

**Faculty of Business, Law and Social Sciences**

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| **Proposed Title:**  Regulatory network disruption and European production systems: exploring SME responses in the Brexit transition period. |
| **School:**  Business School |
| **Proposed Supervisory Team:**  Dr Jacob Salder  Professor Mark Gilman |
| **Abstract:**  The development of economies is increasingly argued as dependent on a strong SME sector. SME performance has been positively associated with availability of and engagement in networks. Networks play an important role in addressing resource limitations faced by SMEs, building awareness of both opportunity and practice in business development and sustainability. This issue is particularly prevalent in export-active SMEs. Networks here provide the SME with critical international and cross-cultural resources aiding entry and access to export markets as well as continually replenished knowledge on industrial trends and changes.  One particular way such networks benefit SMEs is as an intermediary to understanding industrial regulations and state compliance requirements in products, services and trade. Since 1992 and the evolution of the European single market with its free movement of goods, services, people and capital, SMEs in the EU and exporting to other EU countries are likely to have become integrated in a European network both shaping regulation of the industry and disseminating industry requirements. The UK’s forthcoming departure from the EU will likely have a material effect on these networks. As a result, a series of disruptions will occur, not only to trading relationships but to engagement in and advantage of important regulatory networks.  The aim of this research is to explore the role of such networks in supporting SME development and how SMEs are reviewing and reconfiguring these relationships in the event of a major structural shift in economic and legislative relations. The research will involve exploring regulatory networks as they occur in a set of export-active SMEs in the UK principally focused on the EU market, and similarly a set of export-active SMEs in Europe with a focus or dependence on the UK market. Methodologically, it will involve network analysis of firms’ key relationships, unpicking the role of these relationships in reference to product, service and process evolution, and immersive investigation documenting mitigation strategies and assessment of internal risk from regulatory network disruption. It will gain intelligence on an integral aspect of SME practice during a period of unprecedented change, providing stronger understanding of the role of regulatory networks in aiding SME development and the responses and strategies employed by SMEs to periods of disruption and challenging environments. |
| **Research Environment:**  The researcher will be situated in the Centre for Enterprise Innovation and Growth, part of the Birmingham City Business School based in offices in central Birmingham. |
| **Applicant Requirements:**  Essential:  Honours degree (2:1 or above) in a relevant subject: Business, Economics, Human (Economic) Geography, or another related discipline  Awareness and understanding of research methods, particularly qualitative methods  Computer proficiency  Effective oral and written communication skills  Motivated with the ability to plan and manage own workload  Desirable:  Experience of data analysis software packages (i.e. NVivo)  Experience of undertaking primary research |
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