



infocus

WOMEN IN INNOVATION

UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS TO INNOVATION

Report of findings – August 2016

Innovate UK commissioned **Ebiquity** to undertake research among female innovators to understand the barriers to innovation and how Innovate UK can better support women in innovation. This report is a summary of the research findings.

Innovate UK is the UK's innovation agency. Innovate UK works with people, companies and partner organisations to find and drive the science and technology innovations that will grow the UK economy – delivering productivity, new jobs and exports. Our aim at Innovate UK is to keep the UK globally competitive in the race for future prosperity. Innovate UK is the trading name of the Technology Strategy Board, which is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and incorporated by Royal Charter in England and Wales with company number RC000818.

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01

FOREWORD FROM INNOVATE UK



Innovate UK
infocus

Innovate UK is the UK's innovation agency

Innovate UK works with people, companies and partner organisations to find and drive the science and technology innovations that will grow the UK economy – delivering productivity, new jobs and exports.

Why are we placing such an importance on diversity and inclusion? Why, at a time of political uncertainty and tight budgets, are we investing our time and money to support women innovators? We know that a good idea for innovation can come from anyone and we miss out by not capturing all the rich talent available in the UK for business innovation. This talent can come from all sectors of society – the lone innovator in their shed, the young graduate, the curious parent.

Let's at least start with women. A recent Women's Business Council¹ report said women represent a powerful yet untapped talent and at Innovate UK we believe that there is a huge opportunity to boost the UK economy by getting more women innovating in businesses.

There is a plethora of data already available to show the talents of women are not being fully harnessed in business. For example:

- women in the UK are half as likely to start a new business, with women less likely to seek external sources of finance²
- men are three times more likely to own a business with employees³
- equalising women's productivity and employment levels with those of men has the potential for increased GDP of 35% in the UK.⁴

Our own data shows just 14% of applicants to our funding competitions are women despite the fact that success rates between men and women are largely equal.

Through this piece of research we have looked at the challenges specific to women in innovation.

One of the recommendations of this report is to simplify the funding application process – at Innovate UK we've heard this message from a variety of people, not just women. We have listened: we have recently streamlined the way we do business, restructuring around four broad sector areas

(Health and Life Sciences, Materials and Manufacturing, Infrastructure Systems, and Emerging and Enabling Technologies) to better meet the needs of our customers, and we are taking steps to simplify the processes involved in making an application for funding through our new grants funding service.

We have already taken some positive action to address some of the other findings in this report by Ebiquty. On 1 June we opened our inaugural infocus Women in Innovation Awards and alongside this we launched an Ambassador programme. We will use our awards to find women with great potential and exciting ideas. We will support them to realise their ambitions and celebrate the work they are doing so that we can inspire others to get involved. Our Ambassadors are highly influential, successful business people. They will promote and actively engage in our work, they will provide mentoring and also help to celebrate the talent of our award finalists.

We are also taking steps to get to know our community better – to find out who the real innovators of tomorrow are in order for us to put in place tangible, impactful programmes to better meet their needs.

Finally, a comment on our own organisation. Like other organisations, Innovate UK and its partner bodies have found recruiting women challenging, particularly those with technology and innovation expertise. Our track record needs improvement too, but – armed with the information in this document – we are working hard to build a diverse and inclusive workforce.

We know there is work to do for us as an employer, as a partner, funder and investor – so let's not wait in taking action to create a broader pool of talent from which we, small businesses and the UK economy will all benefit.



Dr Ruth McKernan CBE
Chief Executive, Innovate UK
August 2016

¹Women's Business Council, 2015 http://womensbusinesscouncil.dcms.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/DfE-WBC-Two-years-on-report_update_AW_CC.pdf

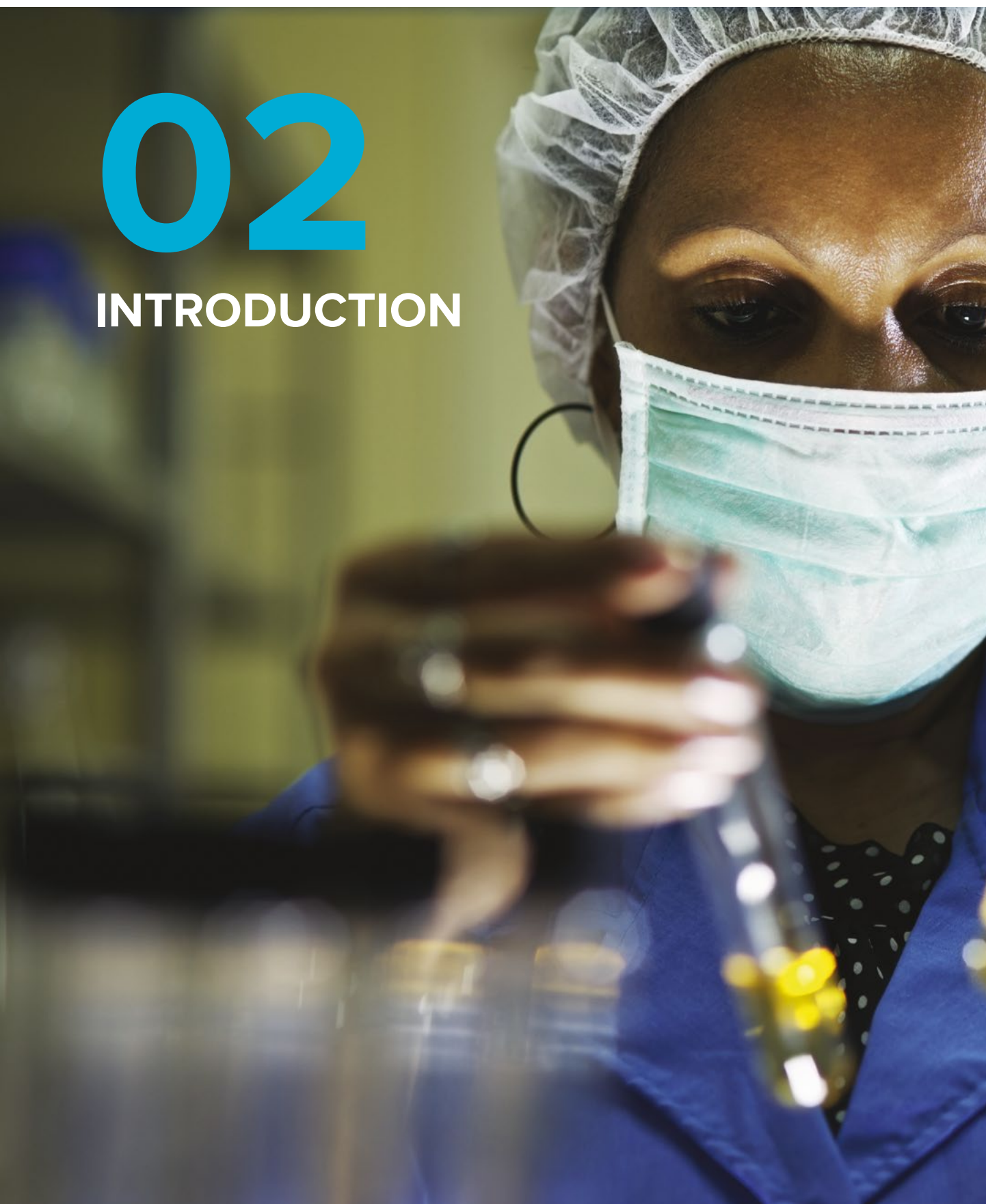
²RBS Group, Women in Enterprise, 2012 <http://www.rbs.com/content/dam/rbs/Documents/Sustainability/Women-in-Enterprise.pdf>

