



# Travelling the Yellow Brick Road Together

*Understanding and  
Promoting  
Small Business  
Growth and  
Entrepreneurship*

*Part 2*

Journal of the  
Association for  
Management Education  
and Development



**Guest Editors: Simon Raby and Mark Gilman**

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Cover image: The road beside Banff Hot Springs in the Canadian Rockies: photo by Simon Raby.

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David McAra

# **Editorial: Travelling together along the Yellow Brick Road for Small Business and Entrepreneurship**

## *Introduction and overview to ‘Understanding and Promoting Small Business Growth and Entrepreneurship’, Part 2*

**Mark Gilman and Simon Raby**



*"There were many roads nearby, but it did not take Dorothy too long to find the one paved with yellow bricks. And while following it, with Toto soberly at her heel, soon she was walking briskly toward the Emerald City, her Silver Shoes glistened in the sun; tinkling merrily on the hard road bed. "*

Baum, 1900. The Wonderful Wizard of Oz



### **The Yellow Brick Road to co-production and co-operative inquiry**

Small business is big business. In the UK, small business accounts for more than nine out of every 10 private sector firms, and employ six out of every 10 people. Beyond their sheer proliferation, small business is considered by many as the engine of economic growth, increasing economic productivity through innovation, competition and job creation (ERC, 2016). For some time, policy makers became too narrowly focused in their support agenda as they searched for “winners”; smaller businesses that had the *potential* for high growth and could deliver the desirable outcomes outlined earlier. This was a natural pursuit, as humans often believe there is an answer, a golden bullet that can solve a problem. What we know now, however, is that small business growth is a discontinuous and often short-lived affair (e.g. Storey, 2011). Growth is complex, influenced by a multitude of factors, and cannot be predicted. In such a world, as guest editors of this edition, we continue to ask ourselves, and those with whom we work: what can we do to understand better how small businesses achieve growth? What role can we and others play to support their aspirations for growth? The recent Brexit decision certainly adds a new dimension and urgency in doing so.



From a researcher's perspective, having a material impact on the growth of small business, and of organisations more generally, can be difficult. A recent study by Reisz (2016) examined what works and what doesn't when researchers seek to make an impact on policy, and revealed that we are not doing very well in this respect. Little evidence was found of "co-production" or "co-operative inquiry" - approaches that are designed to "bring researchers closer to their audiences". The paper goes on to highlight the advantages of researchers learning to think differently, and working with their audience in mind, if their research is to be useful for decision-making. In so doing, Reisz advises researchers to tailor their language and messaging to each audience – be it academic, industry or policy – so that their findings have meaning. The paper goes on to recommend the avoidance of "dry numbers" and instead adopt the use of "narratives and metaphors as a powerful way to get your message across". Much like the story of the Wizard of Oz, in the context of this edition of the journal, this requires us to work together to find and build the small business and entrepreneurship Yellow Brick Road.

### **Collaborating with [AMED](#) on this agenda**

This edition of AMED's journal, *e-Organisations and People*, "Understanding and Promoting Small Business Growth, Part 2", is our contribution towards moving these debates on and this editorial aims to provide a short narrative of the events that have led us to this point. ([Part 1](#) was published in Autumn 2015). Through the journal more broadly, we aim to promote and develop the coming together of different people, with different backgrounds and from different organisations, to debate small business growth and entrepreneurship. It is a crossing of paths and boundaries of people who are following their own 'yellow brick roads' in search of the 'wizard' of small business and entrepreneurial development and growth. In offering a platform for people to meet, new and different paths are beginning to emerge, old ones are being revisited, and all this is helping us to share our experiences and look for new ways of relating and working together. In the spirit of this new way of working we are also discussing and developing different ways of communicating and writing to facilitate business and professional development. For this publication, we have a broad audience in mind, and aim to demonstrate a quality of writing that is rigorous yet relevant for practice.

### **In Search of the Yellow Brick Road for Small Business and Entrepreneurship**

For a number of years now we have sought to take our academic endeavours further than the traditional academic output. The benefits and pitfalls of academia's focus on blind peer-reviewed and globally ranked journals has been widely discussed and often hotly debated in the press, so we will not rehearse this here. What we will say is that current systems create pressure on researchers to publish work that has limited relevance beyond academia. Much of the work in academia is published for one audience alone - that of other academics. However, it is our strong belief that research should go beyond this, to help question and inform the way we all understand phenomena that we each meet on our everyday travels and business transactions.

