

UK ENTREPRENEURSHIP ACTIVITY HITS RECORD-HIGH LED BY WOMEN BUT CHALLENGES PERSIST

- **36% of working-age adults are either running a new business or intend to start one within the next three years, the highest level since 1999**
- **Early-stage entrepreneurial activity by women has seen a threefold increase since 2002, rising from just over 3.5% to 10% in 2024**
- **Immigrants and ethnic minorities are consistently the most entrepreneurial groups in the UK**
- **Entrepreneurs with growth and job creation ambitions are substantially more optimistic about Artificial Intelligence**

The UK's entrepreneurial spirit is at an all-time high, with over a third of the working-age population (thirty-six per cent) now engaged in or planning to start a business.

Start-up creation, particularly among women, immigrants, and ethnic minorities, reached its highest point in 2024, the highest since the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) UK report, produced by Warwick Business School in partnership with NatWest, began collecting data directly from individual entrepreneurs in 1999.

The findings are drawn from a sample of 8,229 UK adults aged 18 to 80 surveyed in 2024. This year's study was conducted against a volatile backdrop of geopolitical uncertainty, a persistent cost-of-living crisis, and a slow-growth economy, making the resilience of small businesses both inspiring and critical to the UK's economic stability and growth.

This surge in entrepreneurship is being driven by remarkable growth within key demographics. Immigrants and ethnic minorities are consistently the most entrepreneurial groups in the UK, with the rate of the non-white population who are actively involved in starting a new business or who are running a company that is less than 3 years old standing at 19.1%, nearly doubling the rate of 10.4% within the white population. Similarly, women are launching businesses at an unprecedented rate. Early-stage entrepreneurial activity among women has grown threefold since 2002, rising from just 3.5% to 10%.

A defining trend for the future is the rapid embrace of Artificial Intelligence by entrepreneurs. The report reveals that AI is quickly becoming a cornerstone of the modern start-up, with 29% of early-stage entrepreneurs already reporting that it is "very important" to their day-to-day operations. Looking forward, adoption of AI is set to become near-ubiquitous, as 72% of entrepreneurs surveyed believe that it will be "somewhat" or "very important" to their business model within the next three years. This optimism is even more pronounced among growth-oriented entrepreneurs, who are

substantially more confident in AI's transformative potential to drive innovation, productivity, and scale.

However, this impressive progress in start-up creation is hampered by persistent weaknesses in the UK's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Entrepreneurs surveyed reported that entrepreneurial framework conditions were weak in several critical areas. With some entrepreneurs reporting access to finance as a barrier, insufficient government policies in relation to business support, and an often-lacking physical infrastructure.

Mark Hart, Professor of Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Policy at Warwick Business School, who leads the GEM UK team, said:

"The Government's 'Backing your business: our plan for SMEs' was published in July 2025 and seeks to address these weaknesses and ensure the UK becomes the best place to not only start a business but to scale them as well. With its emphasis on addressing late payments, leadership skills, innovation, digital transformation and a sustainable route to net zero, the agenda is to be welcomed. Implementation will be key, and the associated Business Growth Service, along with the local Growth Hubs in England, will play a crucial role.

Perhaps we will get to a point not too distant in the future when the UK can transform its impressive record for launching start-ups into longer-term success stories - enabling small businesses to survive, thrive, and grow."

Darren Pirie, Head of NatWest Accelerator, said:

"At NatWest, we're committed to helping businesses build their unique path to growth. The Natwest Accelerator community brings entrepreneurs, innovators, and the business ecosystem together to fuel ambition and connects digital and in-person support UK wide.

This report does more than illuminate the big trends shaping UK entrepreneurship: it's a much-needed call to action to build an environment where every entrepreneur and growing business has the tools, confidence and support to succeed."

The full GEM UK and GEM Scotland reports, in partnership with NatWest, RBS and Ulster Bank, are available for download [here](#). The GEM Wales and GEM NI reports are available on request.

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NOTES TO JOURNALISTS

To request an interview with Mark Hart, please contact Joanna Hall, Media Relations Officer, Warwick Business school joanna.m.hall@wbs.ac.uk or press@wbs.ac.uk

About the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report

Established in 1999 by Babson College and London Business School, [GEM](#) is now the world's largest survey of entrepreneurship and is the only global research source that collects data on entrepreneurship directly from individual entrepreneurs. The report measured various rates of entrepreneurship in 51 different economies in 2024, which cover around two-thirds of the world's population, as well as more than 77% of global GDP.

About Warwick Business School

[Warwick Business School](#) is the largest department of the University of Warwick. The Times ranks Warwick Business School second in the UK and its Global Online MBA ranked among the world's top three by the *Financial Times*. WBS is triple-accredited by the leading global business education associations and was the first in the UK to attain this accreditation. Offering the full portfolio of business education courses, from undergraduate through to MBAs, DBAs, and Executive short courses, and with a strong Doctoral Programme, WBS is the complete business school. Its Dean, Professor Andy Lockett, has a worldwide reputation in the fields of strategy and entrepreneurship, with leading technology executives voting him one of the world's top 100 professors in the field. At the same time, he was also identified as one of the top 50 Technology Innovation Management scholars in the world.