³Women Entrepreneurs in the OECD, 2013 http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/women-entrepreneurs-in-the-oecd_5k43bvtkmb8v-en?crawler=true

⁴Gender equality, economic growth and employment, Åsa Lönström, Department of Economics, Umeå University, 2009 http://www.forschungsnetzwerk.at/downloadpub/2009_12_Gender_Equality_study.pdf

02

INTRODUCTION



Ebiquity was commissioned to undertake research with women in innovation

Gender diversity is a key area of concern for Innovate UK. Innovate UK statistics show that women represent just 14% of the lead applicants to their funding competitions. This is disproportionately low, even when taking into account that women are still under-represented in many of the occupations at the heart of innovation.

With this in mind, we undertook independent research to understand:

- what are the challenges and barriers to innovation
- what are women’s experiences of engaging with Innovate UK
- how Innovate UK can better support women in innovation
- how Innovate UK can encourage more women to apply for funding.

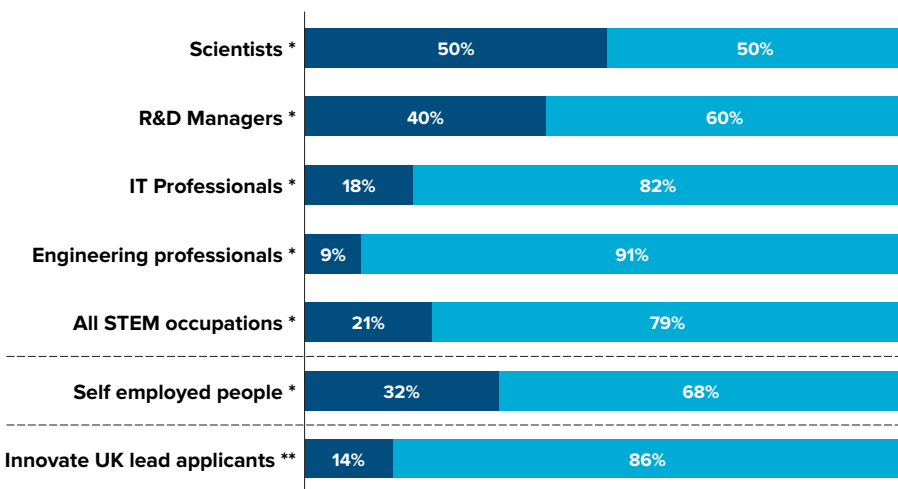
We are pleased to share the findings of the research. Our thanks go to all the innovators who gave up their time to take part in this study.

Ebiquity – August 2016



Data-driven insights

GENDER DIVERSITY BY OCCUPATION



Women represent just **14%** of lead applicants for Innovate UK funding competitions.

* Source: ONS Labour Market Statistics Q2 2015, Employment by gender in STEM occupations job families are as defined by UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

** Source: Innovate UK data



03

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Innovate UK commissioned research to determine why a disproportionately low percentage of women apply for its innovation funding and what might be done to close this gender gap

This report, based on interviews conducted by Ebiqumy with more than 200 female innovators in the UK, delivers fresh insights into how women themselves experience the challenge of innovating successfully and what services and support tools they would like to have more accessible to them.

The study confirms that access to funding is perceived as the single biggest barrier to innovation by female innovators and identifies a number of possible measures to level the playing field in encouraging more women to apply for innovation funding.

Key findings:

- **being a woman has negatively impacted** the careers of a third of interviewees
- **securing funding is by far the single biggest challenge** for women innovators, especially for those in small businesses and start-ups
- **innovation funding organisations play a crucial role** but organisations are too often viewed as inaccessible and male dominated, funding competitions as opaque and irrelevant, and the application process as bureaucratic and too time-consuming
- **positive discrimination is controversial** as a means to encourage and support more women innovators
- **there is demand for more substantial, focused support services** among female innovators, including access to mentors, sharing of success stories, and one-to-one contact and help with funding applications and networking
- **Innovate UK has an important role to play** in providing such services and in addressing the bigger picture of the glass ceiling and gender diversity issues.

