

## Diversity and inclusion among self-employed workers

### Stream Organisers (in alphabetical order):

*Jean Gardiner*, Leeds University Business School, The University of Leeds, LS2 9JT, +44(0)113-343-3218, [jg@lubs.leeds.ac.uk](mailto:jg@lubs.leeds.ac.uk)

*Dr Steve Vincent*, Leeds University Business School, The University of Leeds, LS2 9JT, +44(0)113-343-3516, [sv@lubs.leeds.ac.uk](mailto:sv@lubs.leeds.ac.uk)

*Dr Robert Wapshott*, Bradford University School of Management, Emm Lane, Bradford, BD9 4JL, +44(0)1274 234304, [r.m.wapshott@bradford.ac.uk](mailto:r.m.wapshott@bradford.ac.uk)

Whilst still constituting less than one third of total self-employment, female self-employment has grown by 13% since 2001, compared to 9% for males, reflecting an increase in self-employment generally (calculated from ONS 2008). There is some evidence that self-employment might offer fresh economic opportunities for workers who have experienced constrained opportunities, on the basis of gender. For example self-employment in professional or managerial occupations allows women to maintain that professional status while also benefiting from greater control over their working lives (Albert and Bradley, 1998). Professional women who are self-employed generally find it easier to work on a full-time basis and enjoy greater parity with equivalent male groups, although penalties associated with work-life conflict should not be ignored (Jennings and McDougald, 2007). However opportunities for self-employment in professional occupations are clearly not available to all and many will find themselves in low-paid self-employed roles. On the whole females are less likely to be self-employed and earn less from self-employment than men or employees of either gender despite the fact that they tend to be more qualified than their male equivalents (Cowling and Taylor, 2001).

Similarly, whilst it must be appreciated that there are complex cultural, social, geographical and generational variations between and across black and minority ethnic (BME) communities (see, Virdee, 2006; Clarke and Drinkwater, 2007), those from BME backgrounds usually gain less remuneration from self-employment when compared to equivalent white groups (Parker, 2004; Cheung and Heath, 2007). When explaining the uptake of entrepreneurial careers amongst members of these more marginalised groups, the evidence suggests that more negative 'push' factors, such as discrimination, eroding work conditions and work-life conflict are often at least as important as the more positive 'pull' of independency, flexibility and greater opportunity (Hughes, 2003; Parker, 2004).

In this track we welcome submissions of papers which explore equality and diversity issues in the context of self-employment. The following provides an indicative list of the kinds of questions that will be addressed.

- What barriers to successful self-employment are encountered by members of traditionally marginalised social groups? What strategies are utilised to circumvent such obstacles?
- In what ways do the qualities of social networks and cultural understandings differentially affect the ability of people from diverse social groups to succeed in self-employment?
- How do paths into and out of self-employment vary across diverse social groups?

- How do socially diverse groups access the skills and represent their skilfulness to clients and labour market intermediaries?
- How do the markets and institutional structures that support self-employed workers vary across industries and regions, and what are the implications of these variations for issues related to social diversity and inclusivity?
- What are the limitations of existing institutional supports and how might these be better used to support less advantaged groups into self-employment?

**Publication plans:**

As special issue of the journal *Organization* will be proposed.

**Keywords:** self-employment, entrepreneurs, diversity, gender, ethnicity