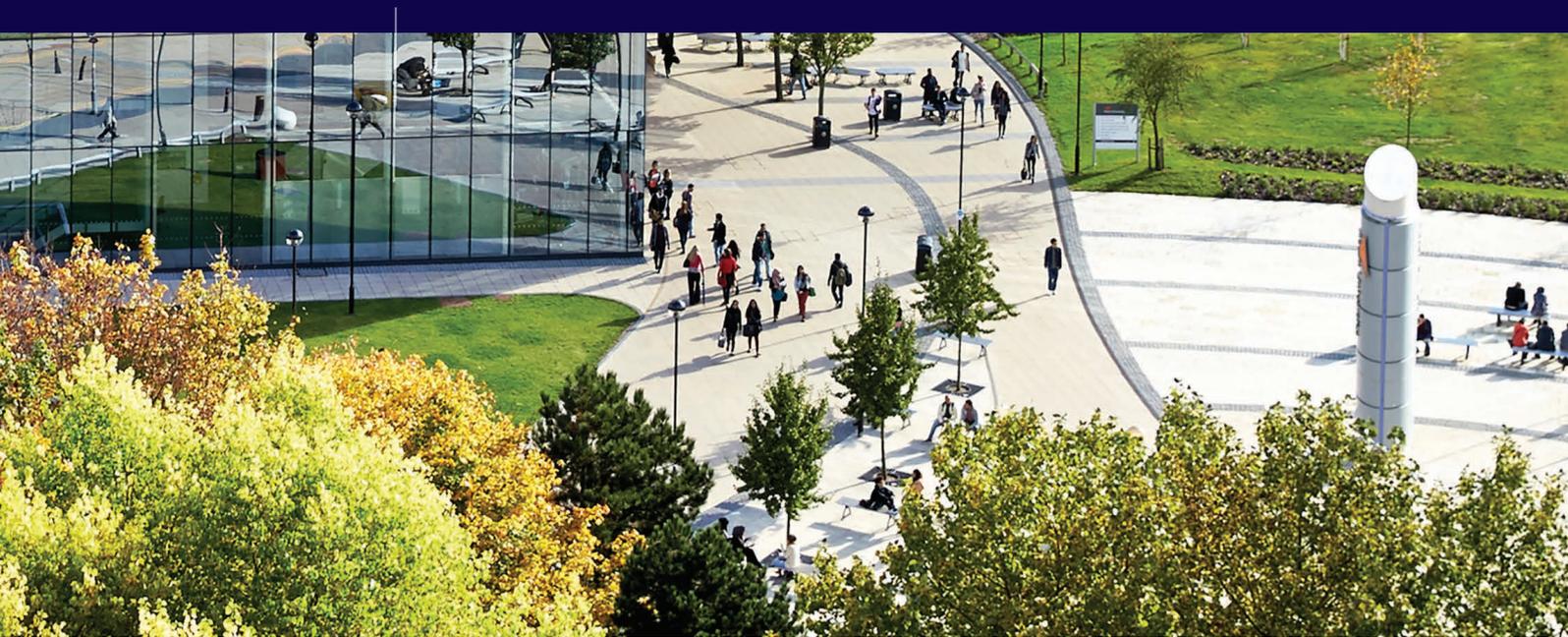


SHARING INFORMATION ON PROGRESS

Report 2017 - 2019



PRME

This is our **Sharing Information on Progress (SIP)** Report on the Implementation of the **Principles for Responsible Management Education**



Contents

01. Message from Helen Higson, Deputy Vice Chancellor and Provost
02. Aston University
03. Aston Business School
04. Business in Birmingham
05. PRME Principles and SDGs
06. Principles 1, 2 & 3 – Purpose, Values and Method
08. Principle 4 - Research
10. Principle 5 - Partnership
12. Principle 6 - Dialogue
14. Appendix

A message from Helen Higson

Business creates wealth, provides employment, produces goods and services and in doing so it affects our economic, social, political, and emotional lives as well as our natural environment. It is these aspects of business activity, which raise the questions about business responsibility and irresponsibility. At Aston, we engage in research that enables business organisations to unify social responsibility and the standards of professional performance and address effectively social and environmental issues.

We are located in a regenerating industrial heartland, where 70% of students are the first in their families to receive a University degree. We are committed to the development and regeneration of the West Midlands, local organisations and communities.

Within Aston Business School, our mission is to enhance enterprise and enterprises. We work with organisations of all shapes and sizes and are recognised for leading some of the country's most exciting schemes to help businesses grow. We develop individuals to perform better within enterprises and the professions, and to create successful new ventures. It is our particular aim to ensure that the opportunities we create are made available to all members of our society.

