.

- Collaboratively launched the new Digital Innovation Transformative Change project around facilitating Inclusive Innovation in the West Midlands.



2. Entrepreneurial

The UK's ethnic minority communities are consistently more entrepreneurial than the wider business population but face distinct challenges in growing their businesses into mature firms. We are committed to helping ethnic minority entrepreneurs to overcome barriers and facilitate their business growth by working with entrepreneurs, business support agencies, community organisations and others.

CREME In Action: Delivering Interventions to Boost Business Growth

- Since 2019, our Productivity from Below (PfB) project has provided long-term support and innovative



3. Transformational

solutions for ethnic minority entrepreneurs from catering, creative and retail sectors to boost their productivity and economic contribution.

- Business support interventions provided were: 'Improve your Productivity' workshops with Aston Centre for Growth, social media training for the Bangladeshi restaurateurs and the creation of a modern leadership programme the 'P Word' for diverse creatives in the West Midlands.

Developing The Next Generation of Entrepreneurs

Internally, we are committed to providing a wealth of pedagogical resources, entrepreneurship, and business support opportunities for Aston educators to develop the next generation of innovators, entrepreneurs, and change-makers. In 2021 we launched a Student Engagement Strategy, aiming to connect Aston University students with CREME's regional business network and to bring ethnic minority business owners to the classroom. The strategy provides students with the opportunity to immerse themselves in a wide range of real-life entrepreneurial activities as well as developing life-long skills and their careers.

Leading The Way: Working Collaboratively to Transform Perceptions of Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurs

CREME delivers leading expertise on business support for ethnic minority entrepreneurs and have transformed perceptions by working with business policymakers and influential organisations to engage collaboratively with overlooked or disregarded business communities.

- CREME is a leading entrepreneurship research centre, with an enviable reputation regionally, nationally, and internationally. Our research is challenge informed, addressing issues such as access to quality business support, economic inactivity, migrant integration, and inclusion of marginalised communities in decision making.
- CREME has significantly shaped research, practice, and policy in ethnic minority entrepreneurship over the past two decades. Prof Monder Ram has served on government advisory bodies on race and ethnic minority entrepreneurship since the early 2000s, including the Black, Asian

and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Enterprise All Party Parliamentary Group and the Equalities Advisory Group for the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, resulting in new initiatives and policies to improve marginalised entrepreneurs' access to finance, business support and procurement.

- We collaborate with businesses, public sector organisations and civil society to generate positive transformational change for ethnic minority communities and the wider society.
- CREME has developed and co-funded collaborative PhDs with four students who are all leading on engaged scholarship doctoral research projects in collaboration with our partners, including Punch Records and ACH, to generate both positive practical impact and novel theoretical insights.

CREME Accolades

CREME has been externally recognised for its commitment to supporting ethnic minority businesses.



2021

ESRC Impact Prize

Our Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded project, 'Productivity from Below' (PfB), was awarded the 2021 ESRC Impact Prize for co-creating innovative collaborations with businesses to tackle inequality, boost productivity, and empower local communities. The ESRC Celebrating Impact Prize celebrates economic or societal impact from excellent research.



2022

Black Talent Awards

CREME was named 'Diversity Ally of the Year' at the 2022 Black Talent Awards. These awards honour and recognise the remarkable performance and achievements of Black professionals in the UK, including both employees and employers.



2023

Small Business Charter (SBC) Excellence Awards

CREME was awarded a Small Business Charter Excellence Award in 2023 for 'Outstanding Stakeholder Engagement' for our ground-breaking work on "Accelerating Growth by Making Diversity and Enterprise Everyone's Business".

The SBC is a national accreditation awarded by small businesses to business schools who excel in supporting small businesses, student entrepreneurship and the local economy. The SBC Excellence Awards raise the profile of business schools offering real influence, partnership, and impact to the business community.

Our Impact

£11.7 million

Total Funding since CREME's Inception

£8.4 million

Total Funding since joining Aston University

*Over 70% of funding has been awarded since joining Aston University

25

Blogs

55

Events and Conferences hosted since 2018

9

Videos and Documentaries

100+

Publications

(Authored & Co-Authored by Prof Monder Ram)

3

External Accolades

26

Practitioner Partners since 2018

94

Research projects since inception

132,000

LinkedIn Impressions (March 2023-March 2024)

Information accurate as of March 2024

CREME Practitioner Partners

Adopting the engaged scholarship model, CREME works collaboratively with the following practitioner partners to create real impact for ethnic minority communities and businesses.



ACH

ACH is a social enterprise comprised of a diverse group of strategists and researchers led by lived experience. They provide supported accommodation, and tailored integration services that not only help individuals, but also disrupt the systems that have entrenched inequalities in our society. ACH's vision is to empower refugees and migrants who reside in the UK to lead self-sufficient lives.

ACH have a track record of delivering effective support services that give refugees and migrants the tools they need to succeed. Their tailored and agile approach allows them to respond to unexpected global challenges by engaging with new communities and their different needs. In 2021 alone, they helped 1000+ people to achieve their personal goals and lead fulfilling lives in their new country.

