RICHARD BERESFORD BURSARY

Blog by Eilish Gorse

I was thrilled to gain the Richard Beresford Bursary as it allowed me to focus on a subject we are very passionate about in the nest team.

I am part of the Enterprise nest team at the University of Portsmouth and we support student startup businesses and academics with enterprise in the curriculum.

Based on recent research of our student cohorts, data clearly indicated that we see far more males than females engaging in enterprise and entrepreneurship. We also observed that there are clusters in certain subject areas such as the Creative Industries. Our mission is to redress this imbalance and ensure that female students take advantage of the support that is available to tap into their full potential.

Initially I did a lot of online research and communicated with other universities across the UK, Ireland and USA, National Enterprise initiatives and Charities, Training and Delivery companies and Female Founder groups. I visited a few to get more of a flavour of the support they offered namely King’s College London and Imperial College London, The Women’s Organisation Liverpool and the University of Birmingham.

Some of the universities I connected with had programs specifically aimed at supporting female students. The support ranged from full programmes such as King’s College London’s ‘The Women Entrepreneurs Programme’, their key aim is to ensure that half of the ventures on the [King’s20 Accelerator](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/accelerator) are women-led. Imperial College London have a [WE Innovate](https://www.imperialenterpriselab.com/programmes/we-innovate/) six month programme which provides tailored workshops, inspiring talks by business leaders, pitch training and business coaching to help enterprising female students get their ideas off the ground and turn them into viable businesses.

The Women’s Organisation (WO) Liverpool has to date supported 50 thousand women over 23 years, the top issues they focus on are Self Belief/Self Esteem/Confidence, pricing and financial fears.

Other establishments were similar to us in offering generic startup support and are in the early stages of building more tailored support for females.

From research, it was clear the white papers, reports and feedback highlighted similar points about the needs of females being quite specific to their gender. Evidence highlighted that a personalised approach to skill development resulted in the most effective outcome.

Females value a trusted and safe environment, honesty, respect, community of friendship, solution focussed, having fun but taking work seriously. Females most needed support with building confidence, learning the art of networking, developing an appetite for risk and problem solving.

Females are generally more reluctant to ask for significant funding such as venture capital and in some areas there are barriers that need breaking down for it to be a more equitable system. More female financing initiative are being launched every day and there is evidence that crowdfunding has proven to help women validate their ideas, build confidence and raise funds. Crowdfunding been a game changer and is one area where half of the community is made up of females.

Peer support, mentors and role models were extremely important to women and group discussions and informal conversations were highly valued followed by networking opportunities and workshops.

Thank you to the EEUK for giving me this opportunity and the nest team are engaged in putting the knowledge into practice with our first sold out ‘Female Entrepreneurship event’ this month. Thank you to those all those colleagues who took the time out to share with us.

Eilish Gorse

nest, University of Portsmouth