We are a member of the UN-led initiative PRME (Principles for Responsible Management Education) and our teaching and research strategies are informed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The University endorses the World Commission on Environment and Development's definition of Sustainable Development: *Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.* In doing so, we strive to reconcile the tensions which exist between the three pillars of sustainability – economic prosperity; environmental quality; social equity – both now and for the generations who will engage with the University in the future.

As one of the original founding members of PRME, Aston University continues to commit to developing the capabilities of students in line with the values of the United Nations Global Compact and PRME as illustrated throughout the report.

Professor Helen Higson

Deputy Vice Chancellor and Provost, Aston University



Aston University

Changing the world through employable graduates

Our courses are designed around the needs of industry. We create work-ready graduates who make an impact.

Welcoming and supportive culture

We make our students feel welcome on campus, and we support our students to thrive and succeed in their studies. Aston students are not just a number – the support that we give is personalised.

Diverse international community

Aston is a long-established destination for international students. We are a diverse and friendly place and home to more than 3000 international students from across the world and many different backgrounds. This creates a vibrant campus and a great atmosphere.

Excellent teachers

Our academic staff are excellent teachers, active researchers and often have extensive industry experience. They are renowned for writing the key textbooks that are used across the world for their particular discipline. Many are Fellows of the national Higher Education Academy.

Transforming students through practical experience

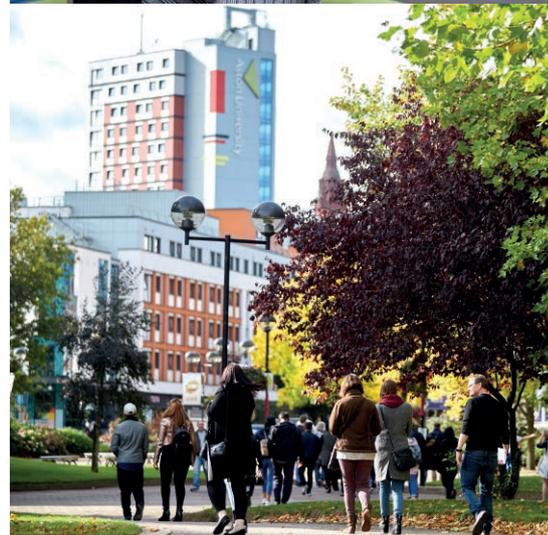
Our approach to education is practical, hands-on, and inspired by industry. Undergraduate students can apply for a one-year professional work placement, and along with Postgraduate students, have access to live business projects set by industry representatives. Addressing real life problems is part of the transformational learning experience at Aston.

Experiencing enterprise and innovation first hand

We are home to the Aston Centre for Growth and the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses programme, supporting companies to grow and thrive. Students can learn how to start their own business, join a family business, or stretch their creative skills by engaging in project work through our involvement in the Prince's Trust.

Vibrant campus community

Our students get the best of both worlds: a green, well-equipped, friendly campus in the centre of a major city.



Aston Business School



Aston Business School is among Europe's largest business schools, with approximately 3,000 students. It has been conducting pioneering research into modern business and management issues for over 60 years, making it one of the longest established, research-based business schools in the UK. Aston Business School is one of just 1% of business schools in the world to hold AACSB, EQUIS and AMBA accreditations - three of the most recognised and prestigious accreditation bodies in the world.

- ▶ Globally recognised, valued by employers, and holding triple accreditation which is shared by only 1% of business schools in the world.
- ▶ Part of an elite group of Business Schools worldwide with triple accreditation from AMBA, AACSB and EQUIS.
- ▶ Awarded the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Gold award for teaching quality - the highest possible accolade.
- ▶ The Aston MBA is one of the world's top MBAs (Tier 1) in CEO Magazine Global MBA Ranking 2020.
- ▶ Ranked in the top 100 for Business and Management (QS World University Rankings 2020).



Business in Birmingham

Aston Business School is located in the centre of one of the UK's most entrepreneurial cities, Birmingham, at the heart of the West Midlands region.

- ▶ The city for enterprise. If you want to make it in business, Birmingham is a great place to make your move having been voted the UK's most entrepreneurial region by Start Up Britain.
- ▶ At the heart of a £94 billion regional economy (HM Revenue and Customs, 2019).
- ▶ Today, the West Midlands is a major banking and finance centre, with 321,000 employees working at more than 43,000 BPFs companies.
- ▶ The region is a base for big names such as Deutsche Bank, PwC and HSBC, which started as the Birmingham and Midlands Bank in 1836.
- ▶ Birmingham has seen the fastest growth in business numbers in the country (West Midlands Growth Company Ltd, 2019).
- ▶ Highest number of employees of any city outside London with just under 500,000 (West Midlands Growth Company Ltd, 2019).
- ▶ A major international airport, just 10 minutes by train from the centre. 143 direct routes, including cities in Europe, North America and Asia.



