



Enterprise Week in the West Midlands 2004 - Breaking the Mould

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THIS REPORT offers an account and initial evaluation of the organisation, content and early outcomes of Enterprise Week (EW) activities held in the West Midlands during November 2004.

We start with a review of the original goals of the EW initiative nationally, setting this in the context of the approach taken to national campaign objectives in the West Midlands. The regional model developed to support the planning, organisation and funding of events is also described. We go on to give an overview and flavour of the range of Enterprise Week activities held across the region during November 2004. And we conclude with an assessment of impacts and outcomes, pointing to a number of important lessons learned by event organisers in the process.

Enterprise Week objectives – meeting national aims in a regional context

The national Enterprise Insight team followed up the Chancellor's announcement of Treasury support for the Enterprise Week initiative by outlining a series of clear national aims for the 2004 campaign. Enterprise Week activities around the country would be designed to:

- Inspire people in their teens and 20s.
- Catalyse debate amongst policy makers and practitioners.
- Forge alliances amongst a broad coalition.
- Recognise the work of those promoting enterprise.
- Celebrate enterprise in all its forms – business start-ups, social enterprise and enterprising employees within existing organisations.

The overall aim was not only to reach and stimulate groups who get excluded from mainstream enterprise/business support, such as young people. It was also to stimulate change in the support agencies that operate within 'the mainstream', by extending their reach and challenging their approach to such groups in the community. And it promoted a much more inclusive notion of what we mean by 'enterprise' – defining it as a set of attitudes, behaviours and aspirations that apply as much to communities and workplaces as to new business start-ups.

Each region was invited to submit funding proposals to the SBS Phoenix Fund via their respective RDAs. Phoenix Fund grants were to be used to deliver an EW programme that met national

objectives in a regional context. Lead responsibility for writing the West Midlands bid was taken by Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce. Their CEO, and author of the bid, had been heavily involved in the national Enterprise Insight campaign group and chaired its regional 'mirror' body, the West Midlands Entrepreneurship Group.

The West Midlands bid focused strongly on providing an EW programme that would deliver both the Chancellor's commitment to fostering an enterprise culture in Britain and the Phoenix Fund's focus on social and economic exclusion – on nurturing enterprise in disadvantaged communities. The bid therefore struck a balance between economic development/growth objectives, on the one hand, and social inclusion on the other. It also set the regional proposal in context, referencing some of the key strategic commitments and themes being addressed by AWM through its Regional Economic Strategy, the FRESA, regional business start-up strategy and support for greater business engagement in education.

Target groups and areas identified in the proposal reflected Phoenix Fund priorities. Potential entrepreneurs amongst groups of young people and women, and from disadvantaged communities (particularly those within the six West Midlands Regeneration Zones) were to be offered a range of opportunities to learn more about what 'enterprise' could mean for them. Various showcase events were planned, including a roving 'enterprise bus' and other activities involving the full range of business support and related agencies (including HM Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue).

Specific sub-regional activities would be led by local Business Links. A series of pilot initiatives were to be funded as well, designed to stimulate innovative working between partners at the local level. All of this activity – concentrated as far as possible within Enterprise Week itself – was to be supported by an extensive media campaign. This would raise awareness of specific local events and reinforce the wider message that 'enterprise' is a real option and opportunity for all, especially those in disadvantaged communities. Finally, the week was to be topped by specially sponsored celebrations, enterprise awards and dinners, showcasing young entrepreneurial talents and achievements.

Resources

The bid successfully secured £200,000 from the Phoenix Fund. This was matched by another £155,000 in 'levered' funding from private sector sponsors and from other partners making in-kind contributions. The table below outlines the expenditure actually incurred under broad budget headings. (Levered contributions have been accounted for separately and show that they exceeded the original target.)

Activity	Expenditure (£ - rounded)
Enterprise showcase dinners:	
- Sponsorship of the IoD event	10,000
- Sponsorship of Lord Stafford Awards	5,000
Enterprise on the Move:	
- Enterprise Bus	14,000
- Promotional 'freebies'	2,000
- Other regional events (non-BL)	4,000
- Sponsorship of regional conferences	10,000
- Website competition	500
- WM Entrepreneurship Group	3,000
Sub-regional events:	
- Allocation to each BL (£5,000)	30,000
Media campaign:	
- PR support	22,000
- Birmingham Post supplement	4,000
- Other coverage	5,500
New partners:	
- Local networking and innovative projects (x6)	50,000
Enterprise Hub	40,000
Total expenditure	200,000

In many ways, the most important and, perhaps, distinctive of all resource allocations made was to the 'Enterprise Hub'. This was as a dedicated team of two staff (a campaign manager and assistant) who were responsible for co-ordinating EW planning, administering fund allocations, maintaining partner communications and liaison, and interfacing with AWM (the Phoenix Fund contract holder). The team also acted as an ad hoc secretariat for the WM Entrepreneurship Group – the regional consultative body that, from late spring 2004, assumed lead responsibility for advising on and progressing plans for Enterprise Week itself.¹

¹ Core members of the West Midlands Entrepreneurship Group include Chambers of Commerce and Business Links, the CBI, IoD, Prince's Trust, Young Enterprise WM, businessdynamics, Shell Livewire, the West Midlands Education Business Consortium, Mercia Institute of Enterprise, the Enterprise Advisor Regional Lead, LSC, AWM and GOWM.