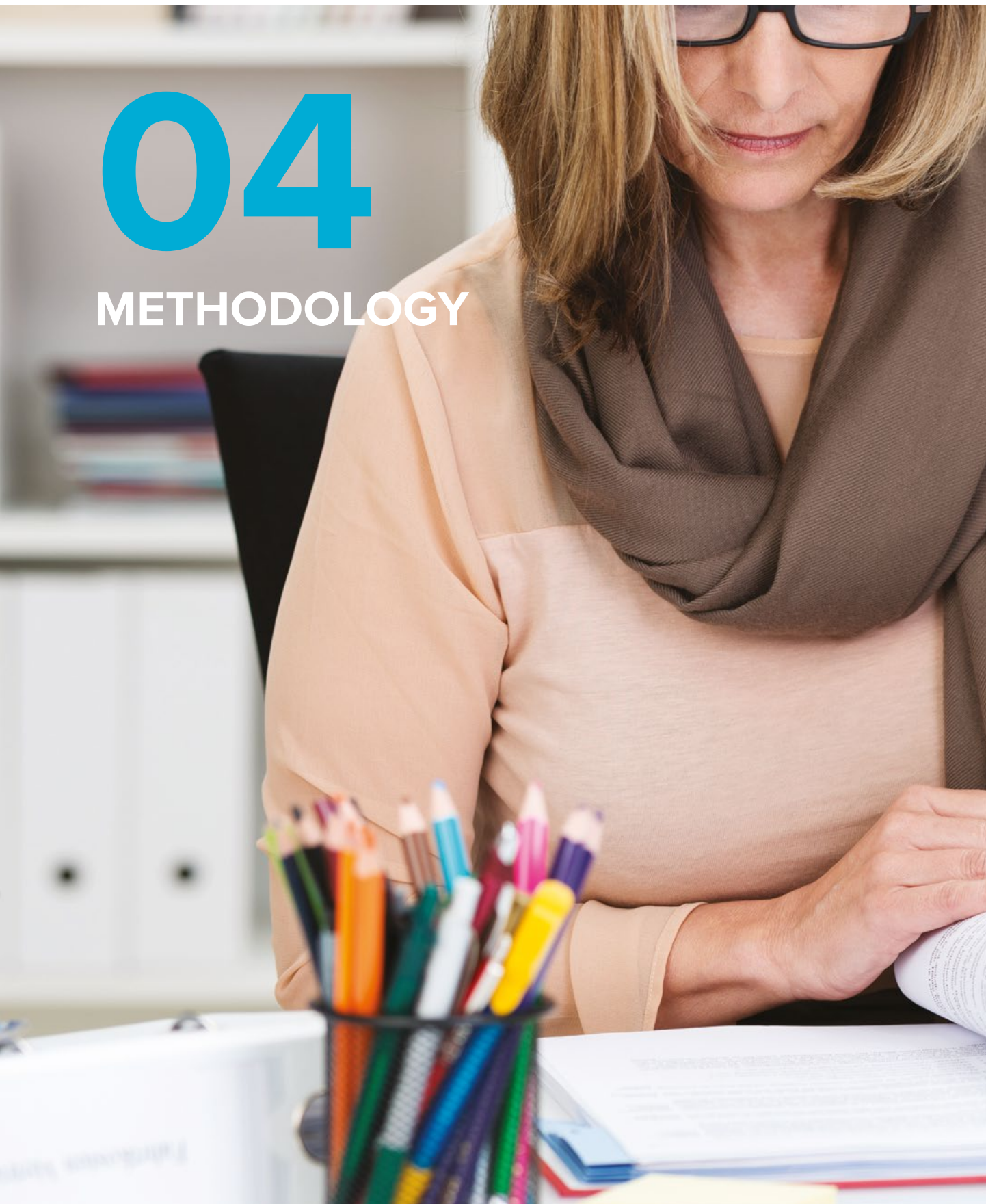
Recommendations for Innovate UK based on the findings of this research:

- **raise awareness of Innovate UK and what it does** by reaching out to women's networking and business groups and collaborating with industry bodies and partner organisations
- **engage in positive action** not positive discrimination to encourage women to seek innovation funding
- **promote success stories**, case studies and role models featuring female innovators
- **address perceptions that Innovate UK is male dominated** by promoting the organisation's gender diversity policy and increasing the visibility of its female leaders and innovation experts
- **contribute to wider initiatives** – to encourage more women to enter Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) occupations and careers in innovation
- **offer one-to-one mentoring** at all stages of the innovation process as well as in helping innovators navigate the funding landscape
- **simplify the funding application process** – making the application process less daunting and easier for micro and small businesses to access without having to employ external expertise will be beneficial for all, irrespective of gender.

The findings and recommendations support the positive actions that Innovate UK is taking to support women in innovation (see foreword from Innovate UK).

04

METHODOLOGY



Independent research agency, Ebiquity, conducted qualitative and quantitative research with a total of 221 female innovators between March and May 2016

The qualitative stage consisted of 20 in-depth telephone interviews to uncover perceived challenges and barriers to accessing innovation funding and support. Ebiquity then quantified the findings in the subsequent stage of research – a quantitative survey of 201 female innovators conducted online and by telephone. All research was carried out by Ebiquity in accordance with the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society.

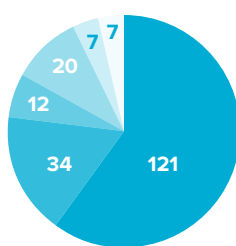
We defined the research audience as women working in businesses and not-for-profit / public sector / academic organisations where innovation is important to the organisation and where the individual is personally involved in innovation. For reference, Innovate UK defines innovation as the development and commercialisation of new ideas, products or technologies to help grow the economy.

The research sample represents a cross-section of UK female innovators from different industry sectors and types of organisation.

It was important that the sample reflected views of women who had and had not engaged with Innovate UK in the past. Interviewees were drawn from databases of female innovators provided by Innovate UK and segmented by their level of engagement with Innovate UK:

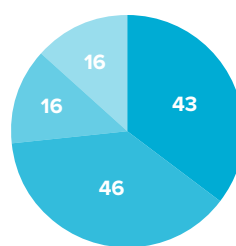
- **‘Unaware’** – those that had no previous contact at all with Innovate UK (n=40 interviewees)
- **‘Aware’** – those that have been sent communications by Innovate UK (n=30 interviewees)
- **‘Engaged’** – those that have engaged with Innovate UK such as by signing up to a newsletter, attending an event, or applying for funding (n=84 interviewees)
- **‘Funded’** – those that were known by Innovate UK to have received Innovate UK funding as lead applicant (‘funded’ n=38)
- Note: one survey respondent was not classified in the above categories.

QUANTITATIVE SURVEY: SAMPLE PROFILE



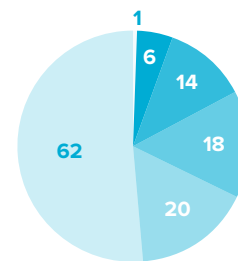
- Business
- Consultancy
- Academia
- Non-profit
- Public sector
- Other

ORGANISATION TYPE
n=201



- Micro (1–9 employees)
- Small (10–49 employees)
- Medium (50–249 employees)
- Large (250+ employees)

SIZE OF BUSINESS
n=121



- Less than a year
- 1–2 years
- 3–5 years
- 6–10 years
- Over 10 years
- Don't know

No. YEARS BUSINESS ESTABLISHED
n=121

05

MAIN FINDINGS



05.1 IMPACT OF GENDER ON CAREER IN INNOVATION

Almost a third of the female innovators we surveyed said that being a woman has negatively impacted their career in innovation

The responses from the women innovators we interviewed show that they are assertive and pragmatic and not inclined to indulge in self-pity. Over half said that being a woman has had a positive impact or made no difference to their career in innovation.

“I’m not in fear or need extra support because I’m a woman. I’m just a business person and it doesn’t matter if I’m female or not.” FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“All these funding organisations are mostly men anyway and I don’t look at the sex of the person when I’m doing business. They’re just all people.” FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

Nevertheless almost a third considered that being a woman has negatively impacted on their career.