One of ACH's most successful campaigns #RethinkingRefugee has helped challenge broken systems and misinformation online whilst promoting refugee and migrant voices and opportunities.



Birmingham Citizens

Citizens UK is the UK's biggest, most diverse, and most effective people-powered alliance. Birmingham Citizens is one of 18 chapters across the UK. Through community organising Birmingham Citizens enables communities and local leaders to develop their voice and come together with the power and strategy to make real change for local citizens.

Birmingham Citizens convenes to overcome injustice and win change on things that matter most to local communities. Current priorities include access to affordable housing, community safety, ensuring everyone has the chance to secure a good job, mental health counselling in Schools and Colleges and making Birmingham a Living Wage City.

In 2023 Birmingham Citizens celebrated its 10-year anniversary and has effectively organised to provide community training for over 500 local leaders, supported the resettlement of 550 Syrian refugees from UN camps and launched the Living Wage in the West Midlands with over 500 accredited organisations joining the Living Wage pledge.



Punch Records

Punch is the UK's leading Music and Arts agency who are committed to working with Black Music, Arts and Culture through four central 'pillars' — Creating, Touring, Programming and Educating through award-winning tours, festivals, international projects, and innovative development programmes for young people.

Punch's vision is: 'transforming lives through music'. They support cutting-edge, experimental and credible work to celebrate the wealth of creative talent in the West Midlands and UK. Punch's mission is to champion excellence, diversity, and innovation by:

- Being a leader and ideas-led organisation to champion partnerships between culture, tourism, and music
- Delivery of learning opportunities and skills development
- Positioning the Black arts as an industry that will make meaningful and measurable contributions through events, tours, and commissioned work.





Skills Link - Bangladeshi Catering Sector

Skills Link is a specialist training and consultancy business focusing on Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic businesses within the catering sector. Skills Link specialises in delivering courses and workshops in food safety, health and safety and supporting businesses to produce risk assessments. Through Skills Link CREME has been able to access a network of UK Bangladeshi restaurateurs and supported them during and post the pandemic through our award-winning Productivity from Below project.



Food, Farming & Countryside Commission

The Food, Farming & Countryside Commission (FFCC) explores practical and radical solutions to climate, nature, health, and economic crises of our time. Through evidence, research, telling stories of change and much more, they seek to involve and communicate with citizens, and advocate for new ideas and new solutions. Through partnerships across diverse sectors and disciplines FFCC has helped shift public narratives and shape progressive policies.



Be the Business

Be the Business is an independent, not-for-profit organisation with a single goal: to help business owners and leaders improve the performance and productivity of their business. CREME has partnered with Be the Business for the co-creation of inclusive business support for ethnic minority entrepreneurs as part of our Time to Change report implementation plans.



Centre for Growth

Aston Centre for Growth

Aston Centre for Growth (ACG) provides leading growth programmes and other practical business support for entrepreneurs, SMEs, business leaders, and students across the community. The Centre has experience of working with thousands of SMEs to support their business growth through high profile programmes such as the Help to Grow Management course and Green Advantage, alongside investment ready pitching competitions, student and graduate focused start-up support and enterprise skills development.

ACG aims to transform the regional economy by working intensively with high-potential entrepreneurs and SMEs – strengthening leadership and management skills, boosting productivity, and promoting genuine inclusive growth.



West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)

WMCA, established in 2016, is a group of local authorities working together to make the West Midlands a better place to live. Through government funding, WMCA has the power to make decisions for the region and are a key partner in the delivery of the Time to Change report. Mayor Andy Street has publicly endorsed the report and is striving towards implementing it in the region through the central business support service, Business Growth West Midlands.



Enterprise Research Centre (ERC)

The ERC is the UK's leading centre of excellence for research into the growth, innovation, and productivity of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Their research helps shape better policies and practices that enable SMEs to thrive. Established in 2013 in Aston and Warwick Business Schools, the ERC provides high-quality, independent research and analysis to inform government policy on SMEs. It is a go-to reference point for anyone looking for robust, trusted data and insights on SME performance. As well as contributing to academic knowledge, the ERC's work has equipped policymakers and practitioners with a better understanding of issues surrounding SME growth and development across the UK.



NatWest

NatWest commissioned the Time to Change: A Blueprint for Advancing the UK's Ethnic Minority Businesses report which was released in 2022. In partnership with NatWest, CREME have developed a clear road map for policymakers and partners to implement the report's recommendations across the UK. CREME and NatWest are committed to working together and have appointed a 'Time to Change' team who are leading the implementation phase of the report.



CREME's Flagship Projects

Productivity from Below (PfB): Addressing the Productivity Challenges of Microbusinesses in the West Midlands

Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), this project employed academic research, co-produced with practitioners, to design and implement scalable policies to boost productivity by strengthening management practices in micro-businesses (1-9 employees). Unique in format and approach, this project was a genuine academic-practitioner collaboration with a commitment to working with local businesses in Birmingham. Project aims were to definitively lift the lid on the challenges facing microbusiness by focusing on three key sectors: retail, catering and creative.