“The region's growing, diverse economy is a key strength. Instead of being reliant on one sector, the West Midlands is home to leaders in finance, life sciences, digital, automotive and aerospace making it more resilient to boom and bust.”

The West Midlands Growth Company

Realising the Sustainable Development Goals through responsible management education

PRME Principles applied to Aston University



Principle 1 | Purpose: To develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy.



Principle 2 | Values: To incorporate into academic activities, curricula, and organisational practices the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact.



Principle 3 | Method: To create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.



Principle 4 | Research: To engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances understanding about the role, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value.



Principle 5 | Partnership: To interact with managers of business corporations to extend the knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.



Principle 6 | Dialogue: To facilitate and support dialogue and debate among educators, students, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organisations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.



Purpose, Values and Method



Principle 1 | Purpose: To develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy.



Principle 2 | Values: To incorporate into academic activities, curricula, and organisational practices the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact.

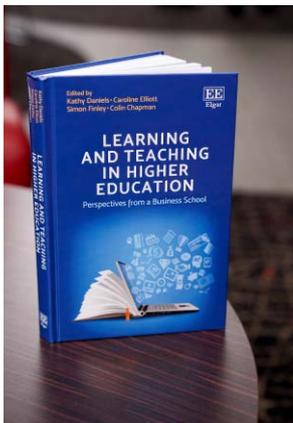


Principle 3 | Method: To create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.

Within Aston Business School, all of our taught programmes incorporate elements of ethics, responsibility and sustainability. The mechanisms for achieving this range from University-wide initiatives to those under the control of individual programmes and module leaders. This variation is deliberate and reflects the diversity of approaches available to integrate and explore ethics, responsibility and sustainability: one size does not fit all.

At programme level, there are specific modules that have as their primary focus ethics, sustainability and responsibility. Examples at undergraduate level include Business Ethics, Ethical and Sustainable Marketing, Business, Government and Society and Professional Conduct and Ethics for Aston Law students. On all MSc programmes, students explore ethics and social responsibility as part of the Aston Global Advantage, our professional development programme. On the Aston MBA, the module Managing Responsible Organisations requires students to explore and reflect on the management of socially responsible organisations.

Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Perspectives from a Business School



A new book, authored by 37 academics from Aston Business School in Birmingham, seeks to provide guidance on becoming a successful lecturer when there are increasing pressures to raise teaching standards in universities. 'Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Perspectives from a Business School', published by Edward Elgar Publishing, offers techniques to enhance teaching practice, focusing on challenges such as large group teaching, increasing attendance and engagement, and successful professional development.

Chapter 25, 'How to embed Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in teaching', is authored by Muhammad Al Mahameed and Umair Riaz. It offers advice on CSR materials to include in modules and how to embed these materials. They argue the importance of having clear learning outcomes, thinking about what learners need to gain as well as the role of CSR material in developing professional, intellectual and transferable skills.

They suggest that the following sub-learning objectives could achieve these holistic objectives. Learners should be able to:

- > reflect on key perspectives in CSR;
- > understand the historical development of CSR;
- > understand current concerns for CSR;
- > reflect on the limitations of the current business practices;
- > reflect on CSR philosophy from ethics.

Further examples of excellence in social responsibility and sustainability in enhancing the learning experience include:

