

Innovation, equality, diversity and inclusion

Innovation and entrepreneurship, internationally, are areas that remain unrepresentative of the population as a whole. According to NESTA in 2018:

“Innovation is still far too exclusive - both in terms of how far and fast the benefits of new technologies spread, and in terms of who gets to become an innovator. Only 8% of patent applicants in the UK are women. Those from working class households form just 15% of scientists. And nearly half of UK Nobel Prize winners in the last 25 years were privately educated. The problem may be clear, but the solution isn't. Despite many well-intentioned initiatives to improve diversity, change isn't happening fast enough. Research published last month showed that there's been virtually no change in the proportion of female directors of companies in the tech sector over the last 20 years.”

Ten great ideas for making your mini-competition and innovation programmes more diverse!

#1 Always remember that the creation of an environment in which people from all backgrounds can flourish, and find opportunity, is something that you can influence. And it is your responsibility to influence it.

#2 Make sure that you use language that is inclusive. The English language has gender-specific personal pronouns in the third-person singular. The masculine pronoun is he (with derived forms him, his and himself); the feminine is she (with derived forms her, hers and herself). For example, if you use the masculine pronoun to always refer to entrepreneurs you implicitly suggest that innovators are usually men. As an alternative, you could make of a point of always using 'he or she', or alternating use of 'he' and 'she' or redressing a longstanding imbalance, by using 'she'.

#3 Remember that in the 21st century, successful teams need to be able to appreciate a greater diversity of customer requirements than has been the case in the past. Unless you have a team that reflects similar diversity in its experience, you are likely to be running a business or institution that will find it difficult to compete in the long term because you will struggle to understand your audience.

#4 Bring diverse role models into your events. Most people would recognise that women, minority ethnic groups and disabled people are not be as fully represented in positions of responsibility in start-up businesses as their numbers in the wider population would justify. It is nevertheless the case that there are many examples of people from these backgrounds who are making a success in business. It is therefore the responsibility of educators to seek them out and find them and make sure that they are represent in classrooms as lecturers and guest speakers, so that your students can be inspired by them and ultimately understand that that it is realist for them to see themselves as future business leaders.

#5 Raise awareness of the fact that investors are more interested in teams than in ideas and that's because good businesses are created by effective teams. Ideas normally change over the course of the early months and years of the development of a new business, whereas teams that are successful tend to stay together and their collective strengths are what help new businesses succeed. Teams, in their nature, are effective when their members have complementary skills knowledge and experience. Teams made up of people who all think the same way, do not diversify the knowledge that they hold, but simply add capacity to get through more work. Diverse teams on the other hand, have the ability to solve problems by maximising the number of solutions that they can come up with and perspectives that they hold.

#6 Actively encourage your students to form diverse teams and explain why this is important. Business teams are 'created' not 'born'.

#7 Seek to balance engagement with students who are representative of the population as a whole, in your programmes. We know that some subjects attract particular genders and particular ethnic groups for long standing systemic and complex cultural reasons. At the same time entrepreneurship is a great 'leveller' because people from all academic backgrounds, regardless of their subject expertise, can come up with great ideas. If you work in an institution with courses with significant and opposite imbalances in terms of gender and ethnicity, try bringing groups from different courses together to engage in innovation workshops. If your institution overall has strong imbalances, consider working with another institution with the opposite imbalance. You'll be more likely to create great interdisciplinary teams too if you do this.

#8 Make the bar to entry for your activities low and build in the idea that no previous experience of entrepreneurship is necessary. At the same time, you can highlight that expectations of outcomes are high. This way you will limit the chance that you will discourage talented people who are from backgrounds where they have not been encouraged to see themselves as future business leaders.

#9 Link in with existing networks and policies that promote diversity. These might be international, national, local, or institutional initiatives.

#10 Everyone needs to own the drive to for greater diversity in entrepreneurship. Think up your own new localised approach to increasing diversity and adapt, develop and expand this list. Evaluate what you are doing and tell the world about what you are finding works well.

#11 Make sure that you reflect diversity in your communications. For example work to ensure that if you are using photographs that you represent cultural diversity – across a publication. Also think about how you represent power relations in photos. For example: think about how you link roles that people play in photos (teachers, business people, students) to particular genders or ethnic groups. Be careful that you avoid stereotyping who performs the roles which are associated with particular levels of power.

#12 Make sure that you choose physical spaces that are accessible and that you ensure that you employ the principles of ‘universal design’ as far as possible. ‘Universal design’ is the principle that we should try to avoid the need for special access arrangements, for particular groups, by thinking through diverse access needs when we design services. By taking this approach, we maximise the chances that everyone feels included because their needs have been built in from the outset, rather than added on as an afterthought.

#15 Of course not all buildings or services have been designed with universal design principles in mind. So you need to remember to consider making adaptations and special arrangements for access. Ensure that you are in a position to fund and support with resources any reasonable adjustments for particular individuals in order that your events and facilities are accessible.

#13 Be aware that investors are (or should be) looking for diverse talent. When arranging events and interventions – bear this in mind and work to reach out to and educate investors.

The following documents seek to address equality, diversity and inclusion in innovation and can act as a source of further inspiration for promoting diversity in Creative Spark and the Big Idea Challenge competition.

British Council guide to mainstreaming diversity in programmes and projects

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B8posmSq0omcVVJldldFdnVXUnVxSWdjWHkzVzlJTDdCRGxz>

British Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/equality_diversity_and_inclusion_strategy_0.doc

Innovate UK: diversity and inclusion - How we are supporting people from a variety of backgrounds and walks of life to innovate and succeed in business.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/innovate-uk-diversity-and-inclusion#ideas-mean-business-meet-the-young-innovators>

Interview with Melody Hobson on diversity in the workplace and on being ‘colour brave’ from BBC Radio 4

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06y244r>

See what a female entrepreneur looks like - Women in innovation exhibition

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/634639/infocus_women_in_innovation_photography_book.pdf

Innovate UK - Statement of Intent - diversity and inclusion

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/526565/Innovate_UK_Diversity_and_Inclusion_Statement_of_Intent_May_2016.pdf

Equity in Innovation Women Inventors and Patents

<https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/wpallimport/files/iwpr-export/publications/C448%20Equity%20in%20Innovation.pdf>

Opportunity lost: How inventive potential is squandered and what to do about it Madeleine Gabriel, Juliet Ollard and Nancy Wilkinson December 2018

<https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Opportunity-Lost-December-2018.pdf>

Nesta (2008) Shifting the dial on diversity in innovation: five key ideas from Breaking the Mould

<https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/shifting-dial-diversity-innovation-five-key-ideas-breaking-mould/>