The Hub team therefore did all the essential 'leg work'. They visited partners in the sub-regions, liaised regularly with Enterprise Insight nationally, fielded queries from partners, issued news updates and once or twice found themselves holding the ring between competing interests.

Project planning and management – the West Midlands way

Other regions approached the planning and management of EW events in rather different ways, many relying on a more devolved or 'arms-length' model of delivery with no regional flavour or direction to speak of. We have seen, by contrast, that the West Midlands 'model' featured a small, dedicated team that was able to offer a mixture of support and leadership to partners and prospective contributors on the ground.

This was achieved by working through the Chair and members of the regional Entrepreneurship Group (the WMEG) to build a consensus – first, around the required approach (the focus, style and reach of the campaign) and, secondly, around EW marketing and branding (adopting Enterprise Insight's national *Make Your Mark* logo). But the team also dealt directly with partners on a one-to-one basis where necessary in each of the sub-regions.

This mix gave the project as a whole a distinct advantage. It provided a degree of *central direction and control*, on the one hand, while maintaining the principle of *local design and delivery*. It meant it was possible to gain region-wide coverage – for example, through the Enterprise Bus and co-ordinated PR/media campaigns – at the same time as encouraging very innovative and some highly experimental ideas for delivery at the lowest level.

Part of the success of this consciously *regional* approach is put down to the trust that partners from other sub-regions had in the people running the programme from Coventry. The importance of these people's reputations for being even-handed and non-partisan cannot be overstated in this context. Along with this element of trust, a number of other factors combined to make the regional model work well – a clear idea of what was required from the outset; a willingness to listen to new (and sometimes better) suggestions, and access to a readymade vehicle for progressing ideas and sharing information (the WMEG).

Breaking the mould

Another notable characteristic shaping this planning model was the strong underlying commitment held by key partners to 'breaking the mould' of enterprise delivery. A decision was taken early on to use the EW opportunity and Phoenix Fund resources to *reach out* to excluded groups and communities in new ways. Organisers were encouraged – not least by their AWM contract holders, who played a deliberately 'hands-off' role – to explore new, more flexible and responsive ways of getting the enterprise message across to target groups. It was argued that these were exactly the sorts of people who normally 'fall off the radar' of mainstream business support service providers. Enterprise Week activities and funds were therefore seen as an ideal opportunity to work outside the constraints imposed on most agencies (by most funding regimes), compelling them to achieve short-term outputs and targets:

"We thought – 'Let's get out and show these communities what enterprise is!' If that produces more leads for the likes of Business Link, then fine, all well and good. But that wasn't our main purpose – we weren't there just to drum up business. Our job was to raise awareness out there, to drum up some new energy and enthusiasm for enterprise."

We say more about the impacts and outcomes achieved later in this report. But this quote from one of the organisers illustrates something of the spirit behind the West Midlands approach.

So, to summarise, the approach was shaped by a clear focus on delivering the enterprise message to the community *in* the community, and on trying out new ways of 'connecting' with target groups:

"We started with a 'can-do' mind set, that we could try something different to capture the enthusiasm of young people especially, and not do more of 'the same-old, same-old'. We had the support of key people in this as well, here at the Chamber and at AWM."

Branding

The decision to favour outreach rather than service-centred delivery influenced the choice of marketing styles and materials. Enterprise Insight's national *Make Your Mark* slogan and literature were adopted to give the regional campaign a consistent and distinct brand identity. In the process, a number of partners agreed to 'badge' their own, independently planned, events as part of the EW family. This in itself was an achievement, given the notoriously competitive, brand-protected environment in which business support agencies tend to operate.

In other regions, it appears that Business Link leadership and branding for the programme were taken more for granted. On reflection, the view of organisers in the West Midlands is that the adoption of a 'politically neutral' brand had a number of benefits. First, it encouraged more and different sorts of partners to get involved in the initiative. Secondly (and more importantly, perhaps) it spoke more directly to young people, for example, to whom the Business Link name might have meant very little. And thirdly, it reinforced and resonated with national media coverage of the campaign using the same logo. Organisers said:

"We felt the Make Your Mark slogan said on the tin exactly what we were trying to do with the campaign."