As guest editors, one of the aspects that has endured and, we believe, that has enabled us to take a broader perspective, is our backgrounds: we both come from industry, and we both have a record of continuing support for and engagement with each other's work. We share a relationship and mutual respect through our work, as colleagues in academia and in a business we run together: [Business. Improvement. Growth.](#) and

through a trusting friendship. However, do not be fooled by this utopian picture: we do not agree on everything! One of the valuable aspects of this relationship, and one which we cherish, is the ability to disagree. We constantly challenge each other (respectfully!) and those with whom we work, we are naturally inquisitive beings, we like taking action and seeking impact, and we are passionate about what we do.



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We truly believe in the agenda of building a strong bridge between academia and industry. We profess that there is much that these worlds can achieve together. However, this relationship is not easy. To move these debates forward, we decided to create a network on small business growth, to help find and co-create the yellow brick road. Through the [support](#) of the [Enterprise Research Centre](#) (ERC) and the [Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship](#) (ISBE), following the publication of Part 1, we held an [inaugural meeting](#) in December 2015 for a Community of Interest (CoI) to materially impact the way we think about, understand and support small business growth and entrepreneurship. Both of these organisations share a common objective, to develop new knowledge and have an impact upon the world of small business and entrepreneurship. For this initial meeting we were particularly interested in learning from current models of University, small business engagement, research and support.

### **The inaugural meeting of the SME Community of Interest**

At the first CoI meeting we were joined by a group of participants, with representatives from academia, industry and policy. In the context of SME growth, we discussed some key questions: why are you interested in a CoI? What does current practice look like? What are the capabilities of the Universities? What are the barriers to progressing this work? What would/should a successful CoI do? Participants agreed that an ongoing programme of work should be progressed, including the formation of a Special Interest Group (SIG) on “SME growth”. It was felt that a central part of this SIG should provide a stimulus to examine the process of engaging SMEs (in the belief that learning for both parties is a result of long term relationships), discuss successful examples, and develop new insights on what works and what doesn't. It was felt that all of this knowledge could come together to inform how Universities and other actors in the regional innovation systems across the country could better understand the needs of, and support the growth of small business.