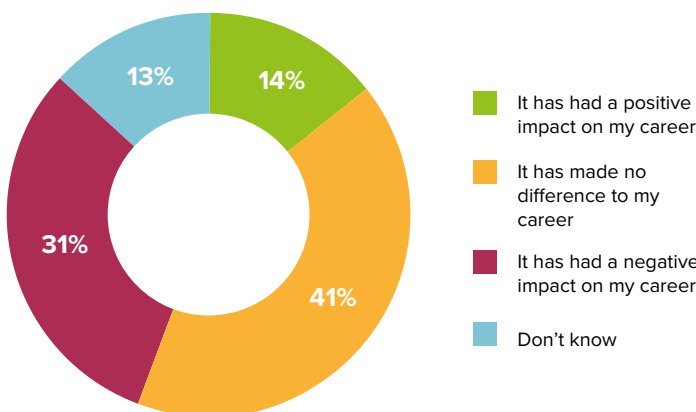
“At the moment the system is heavily weighted against women and we are predominantly pitching to men; there is a lack of diversity within the finance sector.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“Everyone should get their job based on their skill, not their gender but it’s about how worn-down women get when they are fighting a battle all the time to have an equal voice.” FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“As a FEMALE sole trader, I still feel I’m regarded as ‘not sure what I’m doing’.” FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

IMPACT OF BEING A WOMAN ON CAREER IN INNOVATION



31% of the female innovators interviewed said that being a woman has had a negative impact on their career in innovation.

41% said it had made no difference.

Q. All in all, would you say that being a woman has had a positive or negative impact on your career in innovation, or has it made no difference? SINGLE RESPONSE QUESTION Base: All female innovators (n=201). Source: Ebiquty

05.2 PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO INNOVATION

THE BARRIERS TODAY

Securing funding is the most challenging stage of the innovation process for female innovators

Securing funding – whether internally or from banks, investors or funding bodies – is a challenge for any business but in our research was most often identified by women innovators as the hardest part of the process of bringing new ideas to market.

Women in small / micro businesses and start-ups find funding especially challenging.

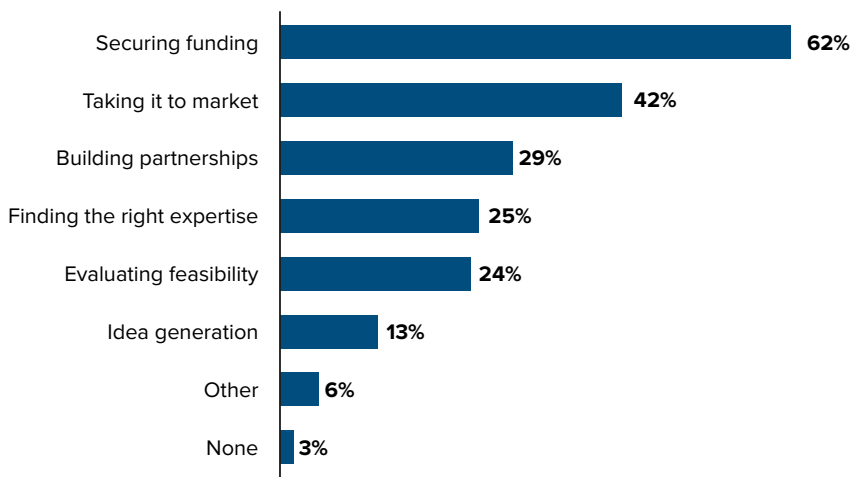
“Raising finance to get from proof of concept to market.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“Having a great idea but no money to take it to market.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION

MOST CHALLENGING STAGES OF THE INNOVATION PROCESS



We asked interviewees to select which stage or stages of the innovation cycle they found most challenging. ‘Securing funding’ was identified by 62% of interviewees, followed by ‘taking it to market’ (42%).

Q. What stage(s) in the innovation process, if any, do you find most challenging?
MULTIPLE RESPONSE QUESTION
Base: All female innovators (n=201)
Source: Ebiquity

Convincing others, finding partners and being taken seriously were among the challenges identified by women innovators

The hurdles to overcome in bringing an innovation successfully to market are multiple and many of those identified by female innovators will resonate with any new start-up or small business, irrespective of gender. Besides the major challenge of getting funding, women innovators identified:

“Finding time to actually step away from day-to-day work to develop the inkling of a great idea.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION

“Convincing others to step outside their comfort zone.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, SMALL BUSINESS

“Finding skilled employees (especially scientists and engineers) who can develop the innovative ideas.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“Finding partners with the same big vision.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, SMALL BUSINESS

“Getting big manufacturers to take us seriously.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, SMALL BUSINESS

Are these challenges greater for women in innovation? Some women robustly dismissed the idea, but others speculated this could be the case. Sheryl Sandberg’s book *Lean In*⁵ was cited more than once.

“[Women may] lack the confidence to put themselves forward: the head of Facebook in her book, Lean In, points out that men are quite used to stepping up while women may not feel they have right to be there.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, SMALL BUSINESS

Perhaps more tellingly, fewer than half of women innovators said they had overcome their biggest innovation challenges. Moreover, those that had overcome them mostly did so themselves, without external help. Around three in ten credited external support, including partners, advisors and funding mechanisms.

SINGLE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACED IN THE INNOVATION PROCESS

In an open question we asked participants to describe their single biggest challenge to innovation. ‘Funding’, ‘convincing others’, ‘finding partners’ and ‘time’ were the challenges most often mentioned.



Q. Can you tell us a little about the single biggest challenge you have faced in the innovation process? OPEN-ENDED QUESTION Size of the word denotes the number of mentions. Base: Female innovators who have experienced challenges in the innovation process (n=195). Source: Ebiquity

⁵Lean In, Sheryl Sandberg, Ten Speed Press, 2015

BARRIERS TO FUTURE SUCCESS

Funding also seen as key to success in the future

Looking ahead, the women innovators surveyed most often identified funding as the number one factor that will likely determine their future success in innovation. Consistent funding, funding for training, for manpower and to ensure job security, for cash flow, for bringing products to market, and funding to buy time to develop new ideas – innovators know all too well the importance of sustainable funding for their business success.

Other critical factors mentioned included:

- **time** – finding the time to focus on innovation in addition to the everyday demands of running the business
- **political uncertainty** – including the perceived risks around the EU referendum and subsequent changes to organisations such as Innovate UK (note the research was conducted prior to the EU referendum in June 2016)
- **competition** – and the need to scale up rapidly to stay ahead.