- > Aston University signed up to the National Union of Students Responsible Futures Accreditation Mark in 2018. The Education for Sustainability (ESD) Working Group provide teaching and learning experiences that empower and inspire students to be critical change-makers for sustainability within their field of expertise (Education for Sustainable Development). NUS' sessions on Introduction to embedding Sustainability into the Curriculum reinforce the needs for academics to include the UN's Sustainable Development Goals into their modules.
- > The Sustainability Team: Living Lab Projects embed the University's sustainable initiatives within teaching and learning objectives by offering students the possibility to work on projects such as "How Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are expected to integrate Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across curriculum?" or "Embedding corporate responsibility: Aston as an example."
- > The new MSc in Crisis and Disaster Management will prepare students further for responsible leadership.
- > The 'What Makes a Smart (& Ethical) City?' workshop was part of the Talk About online and in-person community which encourages young people to talk about current affairs and issues affecting them, for instance, how would an ethical Birmingham of the future involve consideration of food security and sustainability.
- > Through the Prince's Trust business challenge (part of the postgraduate Professional Development Programme), students are asked to identify current issues facing young people in Birmingham.
- > Aston Law School's Speed Networking events in partnership with the Birmingham Law Society's Social Mobility Committee offer students interested in a career in law the confidence to become lawyers whilst lowering barriers to social mobility for all students.
- > The Aspiring Black Lawyers' network brings together universities, schools, colleges, law firms, barristers' chambers, legal recruiters, and other organisations to address the under-representation of black and mixed-race men and women in the legal sector.
- > Aston's crowdfunding platform GO! empowers students and staff to directly generate funds for their own Aston projects. 'A Day of GO!' showcases previous success stories, upcoming projects and ways students and staff can drive their best ideas forward.
- > Aston University's Mentoring in Schools programme raises local school pupils' aspirations, attainment and awareness of further and higher education.
- > The Charlie Waller Memorial Trust's e-learning package is designed to give non-specialist staff the skills, knowledge and confidence to offer a first line of support to students who may have mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, homesickness or low self-esteem.
- > The Business Simulation in Accounting: 'Bissim' programme has been shortlisted as part of the 'Finance for the Future Awards, 2019' sponsored by the ICAEW, The Prince's Accounting for Sustainability Project (A4S) and Deloitte.
- > Aston's crowdfunding platform GO! empowers students and staff to directly generate funds for their own Aston projects. 'A Day of GO!' showcases previous success stories, upcoming projects and ways students and staff can drive their best ideas forward.

PRIME example

The Prince's Trust

Aston Business School is a proud partner of The Prince's Trust, a charity that supports disadvantaged young people in the UK.

Founded in 1976 by Charles, Prince of Wales, to help vulnerable young people get their lives on track, it supports 11 to 30-year-olds who are unemployed and those struggling at school and at risk of exclusion. Many of the young people helped by The Trust are in or leaving care, facing issues such as homelessness or mental health problems, or have been in trouble with the law.

It runs a range of training programmes, providing practical and financial support to build young people's confidence and motivation. Each year they work with about 60,000 young people, with three in four moving on to employment, education, volunteering or training.

Postgraduate students are given the opportunity to support the Prince's Trust in a range of areas:

- > Fundraising challenge – think of a business idea, develop this and try to raise £10,000 in just six months.
- > E-mentoring – become an online mentor and use their knowledge and experience to help young entrepreneurs.

- > Learning materials – inform, guide and empower young entrepreneurs by creating educational guides.
- > Training programmes – help facilitate our on-campus training programmes for The Prince's Trust beneficiaries.

These opportunities for students to gain real world experience can make a real difference to lives of other young people.



Research at Aston



Principle 4 | Research: To engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances understanding about the role, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value.

Aston University and Aston Business School work proactively towards a more sustainable and ethical future. The extent of the research activities produced within the University is testament of Aston's commitment and engagement towards the PRME Research principles.

Our research is multi-disciplinary, collaborative and international. We also organise Birmingham's CSR Summit annually in partnership with THRIVE which focuses on local CSR issues. Our members contribute to the Centre for Critical Inquiry into Society and Culture as well as developing research with the CSR Centre of Excellence, Kedge Business School, France and Centre for Responsible Business, India.

Some of our current research in this area includes projects examining:

- > The bottom-up and national approaches to corporate social responsibility and sustainable development;
- > Psychological approaches to CSR;
- > Human rights role(s) and responsibilities of MNCs/TNCs in transnational production networks;
- > Role of business in peace and state building, corporate political activities, MNCs in colonial and post-colonial contexts;
- > Sustainable supply chains, food security, food sustainability, food waste, supply chain risk and resilience; and
- > Social impacts of responsible business practices.

Aston Business School Research Departments

Teaching and research within Aston Business School are managed through the following academic departments:

- > Accounting
- > Aston Law School
- > Economics, Finance and Entrepreneurship
- > Marketing and Strategy
- > Operations and Information Management
- > Work and Organisation

Aston Business School's Research Centres

Aston Business School's centres of excellence in research are:

- > Advanced Services Group
- > Aston Centre for Growth
- > Enterprise Research Centre
- > Centre for Research into Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME)
- > Lloyds Banking Group Centre for Business Prosperity

Aston University's Cross Disciplinary Research Centres

Aston University academics contribute to research, aligned to PRME principles, through centres of excellence and multidisciplinary research groups such as:

- > Energy and Bioproducts Research Institute (EBRI)
- > Aston Research Centre for Healthy Ageing
- > Aston India Centre for Applied Research
- > Sustainable Environment Research Group

