

**- EYP London "Women in Enterprise" seminar –
Niamh Hughes**

One would imagine the issue of discrimination against women in the workplace to be a thing of the past. However, I soon realised at the recent EYP London "Women in Enterprise" event, hosted at the Apple headquarters, that this unfortunately isn't the case. Despite this realisation, the seminar was intensely motivational and addressed other issues such as the importance of networking and support groups and the impact women have had on the economic structure.

Leading ladies Angela Eagle (MP), Sally Russell (Netmums), Priya Lakhmi (Masala Masala), Maxine Benson (Everywoman), Brenda Joseph (Apple), Catherine Bennett (Apple) and Marilise Saghbini (Make Your Mark) spread their infectious positive energy like wildfire and inspired us with their stories and experiences in sectors ranging from politics to consulting to consumer goods.



The "Women in Enterprise" seminar opened with Her Majesty's Minister of State for Pensions and the Ageing Society, Angela Eagle, who highlighted the importance of networks and events like those organised by SANDBOX and EYP London, which encourage women to bring their unique knowledge and experience to the forefront of our economy by creating enterprising businesses. As active members of sandbox, we have already initiated this process; however there is always room for improvement and further development.

Angela Eagle's persistence to rise above the gender and sexual orientation discrimination which she is regularly susceptible to is particularly admirable. She assured us that, the British Government is working towards closing the women's enterprise gap and enforcing equality acts so this potential and entrepreneurial spirit that lies untapped by the economy can emerge and excel. Inevitably, unwritten and unspoken assumptions exist concerning women in the workplace i.e. when will they get married, settle down and have kids. As Angela so adamantly exclaimed, does this mean we should walk around with a sign saying "my ovaries are tied", just to eradicate such assumptions? Of course not, but these "glass ceilings" do still exist and it is up to us, to support each other and utilise our networks in order to break through them. "The more networks you have the stronger you are!"



This event highlighted the strong support networks that exist within the U.K, not just for aspiring women but for all aspiring entrepreneurs. Maxine Benson of Everywoman, a free resource for women starting or growing a business, spoke about the importance of having a diverse network of people to acquire a refreshing pool of knowledge and tips from all angles. She also reassured us that there is always funding available to establish a company, even in times of recession. Marilise Saghbini spoke on behalf of Make Your Mark, a national campaign to increase entrepreneurial spirit in the UK. Marilise highlighted the fantastic work Make Your Mark is doing to encourage women's enterprise particularly through the global network, Unleashing Ideas.

Priya Lakhami, originally a legal professional, is a living testament to the importance of networks such as Make Your Mark and the claim that funding is still available. Priya truly inspired us with her passion and entrepreneurial spirit to drive her newly established company Masala Masala to success within just 6 months! Masala Masala is not just a fresh curry sauce brand, but also a Trust based in Mumbai that will provide a meal to a homeless person for every unit of product sold! Although there is much doom and gloom with the current recession, Priya assured us that this is a great time for a start-up to make some great deals, considering her experiences establishing Masala Masala in autumn last year!

I found it particularly interesting, how Angela Eagle commended women for their understanding and influence in promoting sustainability in our economies by comparison to the traditional male economic structures. She did suggest she was making a sweeping generalisation but is a strong believer that women have played a key role in implementing this holistic approach to economics. The 21st century has witnessed the internalisation of externalities, particularly regarding resources and pollution, as well as the increase in female economic power. Is this a coincidence or have women in fact influenced their male counterparts to look towards sustainable living? This is almost impossible to answer but I am happy to accept praise on behalf of our predecessors!

Although a certain level of obscure discrimination against women within Enterprises does still exist, it is without doubt that the female presence across the economy continues to advance and strengthen across all sectors. I do believe this underlying level of discrimination acts almost as a driver which motivates women to become independent and establish their own enterprises and is therefore

somewhat good. It's the means to an end, as such. It is also through strong and active networking that we continue to learn and progress.

The U.K appears to be particularly aware of the importance and value of women in enterprise, considering the support groups, funding and equality acts in place, but how are other countries working to promote female entrepreneurship? What can the U.K learn from other countries?

In the words of Priya and Angela respectively, "Don't sit down and wait for the opportunities to come. Get up and make them!" also "Good Luck, aim high and stay in touch with everyone"!