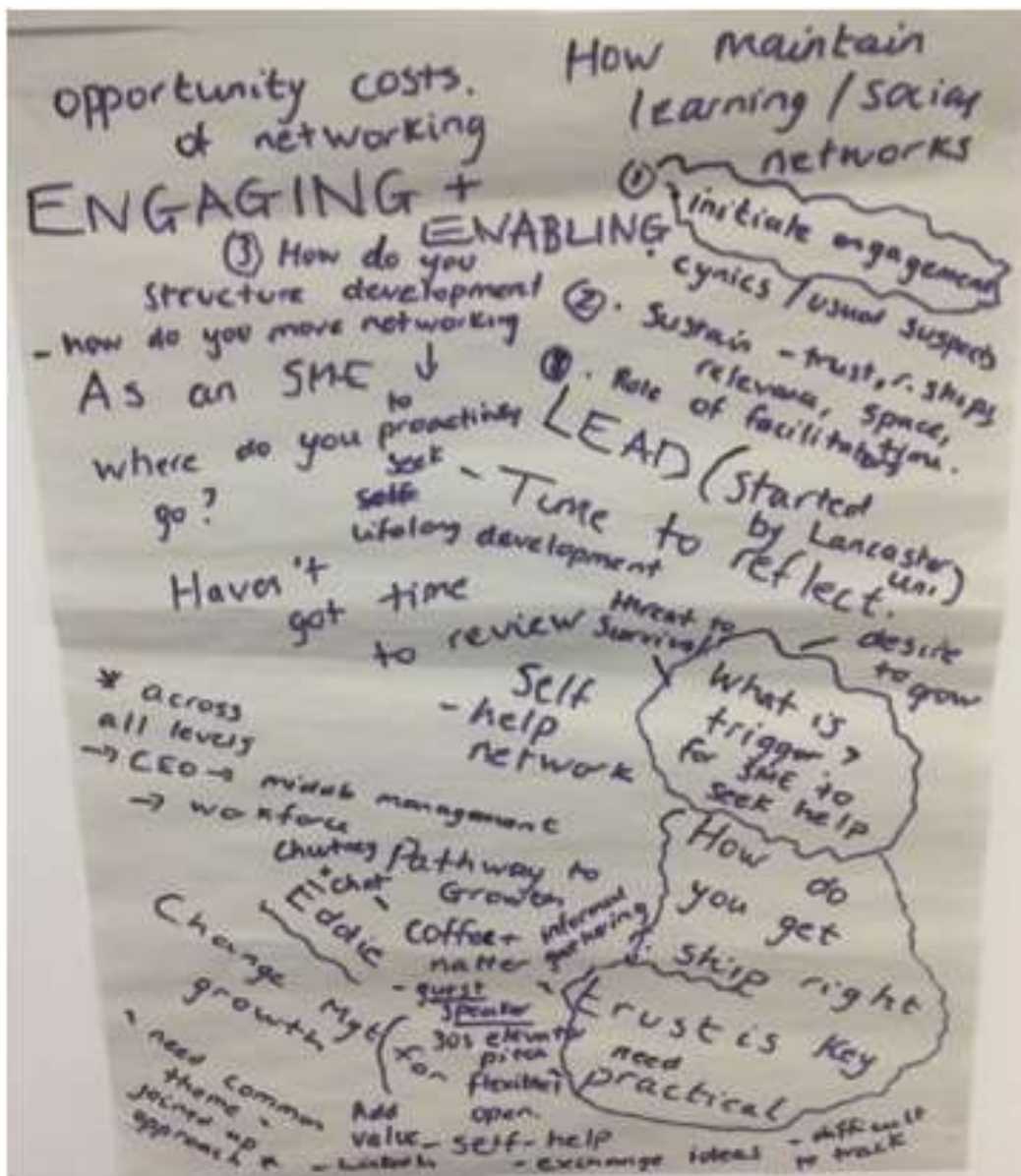
It was around the time that we were forming this COI that one of us met Bob MacKenzie in October 2014 at a post-publication Gathering of another edition of e-O&P, which served as another opportunity to connect writing and conversation on [‘Conscious Business’](#). Bob is a linchpin for AMED and the commissioning editor of their online journal *Organisations People* (e-O&P). The Association for Management Education and Development (AMED) aims to serve as a forum for people who want to share, learn and experiment, and find support, encouragement, and innovative ways of communicating on issues related to organisations and people. Our chance meeting unconsciously felt like another meeting of minds and underpinning philosophies. It was not long before we were in dialogue over the relative merits of people coming together from different organisations and backgrounds with exactly the same aims as we had been progressing. This

led to the creation of an edition of the AMED journal on "Understanding and Promoting Small Business Growth", that we would later refer to as "[Part 1](#)".

"As the trio ventured further into the dark woods, the road became rather rough and unorganized. The walking grew so difficult at times that the Scarecrow often stumbled over the yellow bricks, which were very uneven in this section of the wood. Many bricks were loose, broken, or missing altogether, leaving large holes that little Toto jumped across and Dorothy carefully walked around. As for the Scarecrow, having no brains, he walked straight ahead without a care in the world, and stepped into the holes and fell at full length on the ground. It never hurt him however, and Dorothy would quickly pick him up, pat his straw and set him upon his feet again to continue on, while he joined her in laughing merrily at his own innocent clumsiness. "

Baum, 1900. The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.

### Combining writing & conversations: a joint, post-publication gathering / follow-on, Community of Interest meeting



Results of some 26 April Col group work

An [opportunity](#) was identified to bring together the Col with a joint ISBE/AMED, post-publication workshop on 26 April in a spirit of 'critical friendship' (MacKenzie 2015) to illustrate the potential of relating writing and conversation to the development of effective small business and entrepreneurial policy and practice, to reflect and build on Part 1 of the *e-O&P* journal, and to further the Col since its inaugural meeting. We invited researchers, policy makers, entrepreneurs, and those who deliver support for growth and development to this event to share their perspectives on the critical issues facing small business. This was an opportunity to respond to longer-term ambitions, and consider the more immediate term challenges posed by the imminent European Referendum.