Examples of research projects and initiatives include:

- > **The Advanced Services Group** hosted the 6th PhD Training School of the Marie Curie funded International Training Network on Circular Economy where PhD students and their supervisors from different European Universities attended Dr Igor Pyrko's workshop on the use and potential of concept mapping to assist in the understanding of the circular economy.
- > Professor Prasanta Dey, Dr Soumyadeb Chowdhury, Professor Pawan Budhwar and Dr Geoff Parkes received funding from the British Council under the Research Environmental Link for pursuing a project entitled '**Circular Economy Knowledge Hub: Promoting Multi-Disciplinary Research, Capacity Building and Leadership**', in collaboration with Hanoi University of Science and Technology and Da Nang University, Vietnam.
- > **With CREME's mission's 'diversity and enterprise is everyone's business'**, the 22nd Annual Ethnic Minority Business Conference presented leading edge research and practice in order to place minority businesses at the heart of debates on entrepreneurship and inclusive growth.
- > **The Aston India Centre for Applied Research (AICAR)** conducts India-related research activities centring on business and policy related issues including sustainability. Aston India Centre for Applied Research organised an event entitled 'Gandhi Katha', which was supported by the Consulate of India at Birmingham as part of the Government of India's initiative to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The event was coordinated by Professor Pawan Budhwar and Dr Bimal Arora.
- > **The Work and Organisation research department** was invited by the University of Glasgow and Living Wage Scotland to write a short policy brief on living wages in supply chains following on from the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) Living Wage Event at the University of Glasgow.
- > **A "Social Well-being and Mental Health Challenges of Employees of Small and Medium sized Enterprises in Emerging Economies"** workshop was delivered to senior researchers from universities based in Bangladesh and Thailand as well as a workshop on "How to develop an impactful research grant proposal" delivered at the Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management to senior researchers from a number of institutes from the Andhra Pradesh State of India.

Further examples of research and publications can be found in the Appendix section of the report.

PRIME example

Centre for Research into Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME)

Based in Aston Business School, CREME delivers leading-edge expertise on business support for ethnic minority entrepreneurs. CREME has transformed the 'perceptions' of ethnic minority entrepreneurs by working with business policy-makers and influential organisations to engage collaboratively with overlooked or disregarded business communities. Headed by Professor Monder Ram OBE, CREME has built up an enviable reputation regionally, nationally and internationally for its pioneering research and business engagement activities, promoting diversity and enterprise.

Put simply, the mission of the Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CREME) is to 'make diversity and enterprise everyone's business'.

CREME is committed to the production and promotion of knowledge that is useful

to academic and practitioner communities. CREME was established as a joint venture in 2004 between a Regional Development Agency (East Midlands Development Agency) with a passion for promoting enterprise amongst all communities, and a group of researchers committed to making a difference to practitioners as well as the academy. CREME is a leading contributor to academic and policy debates on ethnic minority entrepreneurship. CREME's collaborative approach is highly effective in developing activities that are impactful for our wide range of stakeholders. This fusion of research and practice is a key feature of CREME's varied range of activities.

CREME's work is governed by three guiding principles:

- 1. Engaged scholarship** - applying the insights and findings from our high quality 'internationally recognised' research to 'real' business issues, such as capital and finance, supplier diversity, wages, migration policies, technology and social inclusion.
- 2. Transforming practice** - working with a whole host of stakeholders to

influence policy and practice, including the private sector (large corporate, trade and professional), local and national government funded agencies.

3. Outstanding engagement and dissemination - organising events to bring together local entrepreneurs, business policy-makers and academics, to encourage networks and disseminate valuable information.

The Annual Ethnic Minority Business Conference is the highlight of CREME's year, bringing together key stakeholders to discuss key issues on diversity and enterprise. CREME delivers workshops, seminars and briefings throughout the year.



Partnerships



Principle 5 | Partnership: To interact with managers of business corporations to extend the knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.

Aston has a wealth of experience in working with organisations of all shapes and sizes from start-up micro businesses to multinationals and is recognised as providing excellent support to SMEs through the Small Business Charter accreditation. This equally translates in our graduates reaping higher earnings and career opportunities than nearly any other university in the UK according to a study by The Economist (August, 2017).

Aston Business School's research centres strive to develop individuals to perform better within enterprises and the professions, and to create successful new ventures. We support business leaders in enhancing their organisation's performance and growth, and advise policy-makers on ways to improve society and the economy.

