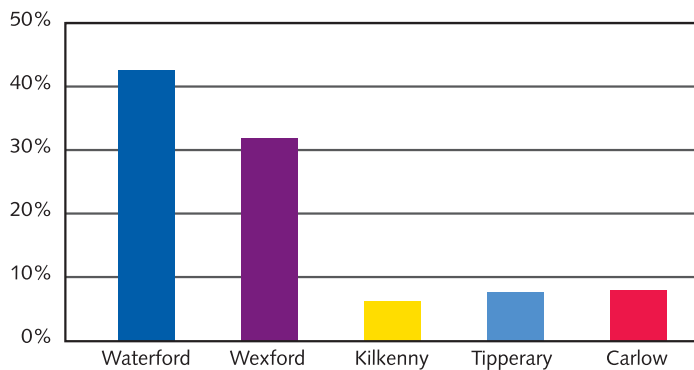


Female Entrepreneurship in Ireland and Wales (FEIW)



Pictured at the FEIW Conference, "Moving Centre Stage-Giving a Voice to Women-Led Business" held on November 8th is Margaret Durand FEIW Project, Dr. Colette Henry of Dundalk Institute of Technology (Speaker), Majella Ryan of Ivowen Ltd (Speaker), Sue Lawton of Prowess UK (Speaker), Professor Kieran Byrne Director WIT, Elaine Aylward of the FEIW Project (Speaker), Margaret Tynan, FEIW Project and Bill O'Gorman Head of Research, Centre for Entrepreneurship WIT".

Women business owners are increasingly recognised as having an important impact on the economy, both as a source of employment and of potential growth (OECD, 2004; GEM, 2004; and Henry and Kennedy, 2002). As a result, the Centre for Entrepreneurship, School of Business, WIT has developed an INTERREG IIIA-funded education and development programme with their partners from the School of Business and Management, University of Wales, Aberystwyth. The programme is the first of its type to be run in South East Ireland. The programme's aims are to facilitate the growth and development of women-owned businesses in South East Ireland and South West Wales. The research for the programme determined the level of women-led businesses in both regions, the type of businesses women set up and the challenges they face. The research also identified the specific training needs of women in business.



Percentage of women-led businesses in the South East region

Part of the research involved a questionnaire sent out to 129 women-led businesses in the South East. From the chart above it can be seen that Waterford and Wexford have the highest levels of female entrepreneurs in the South East region. Overall however, the South East has an above average level of female entrepreneurial activity compared to the rest of Ireland. For example 16% of businesses in the South East are owned by women. This compares favourably with the average for Ireland which is estimated to be anywhere between 7.5% to 15% (Henry and Kennedy, 2002).

Also contrary to previously published research about the ambitions and attitudes of female entrepreneurs towards growth, this current research identified that the majority of women in the South East wish to grow their businesses. Previous research suggested that women intentionally start low growth, low potential businesses. For example, according to researchers such as Buttner and Moore (1997); Cliff (1998); Henry et al (2004), women favour slower growth and actually place a limit on the extent to which they are willing to grow. The FEIW research also established that

there appears to be a lack of awareness of the business supports available to women and that women who had availed of these supports rated them as "fair." This low level of awareness and assessment may be due to the fact that most supports and enterprise training and development programmes are 'menstreamed' as opposed to gender neutral and as such, fail to take account of the needs of women business owners (OECD, 2004). In fact many programmes are viewed as being male dominated and patronising, with little evidence of 'female management styles' in programmes (Fielden et al, 2003). The expectation is that women should conform to male behaviours (Carter, 2000).

Thus the enterprise development programme developed by the FEIW team is unique in that it is based on the needs of women who have the desire to grow their businesses. The programme, with twenty participants representing a broad spectrum of industry sectors, was launched in September 2006 and will run on a pilot basis for 12 months.

Another major recent success for the FEIW team was the well-supported, extremely successful one-day conference, 'Moving Centre Stage – Giving A Voice to Women in Business', held in the Faithlegg House Hotel, 8th November 2006. The conference was opened by Professor Kieran Byrne, Director, WIT, who emphasised the contribution women in business currently make to the economy in the South East, and encouraged the Centre for Entrepreneurship to continue developing programmes to both support women in business today as well as to encourage other women and female graduates to consider entrepreneurship and business as a career.

The presenters at the conference were a good mix of academics from Ireland and the UK such as Dr. Colette Henry, Head of Centre for Enterprise, DKIT, Elaine Aylward, Research Assistant on the FEIW Project, Dr. Sue Lawton, Director, PROWESS UK; and successful women entrepreneurs such as Maree Morrissey, MD, Irish Entrepreneur, and Majella Ryan, MD, Ivowen.

Senator Mary O'Rourke closed the conference, providing the audience with insights into balancing family priorities with a career in politics.

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