The event provided a mechanism to identify relevant issues to be addressed, to share and explore collaborative research, business and writing support agendas, and to deepen stakeholder relationships. The time proved to be extremely valuable in crystallising what could be done to understand and support small business and entrepreneurs better.



A few of the Col participants in conversation, with writing not far away



Speaking about the writing at the Col

The use of [open space technology](#) and [world café](#) principles created an energy in the room that was highly productive. By the end of the day, participants agreed on three key themes that required further exploration:

1. Who are the key stakeholders and how can we create trusting relationships for leading SME growth?
2. What would a holistic service of support to SMEs look like?
3. What are valid criteria for measuring growth and success of SMEs?

Subsequently, these themes have featured in detailed reports that provide an important agenda for future action and impact. Future collaborative research opportunities were also identified and groups were invited to write papers prompted by each of the above three questions as part of a special edition. This energy and the momentum from the previous edition led to this publication of Part 2 of this special themed edition.

### The focus for Part 2 of this special edition

In Part 2 of this AMED/ISBE collaboration on "Understanding and Promoting Small Business Growth and Entrepreneurship", we decided to focus on the way that academia, policy makers, learning and development



practitioners and leaders of small business can collaborate more effectively. This follows on from the events that have been run, and from the desire to think about the stakeholders who we are each seeking to impact through our research and support activities with and for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

So in December 2015, we invited ideas for short articles in the following areas:

- **The broader context** – explore the macro level trends influencing the growth of SMEs
- **The dynamics of growth & development** – debate what we mean by “growth”
- **The support ecosystem** – review “what works” in promoting and supporting growth
- **The way we communicate** – consider how we share knowledge across all stakeholders
- **The way we measure success** – examine the metrics used to assess success

We received an excellent response and the contributions we accepted broadly address all of these themes.

## **An overview of the articles**

### **The Notion of Growth: A Research Agenda for SMEs and entrepreneurs - Jonathan Deacon and Nihar Amoncar**

Our first article addresses a preoccupation that academics within the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise (SME) sector have in terms of seeking to identify the factors that act as impediments to the growth and development of SMEs around the world. The article attempts to understand the ‘notion of growth’ as experienced by SMEs in Wales and East India (particularly West Bengal), by exploring the narratives of entrepreneurs within those regions. The article highlights the importance in Government policy formulation of understanding and using the language of growth as defined by the ‘context’ of the entrepreneurs themselves.

### **Anchor Institutions and Regional Innovation Systems for supporting Micro and Small Businesses - Nigel Culkin**

This article examines the role of universities as ‘anchor institutions’. It explores some key strengths and weaknesses in the role they can play in providing support for SMEs. Drawing on contemporary literature on the entrepreneurial university and regional innovation systems, the article highlights the crucial and strategic contribution that certain types of organisation can make in the context of the after-shocks of the global financial crisis, the EU Referendum, and the growth in popularity of the Regional Innovation System (RIS).

### **Learning Gains for SME Owner-Founders through Business School Growth Programmes - Andrew Greenman**

Following on the theme of ‘anchor institutions’, this article argues that business schools are in a unique institutional position to contribute to SME growth by encouraging higher learning. Looking at Universities as providers of business support the article uses participant insights to contribute a model intended to help articulate learning gains for SMEs through business school programmes. Examining the question of how business schools can better articulate the learning gains for local SME owners within their growth programmes, the article helps to highlight the value that is created when business schools and SME owners engage in meaningful and purposeful learning.



### **Capturing the Concept of the Captured Programme - Fiona Whitehurst**

This article continues the theme of the previous two by looking at the role of ‘anchor institutions’ that are located in regions ranking below the United Kingdom average in terms of productivity. It explores ways to support small firms to develop their leadership and entrepreneurship by trialling innovative ways of working. The author recognises the opportunity afforded by this edition to share her experiences in doing so with academic and practitioner audiences, and hopefully to stimulate further debate and learning.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility perception and practice in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Kilsyth, Scotland - Ana-Paula Fonseca**

This article deals with the sometimes controversial issue of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Decision-making within CSR is concerned with actions that create value for society whilst minimising impact on the environment. It is also concerned with relationships between organisations and stakeholders. Whilst this is a strategic issue, SMEs encounter challenges and barriers in attempting to demonstrate CSR. This article highlights the differing experiences and perceptions of six small enterprises in Kilsyth, Scotland, in relation to CSR.