Some notable examples of business partnership and collaborations include:

- > Professor Vladlena Benson and Dr Panagiotis Petridis have hosted the first transnational meeting for the **CyberAdventure Project**. The meeting brought together partners from Spain (CEIPSO Maestro Rodrigo), Portugal (Advancis and Boon), Lithuania (UAB Karalienes Mortos mokykla) and UK (SATRO), focussing on creating a serious games for online safety education of children (7-12). The project will provide teachers with an easy-to-use learning tool that can help overcoming their lack of competences regarding online safety topics and engage children in the learning process.
- > Professor Prasanta Dey has received funding from the United Arab Emirates University for a project entitled **'Achieving Sustainable Performance through Circular Economy in Small and Medium sized Enterprises in the UAE and the UK'**, in collaboration with Dr Walid Cheffi of the United Arab Emirates University.
- > **Aston is to be the home of UKMSN+** (UK Manufacturing Symbiosis NetworkPlus), bringing together the manufacturing research community and stakeholders in order to identify key research opportunities, build collaborations, inform policy making and translate scientific developments in digital technologies and materials science into business model innovations for the Circular Economy, led by Dr Luciano Batista.
- > **The H2020 Collaborative DINNOS project** has been set to conduct a large-scale randomized control trial to explore the effectiveness of an innovation support scheme (ISS) for SMEs to run in the West Midlands and in the Rhine-Ruhr region of German with a particular focus on employees' age diversity as a resource for innovation led by Dr Wladislaw Rivkin.
- > **The Erasmus+ collaborative project Circular Economy Adoption** within small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), with Asian Institute of Technology, University of Thai Chamber of Commerce and Panyapiwat Institute of Management in Thailand, enables staff from Thai partner institutions to undertake training in the field of interdisciplinary, collaborative and impactful research on Circular Economy for SMEs, led by Professor Prasanta Dey.
- > **The Centre for Responsible Business (CRB), in association with Aston Business School**, organised the India and Sustainability Standards Conference in New Delhi. Dr Bimal Arora is the founding CEO and Director of the Centre for Responsible Business (CRB) which he established to facilitate the participation of Indian actors in voluntary global governance for sustainability.
- > Professor Ben Clegg's new app called **'Station Partner'** helps people with autism and mild cognitive impairments build their confidence to use railway stations. The app is the output of a project with Chiltern Railways, RRSB (Rail Safety and Standards Board) and Focus Games and can be downloaded free from Google Play.
- > Aston participates in the **UN Internet Governance Forum (UN-IGF) - IGF Dynamic Coalition (DC) on Child Online Safety** leading to the drafting of a Charter for Children's Rights in the Digital World as a reference point for children's fundamental rights on the internet.
- > **A workshop on Voting and Democracy**, with Aston academics and the Beatfrees Collective, a Birmingham-based group of social enterprises who use creativity to challenge the world, covered political participation and political activism.

- > **The ESRC-funded Productivity Insights Network: SME Productivity and Mental Health** is a collaboration between Aston, Keele, Birmingham, York and Glasgow Universities which builds on the findings of Aston's previous Midlands Innovation Project for the adoption and implementation of practices, strategies and initiatives to support mental health and well-being in the UK SME sector, led by Dr Soumyadeb Chowdhury.
- > With **UKRI's enhancing place-based partnerships in public engagement funding**, Professor Leon Davies, Professor Frank Austermuehl, Professor Monder Ram and Dr Angela Jeffery, the team is working with Citizens UK and the Aston Villa Foundation to understand how the local population might engage in health research. The work supports Aston University's 'Villa Vision' project, which provides eye health services to local communities.
- > **The Aston Centre for Research into Safety and Security (CRISIS)** , led by Professor Pavel Albores, provides government and private organisations with high quality support in preparing their operations and their people for managing crises.
- > With Aimhigher Plus, Aston supports the **National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)** with Aimhigher Plus with the development of a completely new model to encourage students from non-privileged backgrounds to participate in study abroad programs and promote overseas mobility with secondary school pupils from low participation backgrounds. Aim Higher Plus and Aston have partnered with [Envision](#) to deliver a project called community apprentice for students to learn about the benefits of social action and fundraising, whilst developing essential skills to improve their future employability.
- > Aston University staff and students volunteer with the **Access Project** to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access top universities through personalised tuition and in-school support.
- > **Enactus Aston** is a student society which runs projects aimed at helping people in the local community including The Give Project (young disabled adults' entrepreneurs) and Chance for Change (English and employability skills for refugees in partnership with The Economist and Change Kitchen).