Factors mentioned by a smaller proportion of participants included:

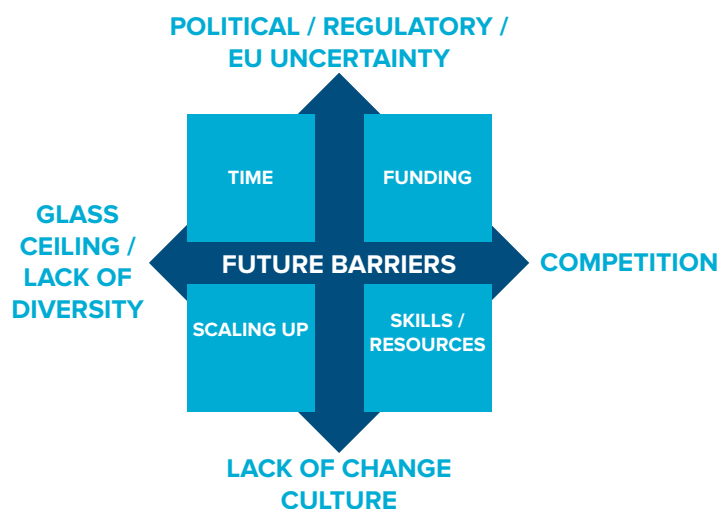
- **lack of change culture** – rigidity and slow pace of change in large organisations and procurement processes
- **glass ceiling** – the difficulty of being taken seriously in a male-dominated field.

“Lack of support in such male-dominated field, voice is more difficult to be heard.” FEMALE INNOVATOR, LARGE BUSINESS

“Glass ceiling, being recognised and taken seriously.” FEMALE INNOVATOR, SMALL BUSINESS

“Lack of diversity in the IT industry and in senior management.” FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

CHALLENGE / BARRIERS TO FUTURE PLANS FOR INNOVATION



An open question on perceptions of future challenges and barriers to innovation identified four main internal barriers (time, funding, skills / resources and ability to scale up).

External challenges included political uncertainty, competition, lack of change culture and gender diversity.

Q. What do you consider to be the main challenges / barriers to your future plans for innovation, if any? OPEN-ENDED QUESTION. Base: All female innovators (n=201). Source: Ebiquity

05.3 INNOVATION FUNDING AND SUPPORT PERCEPTIONS OF FUNDING ORGANISATIONS

Women recognise that funding organisations can play a crucial role

In securing funding for innovation and, indeed, bringing an innovation to market, funding organisations can play a crucial role. Women innovators in our survey fully recognised this: nearly three-quarters of those interviewed consider funding / support organisations to be important to their success. Eighty-seven percent have accessed a funding or support organisation at least once in their careers.

Why and how so? Innovation funding organisations were perceived by our survey participants to help in the following ways:

- funding cover for longer development times and higher risk
- access to a broader network
- new ways of thinking and being more efficient
- targeted support and advice.

“They do encourage innovation, they make us think of new ways we can make ourselves better, more efficient...we wouldn’t have been able to do it without them.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“We look for funding when we feel there is a longer development time and the risk is higher.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESS

“Because they give you a broader network, they’re actually quite a good idea.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

However, all too often, funding organisations were perceived critically, for various reasons:

- criteria are often restricting
- not relevant to my business
- bureaucratic and time-consuming
- not enough business experience
- male dominated.

“There doesn’t seem to be a lot there for small businesses.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“Every time we’ve tried for funding they didn’t like us as we didn’t have a product, we were just a service and that’s the thing that has always stopped us.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“The bureaucracy involved to get a tiny amount of money is just not worth it.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, SMALL BUSINESS

“I don’t want to waste my time on something I don’t have a chance of winning.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“If you don’t know the ‘buzz words’ and language you don’t have a chance.”

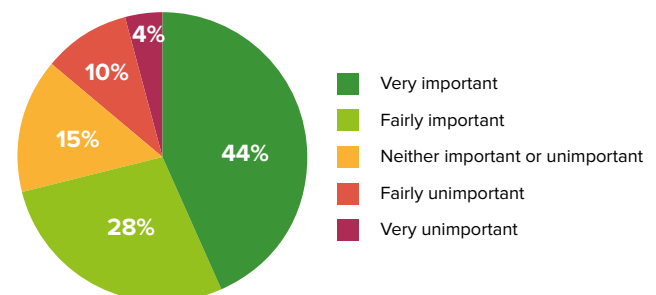
FEMALE INNOVATOR, SMALL BUSINESS

“From my experience of the funding agencies I’ve approached it’s very male dominated.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

72% of the women innovators surveyed agreed that funding and support organisations are important in helping them succeed in their role, compared to 14% who felt that they were unimportant.

IMPORTANCE OF FUNDING / SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS TO SUCCESS IN ROLE



Q. In general, how important or unimportant are these organisations in helping you succeed in your role? SINGLE RESPONSE QUESTION. Base: All female innovators who have heard of at least one funding / support organisation (n=199). Source: Ebiqurity

The plethora of funding organisations adds to perceptions of complexity

The survey participants had found that even just finding out about funding opportunities is hard, given the multitude of funding organisations out there and complex criteria and requirements.

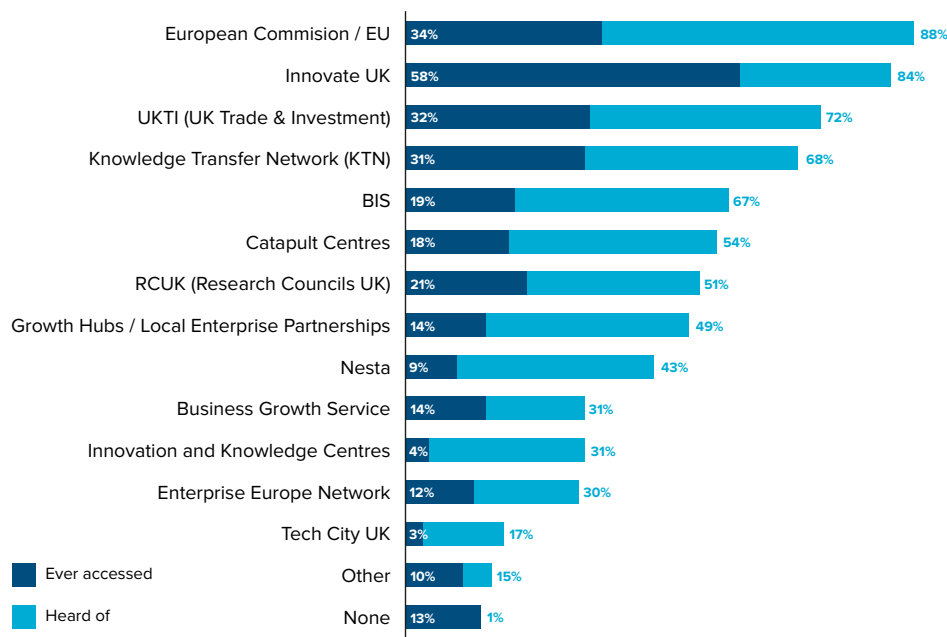
“How are we supposed to find out about these things?”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“[Single biggest challenge is] understanding the plethora of funding sources available.” FEMALE INNOVATOR, CONSULTANCY

Interviewees could name on average seven different organisations offering innovation funding or support and have accessed around three in their careers.