### **Beyond communication skills: what you were never told about writing and public speaking - Alison Donaldson & Michael MacMahon**

Finally, writing and talking are essential activities in business. This article, co-authored by a writing coach and a public speaking coach, offers unusual, thought-provoking ideas about how to get the most out of both forms of communication. In particular, the article focuses on the important issue of how to have quality conversations, especially around issues such as coping with fear and stress; organising your thinking in advance; going beyond the script; the ‘social life’ of documents; developing ideas jointly; using stories as well as facts and propositions; and the enduring value of conversation.

### **Concluding thoughts: enabling complex conversations**

Our reflections on carrying out the various events and two guest editions of the e-O&P journal have led us to recognise the dynamics of multiplicity and complexity in conversations. AMED encourages such multi-media communications by means of a series of pre-and post-publication gatherings to discuss ideas in and for writing about development, by face-to-face SIGs such as the [AMED Writers’ Group](#), through group Skype calls and generally by embodying the principles of critical friendship (qv) wherever possible. Alison and Michael’s article in this edition also gives some practical illustrations of the essential interrelationship between speaking, writing and action for development. These are principles and practices that ISBE’s Cols and SIGs aim to follow. There are many ways to find our way to and along the Yellow Brick Road of small business and entrepreneurship, to join the debate



The Yellow Brick Road at Banff Hot Springs in the Rockies by Simon Raby

and journey, and make an impact. Many of the authors who have submitted articles for Part 1 and Part 2 of this special edition of e-O&P differ in the paths they have taken and in their motivations. Some were inspired by the conversations that arose during the meetings discussed above, whilst others were inspired by reading the first special edition of the journal, and by the call for contributions for Part 2.

*"They all started upon the journey, greatly enjoying the walk through the soft, fresh grass; and it was not long before they reached the road of yellow brick and turned again toward the Emerald City where the Great Oz dwelt. The road was smooth and well paved, now, and the country about was beautiful, so that the travellers rejoiced in leaving the forest far behind, and with it the many dangers they had met in its gloomy shades".*

Baum, 1900. The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.

An interesting conundrum that we have been left with for future debate is how we unpack the motivations and paths that different authors and meeting participants take, and how we identify what implications this has for ways in which we all develop our thinking on small business and entrepreneurship. We would like to conceptualise this activity as an ongoing and integrated set of conversations, both written and spoken, that aims to promote small business and entrepreneurship. Should you have any ideas on how you believe we should take this work forward, please do get in touch!

We do hope you enjoy reading the articles in this edition. Perhaps they will inspire you to join in our continuing project to enhance the impact of SME and entrepreneurial practice in this post-Brexit era. You are very welcome to participate in the activities of the SME Col and SIG, as well as in any AMED events that you might find helpful. (See the section on forthcoming events at the end of this edition).

## Acknowledgements

### A message from Mark and Simon, Guest Editors

We would like to start by thanking **Bob MacKenzie**, Commissioning Editor of this journal. Bob's unwavering supportive challenge and thoughtful approach has been an essential ingredient to the publication of this edition; indeed, it would not have been possible without him. We would also like to thank **AMED** more broadly in its commitment to offering partners, such as ISBE and the ERC, space and support through their publications, and encouraging early career academics and novice writers – as well as established authors - from anywhere in the world to write and become published as a means of developing their own and other people's small business and entrepreneurial practice.

AMED is supported by a passionate group of volunteers. In addition to Bob, we would like to acknowledge **David McAra** in his editing capacity, helping to tame text into an accessible and pleasing pdf format, **Linda Williams** in the AMED Office for her administrative expertise, **Julia Goga-Cooke** for translating the journal into a subsequent Digest for wider distribution, and **Ned Seabrook** for creating pdf versions of the articles from the comprehensive edition. (Individual articles will become available in the weeks following publication).

### A message from Bob and David at the e-O&P editorial board

In terms of AMED's acknowledgements of our ISBE and ERC partners in this project, we would like to express our thanks to **Mark** and **Simon** for their tremendous efforts in devoting their time and attention to promoting this joint ISBE/AMED project. Despite their many other preoccupations and busy schedules, they willingly accepted responsibility for all the chores – and not a few tribulations - that guest editing entails.