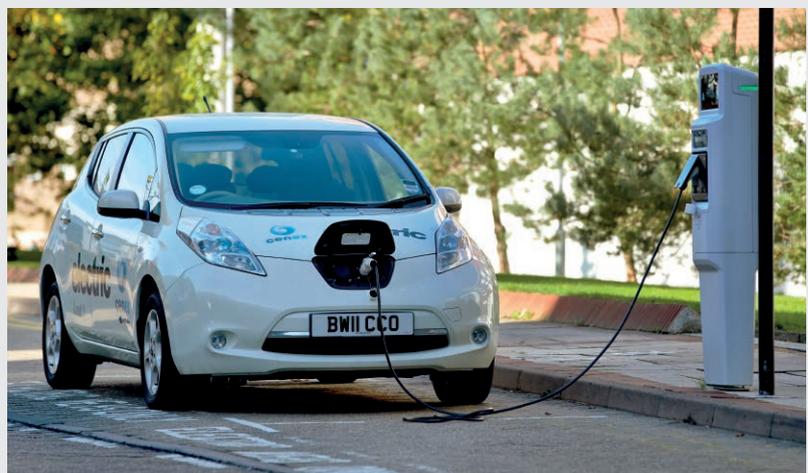
PRIME example

Low Carbon SMEs

Low Carbon SMEs is no ordinary energy advice service; its mission is to transform businesses for a sustainable future. Low Carbon SMEs takes a practical approach to making change happen by providing free, expert energy efficiency support and advice to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Black Country, Greater Birmingham and Solihull areas of the West Midlands.

The project brings together the best academic minds, industrial expertise, and a solid understanding of the low carbon drivers that impact on SME businesses in the region. The result is a holistic approach to energy efficiency that will lead SMEs to higher productivity and a strengthened bottom line. Evidence shows that even low and no-cost actions can typically reduce energy costs by at least 10%, coupled with quick returns.

The project provides free advice and grant support to SMEs on a whole range of energy efficiency challenges. The specialist strategies and guidance will set businesses on a pathway to carbon reduction. Projects leading to a reduction in energy consumption, carbon emissions and process inefficiencies within high energy using organisations are eligible for support.



Dialogue



Principle 6 | Dialogue: To facilitate and support dialogue and debate among educators, students, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organisations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.

Aston University continues to encourage conversations and critical debate among academics, students, and its various stakeholders in order to embed social responsibility and sustainability further within its strategies and core values.

The Times Higher Education 2019 Awards shortlisted Aston Business School in the category of **Business School of the Year** for transforming the regional economy through working intensively with SMEs. During 2017/2018, over 500 high-growth potential SMEs from the West Midlands participated in the support programmes with significant impact on firm-level growth, jobs created, student start-ups and investment for the region. Aston's work is unique due to its scale – the number of businesses participating, the number of targeted initiatives, and the size and significance of our regional peer-to-peer network that currently stands at over 1,000 entrepreneurs.

Aston Business School has been awarded the **Small Business Charter** with **Aston's Centre for Growth** recognised as one of their national exemplars with the provision of leadership development for microbusinesses to adopt digital and new technologies.

Examples of dialogue around issues relating to corporate social responsibility and sustainability include:

- > **'Beyond The Box'** from TEDx Aston University featured inspirational speakers and performers from Birmingham to encourage everyone to defend the rights of those marginalised, or find innovative ways to address issues with climate change.
- > Aston University has a target to achieve a GOLD level SKA Rating for all **Sustainable Construction** refurbishment projects with [SKA HE](#) (Higher Education), a scheme consisting of more than a hundred 'good practice' measures covering energy and CO2 emissions, waste, water, materials, pollution, wellbeing, biodiversity, project delivery and transport.
- > Aston University has been awarded the national **Workplace Wellbeing Charter** by Health@work as a place of work that is committed to the health and wellbeing of all staff in eight categories which include leadership, absence management, health and safety, mental health, smoking, physical activity, healthy eating, and alcohol and substance misuse. Wellbeing forums have been introduced across the schools and Organisational Development are collaborating with colleagues on projects such as the University Mental Health Charter. Aston University encourages conversations about mental health with initiatives such as the Mental Health survey, Mental Health Awareness Week, Time to Talk Day, Coffee and Conversation, Blue Monday, Coaching Pool, Mental wellbeing and stress management sessions, and Men's Health and Women's Health workshops in order to improve mental wellbeing. Aston University sponsors [The Haven Being Well Festival](#).
- > The **Aston University's Martin Luther-King Multi-Faith Centre** offers free of charge events to staff and students including Buddhist meditation, mindfulness, laughter Yoga, space for quiet reflection, reflexology, Indian head massage, Story 4 Thought, Knit & Natter Back, shoulder and neck remedial massage, reflexology, Indian head massage and mindfulness.
- > With Sport Aston, **Aston Olympians** have been organising multi-activity sports events for local primary school children with staff volunteers. The mission of Aston Olympians is to help Birmingham youngsters build their confidence and self-esteem by developing skills such as teamworking, leadership, resilience, perseverance and creativity.
- > The **Aston Race Equality Charter** supports the representation, progression and success of minority ethnic staff and students within higher education. The University also has particular responsibilities for good equal opportunities practice that go further than non-discrimination. It has a positive duty to promote race, disability and gender equality. The Minority Ethnic Group enables all to share experiences whilst creating networking opportunities, celebrating different cultures and history (Black History Month), and providing mentoring and support.