AWARENESS AND USAGE OF ORGANISATIONS OFFERING INNOVATION FUNDING / SUPPORT



99% of our survey participants had heard of at least one innovation funding or support organisation.

Interviewees had heard of an average of **seven** organisations.

87% had ever accessed a funding or support organisation.

On average **three** organisations had been accessed.

Q. Which of the following organisations, initiatives and networks that may offer businesses innovation funding and support have you heard of before today? Q. And which have you ever accessed or engaged with for innovation funding or support? MULTIPLE RESPONSE QUESTION Base: All female innovators (n=201). Source: Ebiquity

PERCEPTIONS OF INNOVATE UK

Perceptions of Innovate UK are broadly positive but indicate room for improvement

Female innovators who were aware of Innovate UK or one of its initiatives were broadly favourable in their assessment of the organisation.

In the survey, Innovate UK scored well for being relevant, helpful, approachable, forward-thinking and in touch.

“That it exists as an organization is critical. I like the breadth of programmes that it runs... I found the bureaucracy involved in the small pilot that we did frustrating. But I do have the sense they have taken feedback on board.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“They were very helpful and pleasant...almost too forward thinking and I felt they were almost being over ambitious with what they were doing.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“My perceptions are only positive. They are very approachable, very understanding if we have any issues on our projects. They’re always amenable to change and they’re always there to support you.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, SMALL BUSINESS

However, the feedback also reflected that Innovate UK is male dominated and overly bureaucratic. This is consistent with perceptions of innovation funding mechanisms as a whole.

“I found Innovate UK’s form filling, portals and bureaucracy a demoralising brake on innovation.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESS

“Innovate UK should look at their processes: I may be wrong but I would guess that the vast majority of their assessors are men and all of their application processors are male.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

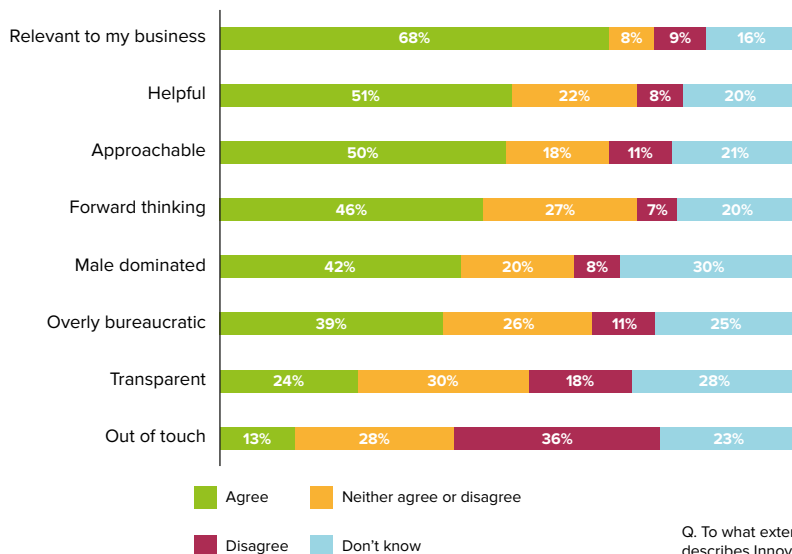
“My personal experience of Innovate UK has not revealed a gender bias.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“It absolutely feels like a ‘boys club’”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, SMALL BUSINESS

PERCEPTIONS OF INNOVATE UK



We asked interviewees who had heard of Innovate UK to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about the organisation.

Top scoring attributes were that Innovate UK is relevant (68% agreed), helpful (51% agreed) and approachable (50% agreed).

But 42% agreed that the organisation is male dominated and 39% that it is overly bureaucratic.

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree that each of the following statements describes Innovate UK (or one of our initiatives)? SINGLE RESPONSE PER STATEMENT. Base: Female innovators aware of Innovate UK or an Innovate UK initiative (n=184). Source: Ebiquity

BARRIERS TO ENGAGING WITH INNOVATE UK

Women innovators do not know enough about Innovate UK and those that do are put off by the laborious application process

Why do so few women innovators enter Innovate UK funding competitions?

Our survey found that the biggest barrier is quite simply lack of awareness of what Innovate UK does. Over forty percent of all the female innovators interviewed agreed that they do not know enough about Innovate UK or its funding opportunities.

“Would love to apply for money but just never heard of Innovate UK or what it can offer.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, OTHER ORGANISATION

“Heard of Innovate UK but know nothing about the agency or what they can help with.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, CONSULTANCY

Another reason that emerged in the research is that the application process is too laborious, bureaucratic and daunting and the chances of success are perceived to be too low. This was especially the case among women in small and micro businesses, who also had less expertise in writing

applications in-house. Twenty-four percent of all interviewees agreed that they lack the expertise to write the application in-house, rising to thirty-one percent of those in small / micro businesses.

“The length of time I need to dedicate to the process is the main thing that puts me off.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, LARGE BUSINESS

“Clarity at the outset is needed: to be told what you can achieve and how much time it is likely to take to do it.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, SMALL BUSINESS

Some participants thought Innovate UK does not offer any funding relevant to what they do or their projects are not eligible.

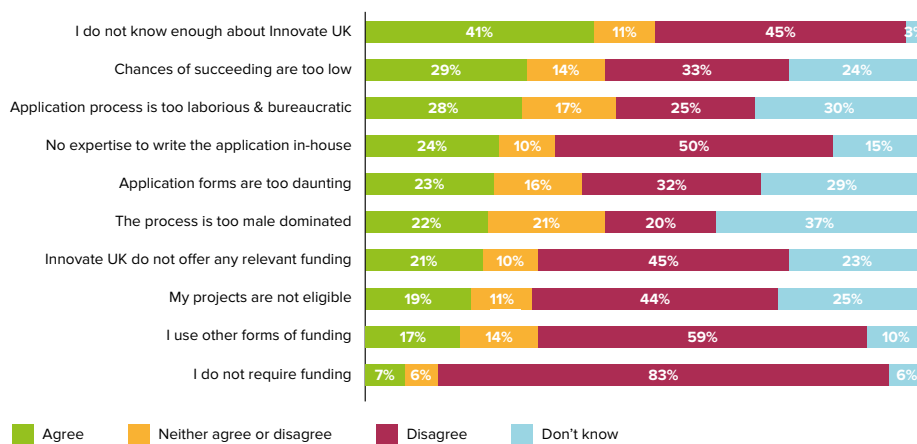
“The opportunity categories seem too narrow and not applicable to my idea.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“I don’t think Innovate funds the kind of work I do.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION

BARRIERS TO APPLYING FOR INNOVATE UK FUNDING



41% of our interviewees agreed that they do not know enough about Innovate UK or its funding opportunities.