Working with project partners Birmingham Citizens, Punch Records, ACH, and the Bangladeshi catering sector, over 4 years the project has been highly successful, and was awarded the ESRC Impact Prize in 2021 for 'Outstanding Business and Enterprise Impact'. The project has created significant further opportunities and impact among business communities:

- Established a peer support and leadership development programme, 'The P Word', providing commercial guidance to creative businesses, now two years running.
- Shaped three successful bids, each worth £1 million with ACH and Birmingham Citizens using PfB design principles. Pathways to Enterprising Futures (PEF), an initiative to support 600 individuals into employment and entrepreneurship; the Migrant Business Support project to provide business support to 500 migrant-owned businesses; and the MILE project on migrant integration in Europe.
- Built future capacity of practitioners to support businesses through £400,000 of additional funding for four PhD students.



Time to Change: A Blueprint for Advancing the UK's Ethnic Minority Businesses (TTC)

Ethnic minorities in the UK are consistently more entrepreneurial, or more likely to start a business, than the population generally. An estimated 250,000 ethnic minority businesses (EMBs) contribute around £25 billion per annum to the UK economy. EMBs make important social and cultural contributions as well, by providing employment, particularly to marginalised groups, revitalising deprived city areas, offering a wide range of products and services, and positively shaping the cultural diversity and attractiveness of British cities.

The Time to Change Report: A Blueprint for Advancing the UK's Ethnic Minority Businesses,

commissioned by NatWest Group and prepared by the CREME sets out ten evidence-based recommendations for developing better policy and support targeting EMBs which, if implemented, have the potential of generating a four-fold increase in the annual GVA for EMBs, from £25 billion to £100 billion. CREME and NatWest are now working together to implement the report's findings across the UK, with the aim of leading the way in the West Midlands through collaboration with regional stakeholders and community groups.



Scan the QR Code to read the report



Migrant Integration through Locally designed Experiences (MILE)

The Migrant Integration through Locally designed Experiences (MILE) project was funded by the European Commission and was established to create a sustainable ecosystem and a replicable cooperation between the municipalities and local migrant-led associations following the specific features and needs of each city involved in the project. The project involved 6 countries: Belgium, Greece, Latvia, Spain, Netherlands, and the UK. Supported by the science for policy approach, the MILE project set up inclusive consultative mechanisms for each city involved, in the area that is the most impacted by the migrant presence and agency. The scope is to enhance the possibility for the migrants to raise their voices and participate in a meaningful way and also co-create and co-design integration policies in their localities, based on their urgent needs.

In 2022, MILE produced reports of local and EU-level inclusion policies with the help of existing evaluation frameworks, such as the Integrating Cities Toolkit. For these analyses, research teams worked together with partnering migrant communities across the participant countries to collect evidence of the current local contexts. Based on these reports, MILE has produced a range of policy recommendations and tools targeting local, national and European policymakers and migrant communities, with the aim to advance the inclusion and participation of migrants in policymaking. Visit mile-project.eu/ for more information.



Pathways to Enterprising Futures (PEF)

A project promoting an innovative approach to opening employment pathways and supporting enterprise skills for ethnic minorities and those furthest from the labour market in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull area.

Part funded by the European Social Fund, Aston University and partners, Citizens UK (CUK), and Ashley Community Housing (ACH), it supported 600 individuals between September 2001 and December 2023.

The project worked with individuals from marginalised communities, addressing challenges by developing new ways of supporting employment and entrepreneurship, building on, and reshaping traditional enterprise initiatives, and tailoring them to help inactive and unemployed ethnic minority individuals move closer to self-employment or employment improving diversity and representation in the region.

Key Achievements:

- PEF In Community Job Clubs – ACH established a series of job clubs to support participants looking for employability support as well as providing learning materials in various languages
- PEF In Community Advice Surgeries – CUK ran a series of Advice Surgeries that provide advice and guidance on housing, benefits and how to get into work or start a business. These surgeries ran in conjunction with local organisations such as Aspire and Succeed
- PEF Entrepreneurship Workshops – Aston University delivered a programme of tailored workshops in collaboration with NatWest. Workshops included guest speakers from the region as well as academics from the university providing support and insights for start-up research, writing business plans, accessing finance and marketing.



European Union
European
Social Fund

Productivity Outcomes of workplace Practice, Engagement & Learning Hub (PrOPEL)

The PrOPEL Hub is a major initiative designed to support improvements in productivity through enhanced workplace practice and employee engagement. The Hub brings together leading researchers from 8 UK universities alongside the CIPD to develop practical tips and tools to help businesses take advantage of the latest insights and expertise.

- Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, they focus on supporting the development of high quality, inclusive and engaging workplaces that help tackle the UK's productivity puzzle. PrOPEL Hub's research themes are managing people, improving wellbeing, engaging employees, boosting innovation, and supporting diversity. Find out more information at www.propelhub.org/






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