Activities and events

A separate listing shows all the events that were eventually held in or around Enterprise Week (2nd - 24th November 2004) and brigaded together as part of the West Midlands initiative.² This shows the range and quality of EW activities, including:

- Seminars and breakfast meetings for local businesses to get them more involved in education.
- Enterprise Fairs in community-based venues.
- Education business partnership business days, Young Enterprise Master Classes and Prince's Trust Team events.
- An interactive game show.
- Young entrepreneurs talking about their experiences to young audiences.
- Special events for school teachers and heads, exposing them to new business relationships, ideas and opportunities.
- Social enterprise exercises.
- Information and advice sessions for new business starts in community locations.
- Young business challenges and competitions.
- Award ceremonies and celebratory dinners.

In addition, the Enterprise Bus (the 'Buzz') toured the region throughout the week, hosting different events and activities in most sub-regions – visiting schools and shopping centres, local companies, historic business sites, and business advice and enterprise centres. On some trips, young people toured their area with business representatives or teachers. Others focused on using the bus as a mobile classroom, helping teachers, for example, improve their enterprise skills and develop new enterprise curriculum materials.

² For a copy email: HANNAHW@cw-chamber.co.uk

Almost all Enterprise Buzz visits and tours were covered by local media. This press coverage, together with the high visibility achieved by 'the Buzz' in key locations, gave the campaign "... a strong common thread and identity across the region. It held it all together".

Allocating funds

As we have seen, the Enterprise Hub team allocated part of the fund to partners in the form of sponsorship, thereby adding value to pre-planned events and aligning them with EW/Make Your Mark campaign objectives. They also made small grants to support new local initiatives. Each Business Link (BL), for example, was invited to submit ideas on two sides of A4, describing local activities that would cost around £5,000. The Hub manager commented on these and, where appropriate, made suggestions about how they might be made more adventurous or innovative.

For the most part, BLs responded positively. Inviting new ideas about how to get the enterprise message across to hard-to-reach groups worked well. The end result was an unexpected diversity of approaches that can now be added to the stock of ideas for future campaigns:

"Each sub-region had a very different approach. In retrospect, this was a strength because it contributed to the experimental nature of the initiative."

A range of other local initiatives were funded through local networking awards, all contributing to this emerging theme of *diversity*. The original plan had been to leave the administration of this part of the fund to a sister organisation in the region. But for a number of logistical reasons the Hub team eventually took direct responsibility for administering these funds rather than working through the intermediary. This move, again in retrospect, is thought to have 'freed up' some of the thinking that went into partners' networking plans. A series of much more experimental approaches were funded in this way, including: a sports project in Coventry; a new regional network to encourage enterprise learning for teachers; 'adopt a school' and teenage mum projects in Staffordshire; an Asian girls' confectionary business in Birmingham, and an 'emotional intelligence' programme run in different parts of the region by HTI to boost enterprise self-awareness and confidence amongst disadvantaged young people.

Education Business Partnerships played a prominent role in delivering some of the more innovative events that received funding. For example, one local EBP linked up with AFC Telford

United to invite schoolchildren in for a day to look at 'the ins and outs' of the business. Year 10 and 11 kids came up with some great ideas for increasing revenues and improving the business – ideas that were both very original and challenging. Everyone, including the Club itself, learned a lot from the experience.

The central allocation of Phoenix funds, mostly to local pilots and other events, proved very effective in maintaining thematic consistency, albeit interpreted in diverse ways across the region – playing to the twin notions of outreach and innovation in equal measure.

This did not mean, however, that there was perfect unanimity around funding mechanisms and decisions across the patch. Some partners were reputedly suspicious of what appeared to them to be over-centralised, even dictatorial control over funds early on in the process. A number would have preferred "... to have been given the money and allowed to get on with it – to do their own thing in their own way". The concern amongst organisers, however, was that this approach would risk diluting – even losing – the distinctive focus, flavour and purpose of Phoenix funding. They did not want new money simply being used "... to deliver more of the same".

In one case, funds were withheld from a proposed programme because it was not seen to be adding anything new or contributing to the spirit of the campaign. Here, central control of the fund was used to dissuade people from a particular approach. However, organisers believe that most of the time their funding role meant they could act as mentors with partners rather than censors.

In this context, the allocation of funds to deliver the EW initiative turned out to be quite a challenge, for everyone concerned. Regional organisers were faced with having to inject some new thinking into the enterprise offer, and established providers were being asked to 'think out of the box'. In the event, most partners embraced the spirit of the campaign, tried new things and learned some important lessons along the way, as the next section illustrates.

Impacts and outcomes – learning by doing something different

One of the main objectives of the EW campaign was to raise awareness of and interest in 'enterprise', especially amongst young people. Given the timescales involved and other factors beyond the control of organisers, it would be quite unrealistic to believe we could attribute changes in

young people's enterprise awareness or cultural receptiveness directly to EW events.