Q. As the Government’s innovation agency, Innovate UK provides funding opportunities to help businesses bring new ideas, products and technologies to market. We would like to understand why people might not apply for Innovate UK funding. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. SINGLE RESPONSE PER STATEMENT Base: All female innovators (n=201). Source: Ebiqity

05.4 SUPPORT TOOLS AND SERVICES

SUPPORT FOR INNOVATORS

Majority in our survey agree that mentoring, advice and new skills could help overcome barriers to innovation

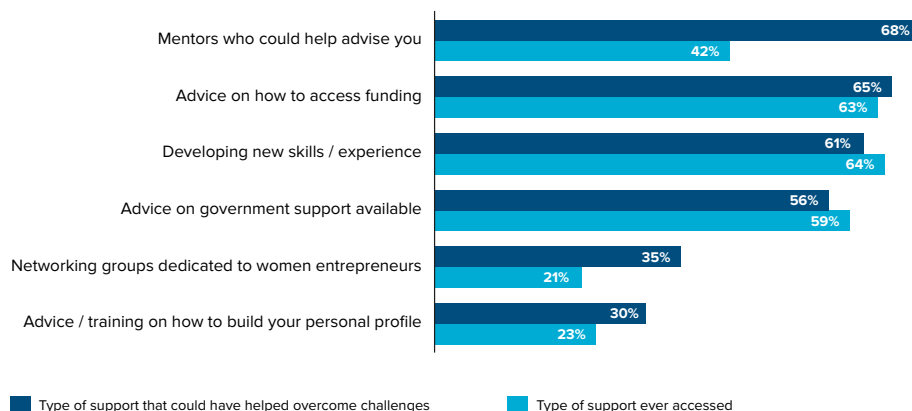
There are a number of different ways that are often put forward to help female innovators succeed in progressing their business ideas.

More than two-thirds of women innovators in the survey felt that having a mentor could have made the difference in overcoming the challenges they faced along the way to successful innovation. Considerably fewer than half of interviewees have had access to a mentor.

Advice on how to access funding is another top priority need. Even though the majority of women interviewed have been able to get advice on how to access funding and government support and have also received support developing new skills, they feel they could use more.

Other types of support were seen as valuable but less make or break. Many respondents liked the idea of women-only networking groups – “An online community of female innovators would be great...” – a third felt they could have made a difference in overcoming major challenges.

TYPE OF SUPPORT THAT COULD HAVE HELPED OVERCOME CHALLENGES



Access to mentors was identified by 69% of our research participants as a support tool that could help them overcome innovation challenges.

Q. Could any of the following types of support have helped you overcome these challenges? MULTIPLE RESPONSE QUESTION
 Q. Have you ever accessed any of the following types of support? MULTIPLE RESPONSE QUESTION
 Base: Female innovators who have experienced challenges during the innovation process (n=195). Source: Ebiquty

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATE UK

The most common suggestions were that Innovate UK needs to improve its awareness, accessibility and processes for everyone, irrespective of gender

We asked our survey participants for their suggestions on how Innovate UK could better engage with female innovators and what Innovate UK could do to encourage more women to submit funding applications. We also gauged interest in a number of Innovate UK planned or potential support tools and services.

Raise awareness and accessibility

The most common suggestion was that Innovate UK should raise its profile and make it easier for innovators to understand what services it has available. This was supported by the earlier finding that four in ten interviewees said that they didn't know enough about Innovate UK.

“Innovate UK really need to raise their profile generally and advertise themselves and their services a lot more – to everyone.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, SMALL BUSINESS

“I don't think I've ever been approached by Innovate...let me know what they do and how they can help me.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“I would like to see a more accessible website and newsletter.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION

Simplify application processes

Survey participants also felt that Innovate UK could simplify the application process, particularly for micro businesses, and make the whole process less daunting.

“Simplify process of application and monitoring for micro size small business.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“Plainer English application forms. Simpler stage one submission followed by a more in-depth stage two.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“I'm not convinced a female targeted drive would be beneficial. Just make the whole process less arduous for everyone!”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION

Funding opportunities for women

Overall, four in ten interviewees were in favour of women-only funding competitions. Some respondents believed strongly that Innovate UK should not engage in what they considered positive discrimination in funding competitions but rather offer support services tailored to women innovators. Others felt some positive action could work.

“Please, no positive discrimination but maybe more training, information, and support for female applicants.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, ACADEMIC

“Some European funding bodies offer more ‘points’ when assessing applications if there is a gender balance within the project team.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, CONSULTANCY

“Increasing the numbers of competitions in sectors where women are more likely to submit applications.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESS

Mitigate unconscious bias

A small number of women warned about the risk of unconscious bias and advocated taking steps to minimise it.

“You are dealing with a societal bias which is unlikely to go away unless you anonymise applications.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, LARGE BUSINESS

“Make diversity in all processes visible and where it is not representative, put in place measures to actively monitor for and mitigate the risk of unconscious bias.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

INNOVATE UK SUPPORT TOOLS AND SERVICES

Women would like to see Innovate UK provide access to industry mentors

Access to industry mentors

Given the widespread interest in mentoring, it is no surprise that access to industry mentors is top of the list of support services women would like to see Innovate UK provide. Nearly seven in ten women thought this would be beneficial, and they also liked the idea of having access to female mentors within Innovate UK.

“Female-based information events would be good with senior female mentors to help out with applications.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

Advice from a dedicated point of contact

Indeed, targeted and, ideally, one-to-one, support and a dedicated point of contact was requested by over half of our interviewees. They were clear that any support offering would have to be highly focused and relevant to engage time-short innovators.

“I think the most important thing is to have a dedicated person at Innovate UK as your personal point of contact.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, SMALL BUSINESS

“More serious support provided on a one-to-one basis. Serious help in building the partners and proper advice with the application.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, ACADEMIC

Case studies and success stories

More than half of the female innovators interviewed also agreed they would like to see more case studies and success stories of women in innovation.

