

CASE STUDY

JOHN BARKER A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE



Wales has historically low levels of innovation and business growth compared with the UK. The impending impact of Brexit and Covid-19 will see a reduction in the economy leading to reduced consumer spending, even lower productivity, and more job losses making the need for Welsh businesses to innovate massively important

My PhD, titled "Developing business innovation in an economically challenged region: A study of Medium-sized Businesses in Wales", focused on understanding how and why Welsh businesses innovate, and what the barriers and enablers are for increasing innovation. The findings of the study will help policy and funding in the area be more targeted and turn the tide against this mounting economic tsunami.

In order to explore the area, I started by utilising a cutting-edge approach to observation of an innovation intermediary in Wales by novelly including data from the company's Slack instant-messaging system, alongside observing meetings, discussions, and decision making. I then took those initial insights and surveyed and interviewed Chief Executives, Directors, and Innovation Managers across Wales to get the most comprehensive results.

The results benefited from collaborating with the industrial partner Simply Do Ideas. They provided me with access to privileged contacts and state-of-the-art industrial practice, alongside mentoring and support through both research and professional development from leading practitioners in the field. I would recommend KESS 2 participation to other students as the combination of industrial expertise and the opportunity to practice, train, and develop into one of the future leaders in your field is irresistible.

THE COMPANY PERSPECTIVE

Simply Do Ideas is a cloud-based, digital platform empowering organisations to deliver challenge-led business improvement. Their purpose is to reduce the time, cost and risk of delivering innovation. Lee Sharma, Chief Executive Officer at Simply Do Ideas commented,

"John has been an excellent student who is always eager to support and stretch himself above and beyond what is required to help Simply Do Ideas as much as possible. We were so impressed with his attitude and approach, that we employed him part-time just after he started his PhD and he has delivered contracts with Rolls-Royce and Yorkshire Ambulance Services. John has also helped to raise the profile of Simply Do Ideas by driving new research and giving talks at numerous national and international conferences, making new contacts and presenting our company as a leader in innovation management software."



(Above) John and a colleague teaching at the Aldridge Institute for Entrepreneurship.

IMPACT



The findings of this research have been highly illuminating adding to the conversation about the applicability of innovation funding across Wales with key findings including the need to fund more process innovation and measure innovation success through internal financial returns, rather than measures such as job creation and protection. The research also provides insight into why more companies in Wales aren't innovating due to issues of trust, cost and intellectual property protection.

JOHN'S HIGHLIGHTS:

During the course of this KESS 2 PhD there have been many highlights, presenting my work in France, Greece, and later on this year, in the USA. I have also had the privilege of attending the KESS Graduate School in mid-Wales and Institute of Small Business and Entrepreneurship Writer's Retreat in Ireland. My work professionally with the company host has given me the opportunity to work with global brands such as Rolls-Royce and the NHS on open innovation projects. I have also been given the opportunity to be Principal Investigator on a nationally funded research project through Enterprise Educators UK and have just won the Best Paper Award at the Advances in Management and Innovation Conference 2020.



PUBLICATIONS:

Barker, J., Clifton, N. and Loudon, G. (2020) Perspectives on innovation within medium-sized firms in Wales. *Welsh Economic Review*, 27, pp.6–17. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.18573/wer.253>

Barker, J, Clifton, N and Loudon, G. (2019) Differences between Further and Higher Education Enterprise Education in South Wales. *European Conference on Innovation and Entrepreneurship 2019 Conference Proceedings*. [Working paper] DOI: <http://doi.org/10.34190/ECIE.19249>

Barker, J, Clifton, N and Loudon, G. (2019) Innovation, Influence, and a Deck of Cards: Exploring an innovation intermediary through Human-Centred Design. *European Regional Science Association 2019 Conference Proceedings* [Working paper]

Barker, J and Fowles-Sweet, W. (2018) Widening Participation and Social Mobility: Encompassing and Integrating Learning Opportunities. *Journal of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*. Volume 20, Number 2, pp.69-95. <https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.20.2.69>

Barker, J, Clifton, N and Loudon, G. (2018) Opening Innovation Doors through Digital Platforms: Ethnographic Insights. *Institute of Small Business and Entrepreneurship 2018 Conference Proceedings*. [Working paper] ISBN: 978-1-900862- 31-8

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