

ASTON CENTRE FOR GROWTH

The Aston Centre for Growth was established in 2014 in response to increasing evidence of the business support needs of SMEs in the region, and national stakeholders seeking to partner with Aston. The Centre has enabled Aston to develop a clear brand around SME support aligned to the University's strategy, and become firmly embedded in business support provision for the region.

Rooted in the entrepreneurship and small business research of Aston's faculty, the Centre creates impact for SMEs through a range of targeted specialist programmes, practical in delivery and underpinned by leading research. The principle behind the programmes is to work in partnership to design practical leadership and management education and deliver it in a peer-to-peer learning environment, helping business leaders to adopt better management practices, gain access to finance and boost productivity, resulting in inclusive growth and economic impact for the region.

The Centre for Growth was built on the foundation of two successful and long running programmes, BSEEN and 10KSB which have now seen hundreds of beneficiaries between them. The Centre now runs a breadth of programmes, including:

- The Aston Programme for Small Business Growth (2015)
- Pitchfest West Midlands (2015)
- GBS LEP Growth Hub Scale-Up Workshops (2017)
- Midlands programme of Productivity through People (2018)
- Be the Business Mentoring for Growth (2018)
- The Apollo miniaccelerator (2018)
- MSDUK/Tuck Building High Performing Minority Businesses programme (2018)
- MSDUK programme (2019)
- Building Business Leaders of the Future (2019)
- Minerva Birmingham (2019)

To date, these activities have provided support to over 1,000 entrepreneurs. Examples of the impact of these programmes include:

- Participants taking part in the Centre's intensive growth programmes have achieved a 28% boost to productivity and created 650 jobs in the West Midlands and £120m of additional revenues for the region. At firm level, participants have achieved 23% greater job creation and 25% higher turnover compared to other growth businesses.
- The Pitchfest West Midlands programme has put over 100 entrepreneurs in front of investors helping them to secure over £3m of angel investment.
- In student entrepreneurship, 632 Aston students and graduates have attended a start-up boot camp, resulting in the creation of 210 new businesses.

The Centre for Growth aims to continue to build this network and transform the regional economy through working intensively with high potential entrepreneurs and SMEs – strengthening leaders and management skills, boosting productivity, and promoting genuine inclusive growth. Themes for the next new initiatives include access to finance, inclusive growth, productivity and growth support for alumni businesses.



The Centre works in partnership both internally at Aston and externally with funders and stakeholders. Two leading-edge research centres are part of the Centre for Growth – ERC and REME – and research outputs from these centres feed directly into the strategy and programmes of the Centre for Growth. The Centre co-developed programmes with key external partners including GBS LEP Growth Hub, Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses UK, EY, Be the Business, Santander Universities, and other business schools both in the region and nationally.

The team at the Centre for Growth has built up considerable expertise in engaging with SMEs, understanding their needs and recruiting them to programmes relevant to their stage of growth. They have become the go-to resource for faculty wishing to use SME case studies in their teaching modules and research, other SME projects needing support to develop a marketing plan, and initiatives seeking to involve SMEs.