“Showcase the success of women in innovation to prove that both men and women can be successful innovators.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

“Networking and role models, rather than special treatment.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESS

Women-only networking events

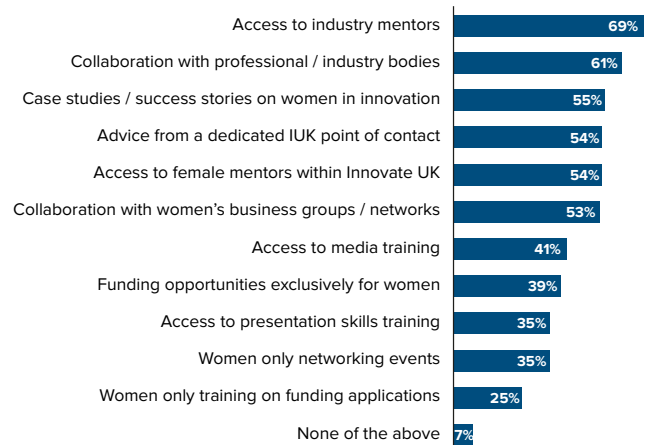
While women-only networking events did not emerge as a high priority, several acknowledged that they can be valuable and suggested that Innovate UK could both organise such events and reach out to existing women’s networks.

“I have been to an event where there were only women and it’s amazing how it brings you together when you’re being encouraged. Have some kind of focus or event that’s more female led.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, MICRO BUSINESS

69% of interviewees would like Innovate UK to provide access to industry mentors to support women in innovation.

INTEREST IN SUGGESTED INNOVATIVE UK INITIATIVES



Q. Here are some suggested ways in which Innovate UK could tell female innovators about what we do and the services we could offer to help women succeed in progressing their business ideas. Which of the following, if any, would you find particularly useful? MULTIPLE RESPONSE QUESTION Base: All female innovators (n=201). Source: Ebiqity

CLOSING THE GENDER GAP – THE BIGGER PICTURE

Interviewees believe that Innovate UK has a role to play in addressing the bigger picture in closing the gender gap

Interviewees suggested that Innovate UK has a role to play in addressing the bigger picture to help women succeed in business by tackling the glass ceiling and gender diversity issues.

“Work with academia and industry on diversity policies and working patterns.” FEMALE INNOVATOR, NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION

Innovate UK collaboration with professional and industry bodies was endorsed by six in ten survey participants. They saw this as a way that Innovate UK could raise its profile and lend its support to industry initiatives to encourage more women in STEM occupations.

The need to reach young female innovators in school, university and early in their careers was reinforced by the research findings. Four in ten of our survey participants said they first aspired to work in innovation while at school or university.

“Support STEM activities at schools, which will lead to more women engineers.” FEMALE INNOVATOR, LARGE BUSINESS

“Attendance at university careers fairs and supporting young entrepreneurs who are not already working within established male dominated organisations may help...”

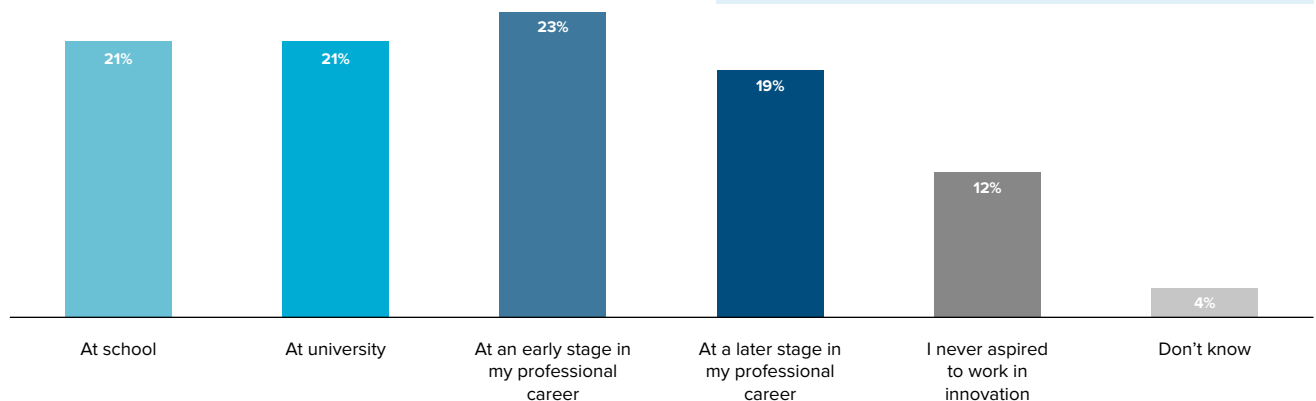
FEMALE INNOVATOR, ACADEMIC

“More support to young female engineers and help them to start their career, settle in such a male dominated area and progress further with the right skills on-hand.”

FEMALE INNOVATOR, LARGE BUSINESS

“I would be happy to see a women in space activity in which Innovate UK brings women together to review what needs to happen to improve female STEM expertise in the space sector.” FEMALE INNOVATOR, LARGE BUSINESS

POINT AT WHICH FIRST ASPIRED TO WORK IN INNOVATION



42% of interviewees first aspired to work in innovation while at school or university. For a further **42%** it was during their professional career.

Q. At what point in your education or career did you first aspire to work in innovation? SINGLE RESPONSE QUESTION. Base: All female innovators (n=201). Source: Ebiquty

06

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS RESEARCH



Ebiquity's recommendations based on the evidence seen in this research support the action Innovate UK is taking

Raise awareness of Innovate UK and what it does

Innovate UK needs to raise its profile among female innovators and should consider reaching out to women's networking and business groups and collaborating with industry bodies and other partner organisations as part of its communications activities.

Innovate UK has already simplified its services to make it easier for innovators to understand what funding opportunities are relevant to them. These improvements should be communicated.

Simplify the funding application process

The application process is perceived as laborious and overly bureaucratic which is deterring some women from applying for funding. Making the application process less daunting and easier for micro and small businesses to access without having to employ external expertise will be beneficial for all, irrespective of gender.

Offer one-to-one mentoring

Access to industry mentors would be welcomed by female innovators. Mentoring is required at all stages of the innovation process as well as in helping innovators navigate the funding landscape.

Engage in positive action

Innovate UK should engage in positive action through competitions and awards to encourage women to seek funding. Innovate UK should clearly communicate its

reasons for positive action and why its actions should not be perceived as positive discrimination, which many interviewees were strongly opposed to.

Promote success stories

Innovate UK should use every opportunity to promote success stories, case studies and role models featuring female innovators.

Address perceptions that Innovate UK is male dominated

Innovate UK may wish to address perceptions that it is male dominated by promoting its gender diversity policy and looking at ways of increasing the visibility of its female leaders and innovation experts.

Contribute to wider initiatives

Finally, there is clearly a role for Innovate UK to play in wider Government and industry initiatives to encourage more women to enter STEM occupations and careers in innovation.

Our findings and recommendations support the actions that Innovate UK is taking to help close the gender diversity gap by encouraging more women to apply for innovation funding. See foreword for a summary of the actions that Innovate UK is implementing.

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