

# BRUNELHIVE REVIEW



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## Scaling Up Globally

*Academic Reflections and Industry Perspectives from  
Brunel Hive and Birkbeck, University of London*



**Small and medium enterprises (SMEs)** and global markets may seem a world apart. As UK entrepreneurs vie for funding, and focus on gaining traction in their local markets, the wider global market dynamic has changed significantly. With technology dictating the pace of change in global marketing, UK SMEs can no longer afford to overlook the growing opportunities open to them. Whilst this may seem like very good news for SMEs, the other side of the story is perhaps more disappointing. The majority of UK SMEs seem to lack the capability to take advantage of this ‘new world opportunity’.

The evidence are clear. 2015 estimates from Enterprise Research Centre (Warwick University) suggest that 110,000 SMEs increasing their participation in international markets will translate into £1.15 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the UK economy. Other estimates are equally staggering. The SME capability problem is however, sadly, real. SMEs need to build their internationalisation muscle, particularly as the UK prepares to leave the European Union.

One way forward is specialist incubation and support. Perhaps a more focused support mechanism is acceleration - and the subject of a research collaboration between Birkbeck,

University of London, Brunel Business School (Brunel University London), University of Kent, and Kogod School of Business, American University, Washington DC. A recent research workshop, SME Internationalisation - Academic, Policy and Practitioner Perspectives, held at Birkbeck, explored the impact of business accelerators and the SME capability problem. Approaching this challenge from academic, practitioner and policy perspectives provided a well-grounded framework from which to explore current knowledge and practice, and participant contributions.



The academic session explored the role of Silicon Valley accelerators in the global marketplace. Prof Tomasz Mroczkowski, professor and chair, Department of International Business at Kogod School of Business, addressed the question: What can we learn from accelerators in Silicon Valley? Bringing the global dimension of Silicon Valley accelerators to the research workshop enabled participants to better understand the reach and scale of the American value accelerators. An interesting observation here was the strategy of the Korean government to support Korean companies in Silicon Valley. Dr Muthu De Silva, senior lecturer at Birkbeck, and Dr Ainurul Rosli, reader in enterprise and entrepreneurship at Brunel Business School, led a presentation on the effect of services provided by accelerators on SME performance. Their presentation focused primarily on

the survival of accelerators, highlighting the range of factors affecting their profitability and subsequent scalability.

Professor Jeremy Howells from Kent Business School, University of Kent, chaired the policy panel, which brought together Dr Sivasegaram Manimaaran, Head of European and Global Portfolio at InnovateUK, the United Kingdom's innovation agency, Rebecca Goulding, SME Manager at Connected Places Catapult, and Huw Watkins, head of the Asia Policy team at the Intellectual Property Office. Providing insights into the internationalisation work at InnovateUK, Dr Manimaaran focused on their collaboration with the European Enterprise Network, the world's largest business support network with 600 partner organisations operating across over 65 countries. InnovateUK manages the Enterprise Europe Network in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Highlighting their work with Perpetuum, InnovateUK, in association with the EU, funded Perpetuum to build transportation technologies, in partnership with Siemens, FIAT and a number of European universities. InnovateUK facilitated subsequent funding to enable Perpetuum to access new market opportunities, gain intellectual property protection, and increase its market visibility. InnovateUK has made a strong local and internationalisation impact on Perpetuum, enabling the company to deploy its rail condition monitoring systems with major UK train operators, and undertake trials in Australia, Sweden, Asia, the US and Ireland.

Practitioner perspectives were provided by a panel chaired by Dr Benjamin Reid, and consisting of Mr Asif Faruque, head of content at Level39, a London-based global tech community, Mr Alex Packham, founder and CEO of ContentCal, a fast-growing, global social media company, and Mr Nektarios Liolios, a co-founder of Startupbootcamp FinTech, a global accelerator programme.

In her closing remarks, Dr Muthu De Silva reiterated the global market opportunity and SME internationalisation capability paradox. Whilst stressing the early-stage position of the research programme, she drew participants' attention to the unique challenges SMEs face, and how accelerators can gear up their programmes to address the perceived gaps in their offerings. One specific gap identified by one participant is the support needed by high-growth firms who do not meet the entry criteria of accelerators and pre-support organisations including business incubators. Dr De Silva invited participants to engage with the wider Birkbeck-Brunel-Kent research programme, to build a policy-practitioner-academic framework which contributes directly to closing the gap between UK SMEs and their potential global markets.

The Brunel Hive Team