On behalf of **AMED Council**, we would also like to thank **the officers of ISBE and ERC** for engaging so readily with this collaboration. We hope that, in its own small way, this joint enterprise serves as an illustration of how diverse stakeholders in the small business and entrepreneurial community can work together creatively to mutual benefit. Last, but by no means least, we would like to thank all **the authors** whose work appears in Parts 1 and 2 of this themed edition for their timely contributions. We are sure that their writings will help to inform the conversations and initiatives of their fellows during the forthcoming ISBE Annual Conference and beyond.

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## About the guest editors

**Mark Gilman.** M.Gilman@bcu.ac.uk

### Past and present

Having spent 18 years working in engineering I found myself completing an economics degree and then a masters and PhD! My thirst for knowledge led me to explore how to apply my industrial and academic experience for the benefit of academic and business communities.

As a trusted and accredited practitioner, I have developed and delivered a range of leadership and executive programmes and networks, coaching, facilitation, action learning and consultancy interventions with individuals and organisations of all shapes and sizes, all with the aim of helping them improve their performance.

I have, and continue to write extensively on human resource management and SME growth issues faced by business owners and their organisations.

I am presently a Professor of SME Growth and Development at Birmingham City University and Co-founder and Director of BIG Associates Ltd.

**Simon Raby Ph.D.** [s.o.raby@kent.ac.uk or simon.raby@haskayne.ucalgary.ca]

### Past and present

In the formative part of my career I worked in construction and manufacturing as a conduit and catalyst for change and improvement, working to translate and transfer knowledge between academia and business. My experiences of working with senior leaders and those at the coalface led me to a question: how do business owners achieve success?

My quest to find an answer initially took me out of organisational practice, into research and then onto personal and organisational development. Through these career transitions I have spent many enjoyable



hours debating, learning and challenging the way business is conducted, and how individuals and organisations develop and grow. I have since co-founded an organisation “Business Improvement and Growth Associates Ltd” focused on supporting ambitious business owners achieve success.

I am the deputy director of an applied research centre (University of Kent), a Visiting Professor in Entrepreneurship (University of Calgary) and serve on the Board of the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship. I am educated to doctoral level, an accredited and practicing coach and facilitator, and continue to write for work and pleasure.

## A note about ISBE



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We are a UK-based global network of 4,000 members that promotes excellence in small business and entrepreneurship by building bridges between researchers, policy-makers and practitioners.

Our annual conference has become a premier event for this constituency, and 2017 heralds its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

We hold many regional events, including academic, entrepreneurial education and practical, skill-building workshops for small business practitioners and the business networks that support them. We contribute actively to policy think-tanks and debates in response to government initiatives and other contemporary issues, and we actively support research via our annual Research and Knowledge Exchange (RAKE) fund, which is awarded to small business and entrepreneurship researchers to develop, produce and disseminate their work.

Overall, ISBE contributes to the world of enterprise by disseminating relevant knowledge and skills, the latest research, and by supporting entrepreneurial education and encouraging debate. [www.isbe.org.uk](http://www.isbe.org.uk)

## A note about AMED



AMED stands for the Association for Management Education and Development, [www.amed.org.uk](http://www.amed.org.uk). We are a long-established membership organisation and educational charity devoted to developing people and organisations.

Our purpose is to serve as a forum for people who want to share, learn and experiment, and find support, encouragement, and innovative ways of communicating. Our conversations are open, constructive, and facilitated.

Through AMED, we strive to benefit our members and the wider society. Exclusive Member benefits include excellent professional indemnity cover at a significant discount, free copies of the quarterly journal *e-O&P*, and discounted fees for participation in a range of face-to-face events, special interest groups, and our interactive website. We aim to build on our three cornerstones of **knowledge**, **innovation** and **networking** in the digital age. Wherever we can, AMED Members, Networkers and Guests seek to work with likeminded individuals and organisations to generate synergy and critical mass for change. [www.amed.org.uk](http://www.amed.org.uk), or contact Linda Williams, our Membership Administrator, E: [amedoffice@amed.org.uk](mailto:amedoffice@amed.org.uk), T: 0300 365 1247