However, we do know that media coverage achieved in the West Midlands was very extensive and in cost equivalent terms, at least, very expensive. Estimates suggest that the press column inches achieved were worth around £184,000, plus other radio and TV exposure.³ We also know from a follow-up survey of local EW providers that more than 2,800 people participated in West Midlands events – mostly young people, but also around 700 business representatives and dozens of teachers.⁴ This suggests that the conditions were right and the ground was laid for awareness raising on quite a significant scale.

Practitioners have long argued that Enterprise Week can only be treated as the tip of the iceberg. At best, it can highlight and celebrate enterprise opportunities and services. Almost by its very nature, though, it cannot *in itself* be expected to create or satisfy new demand for enterprise learning or support. It offers a series of glimpses and tasters. The hardest task is to follow through and meet any expectations that may have been raised. This, it is argued, is where the bulk of investment in enterprise is needed – in building capacity within the service infrastructure.

Others acknowledge this argument but suggest that EW has given everyone a chance to try new routes to market. The value of the exercise, for them, lies as much in what they learn about what works (getting new messages across to new client groups) as in any directly measurable impacts on young people, for example. Anecdotal evidence from the campaign aftermath suggests that the impact of the experience on some providers has, indeed, been considerable:

“Very many partners, including Business Links, have said they've learned something – that ‘enterprise’ isn't just about starts-ups, for example, but about getting stuck in much earlier in people's enterprise journeys. It's about influencing aspirations that might not surface for another 10 years! So we think the tendency of providers to focus on short-term returns and measured outputs was being challenged.”

Learning the lessons

Our view is that some of the biggest impacts of the campaign will be felt in the lessons learned (and attitudes changed) as a result of *partners'* involvement in Enterprise Week. This is not to

down-play the longer-term impacts on target groups and communities. But these, we argue, require a different set of metrics, methods and timescales to assess properly, and these fall outside the remit of this brief report.

So we finish with some of the main lessons that organisers and partners believe they have learned from the 2004 experience:

- Working through an established regional forum (the WMEG) gave the campaign ready access to a decision-making and steering body. This gave the campaign a clear sense of purpose and collective endeavour.
- One of the key decisions taken early on by WMEG was to use the national *Make Your Mark* brand across the region. This helped to unify and 'neutralise' the campaign (politically), as well as speaking much more directly to target groups.
- Central direction of the campaign (and funding), however, did leave some partners feeling a little marginalised at first, with a number questioning whether they had anything useful to add. This reflected, in part, partners' unease about not simply being given the money and being allowed to get on with it.
- Organisers felt, though, that complaints about central control masked an unwillingness – thankfully very rare – to try new ways rather than just doing more of the same. Some providers needed to be nudged out of their comfort zones more than others.
- Regional leadership on specific themes need not stifle local initiative. Indeed, vesting lead responsibility in a sub-regional partner can produce very fruitful and innovative solutions – not least to problems such as getting the message across to the hardest-to-reach groups.
- Allow the space to make mistakes and celebrate the unexpected, such as planning (but not achieving) a series of Enterprise Bus visits that would look the same across the region. In practice, organisers found lots of local variations on 'the Buzz' and plenty of ideas happening on the ground that they simply had not thought of. Diversity is the key.
- Redefine outcomes: there was some nervousness amongst providers about sharing information after the event. A few were reluctant to report back on numbers involved or on other 'outcomes'. Organisers believe this reflects a dilemma for providers, whose

³ Source: Enterprise Week, Issue 1, available from:

HANNAHW@cw-chamber.co.uk

⁴ For survey results email: HANNAHW@cw-chamber.co.uk

performance is increasingly measured by headcounts, throughputs and short-term economic impacts.

- Yet many of those involved in Enterprise Week have stories to tell about the enthusiasm they encountered amongst young people at their events, or the level of interest people showed in enterprise ideas and opportunities. But none of this 'buzz' is captured in client feedback forms at the moment. And in our rush to get results we could be missing out on a whole raft of so-called 'soft' impact measures – measures that actually pick up on the sorts of *cultural* changes (in attitudes, aspirations and behaviours) that Gordon Brown wanted to engender through Enterprise Week.

- Almost by its very nature, Enterprise Week cannot be expected to create or satisfy new demand for enterprise learning or support in itself. It offers a series of glimpses and tasters. The hardest task is to follow through and meet any expectations that may have been raised on the ground.
- Last but not least, if partners are serious about wanting to change the culture 'out there' they will have to start changing it 'in here' too:

“If we’re to help make a new, more enterprising culture in the West Midlands, we’ll have to be much more enterprising ourselves in how we go about it.”