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- > Aston has signed to the **Hidden Disability Scheme** as part of a commitment to creating an inclusive environment, providing the opportunity for staff and students who have hidden disabilities to wear a pin badge on their lanyard to indicate their priority need for use of facilities. The **Inclusive Week** campaign focuses especially on the need for respectful behaviour towards people with seen and unseen disabilities.
- > The University signed up to the **Athena SWAN** charter in 2009 for promoting diversity in Higher Education and received an overall silver award in 2018. Aston fosters the engagement of staff and students in relevant activities and networks, and encourages practical changes to address gender equality issues.
- > The **Aston Feminist Café** is a pan-university reading group which provides an informal space for staff and students to discuss conceptual and political issues relevant to contemporary feminism such as Equal Pay.
- > Other networks include **The Parent Network, Inspiring Women@Aston, and Aston Staff LGBT+**. The **LGBT+ Mentoring Scheme** matches students from the LGBT+ student community to Aston staff members, enabling them to discuss any aspect of being LGBT+ at Aston and supporting them in their personal development and experience at the University.
- > Aston University has been ranked the **9th most sustainable University in the UK** according to the People & Planet 2019 University League Table.

PRIME example

RWAD Syrian Refugees Project

Aston Business School expert, Muhammad Al Mahameed, has helped nearly 50 Syrian refugees become entrepreneurs through the Rwad project. Dr Muhammad Al Mahameed, a member of the Accounting Group in Aston Business School, began leading the Rwad (which stands for 'pioneers' in Arabic) project, when he joined the university in 2014, in a bid to help disadvantaged entrepreneurs acquire the financial and analytical skills they need to set up a business.

Through the project, which teaches aspiring entrepreneurs how to write a business plan and then supports them into acting upon it, over 15 businesses have been successfully set up by Syrian refugees both in the UK and world-wide, including Manchester, Edinburgh, Turkey, Germany and Canada.

According to Dr Muhammad Al Mahameed, "Social and economic integration are two of the main challenges facing refugees in their new societies. However, the economic component receives less attention from governments and NGOs despite its important role in helping the refugees with the overall integration process. I started Rwad to help with this particular aspect and provide this little support to the refugees to start their own businesses. Rwad is inspired by my teaching experience at Aston, providing an interactive learning environment to the learners and allowing them to use their passion and courage to excel in their chosen business."

One of the businesses to have been set up through the Rwad project is Tradot Ltd, an online sporting goods retailer founded in April 2018 by Osama Al Assaf.



Osama arrived in the UK in 2016 after fleeing war-torn Syria with his wife and two young children. The escalating conflict in his native country, which cost Osama his home and his original business, meant that he was forced to embark on a perilous journey through Lebanon, Turkey and France in order to reach Britain in the search for a better future.

Desperate to find a steady source of income, Osama contacted Muhammad about the Rwad project, in a bid to learn how to write a business plan and start a company in the UK.

Osama Al Assaf, co-owner of Tradot Ltd, said: "I first met Dr Muhammad in Syria and knew he had since started working at Aston University. A lack of business education, knowledge of the UK's economy and the language barrier meant I was finding it extremely difficult to find guidance for starting my own business. I contacted Muhammad for advice on

how to write a business plan, and when I discovered he was running the Rwad project I felt I had found my saviour.

"Dr Mahameed not only taught me how to develop my business idea into a plan, but the way that the UK's economy works, and it was this knowledge that gave me the confidence to start my own company.

"I used the knowledge to set up Tradot Ltd, an online retail company selling sporting goods, which has attracted over 9,000 customers in the UK within its first year. The company is selling 53 high quality products and now has the capacity to process international orders for more than 34 countries worldwide."

The RWAD project gained national media coverage on World Refugee Day on 23 June 2019. Muhammad and Osama took part in interviews with BBC Radio 4's Today Programme, BBC Radio Five Live Breakfast and the BBC News Channel.

Appendix

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