

# This startup community was set up to improve diversity in UK tech – and it's getting results

YSYS' Impact Report for 2019-20 shows that specific efforts to improve recruitment, entrepreneurship and company culture for people from diverse backgrounds are working. Now the community is focusing on COVID-19 recovery.

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In the UK tech ecosystem, less than 9% of senior leaders come from minority backgrounds – despite our 14% overall BAME population. The data on gender, disability and so on paints a similarly disheartening picture; there's a lack of diversity of background, and therefore also of thought.

*Read also*

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[This is how you make tech inclusive: Interview with Kwaku Dapaah from YSYS](#)

Founded by Deborah Okenla, YSYS is a community trying out a number of solutions to this problem. It's a space for communication between diverse founders and investors; an accelerator supported by the likes of Atomico and LEGO Ventures; a training service for big corporates; an upskilling and recruitment platform – and a whole lot more.

YSYS' central goal is to get 100K underrepresented people into tech by 2023. To keep interested parties up to date on its progress, it releases annual impact reports.

The *YSYS Impact Report for 2019-20* has just come out – in sync with an Access Week. This saw Softr CEO Mariam Hakobyan introduce the launch of the FoundersDoor Library – a curated library of video masterclasses – and conversations about the no-code movement, website accessibility, and what 'access' means to the wider community.

## So what's new, according to the Impact Report?

In her Founder and CEO letter introducing the report, Okenla writes: 'Access is not only about access to opportunities, funding and job offers but the power to take control, as a community, so that we can begin to build a world that we truly want to live in.'

*'A world that does not discriminate based on algorithms, funnels, closed networks or what the 'ideal picture' should look like.'*

YSYS has made the following concrete progress towards this world as of 2020:

Its FoundersDoor incubator programme, which gives early-stage startups strategic help and intros to investors, has supported 3,170 founders – with collective funding raised adding up to £5,792,565.

Its TalentDoor employability and recruitment programme has seen over 2,600 individuals securing jobs, internships and/or pay rises.

YSYS has delivered diversity and inclusion training to Connect Ventures, FiTT TV, Aula, Beringea and others. It has facilitated inclusive accelerator programmes for Tech Nation (which has created a D&I steering group), Geovation (which now has a prayer room and a section in its curriculum dedicated to D&I), Colour in Tech and more.

YSYS has partnered with JP Morgan and Capital Enterprise's OneTech – an initiative aiming to double the number of diverse founders accessing education and investment. With YSYS' help, the programme has seen a 225% increase in female participants and a 53% increase in BAME founders on the Capital Enterprise investment readiness programme.

The company has also helped EIT Food – which spearheads innovation in food and agriculture – to attract more women and people from minority backgrounds. By launching a specific Changemakers Programme, YSYS and EIT saw the EIT community grow by 247 individuals – 62% of whom were BAME and 74% of whom were women.

## COVID and beyond

YSYS has continued its work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic – adapting resources in line with the new needs of its community. Specially commissioned research indicated that 36% of diverse founders were losing income, 19% were worried about cash flow and 23% were seeking coaching.

As small businesses and their founders continue to suffer the negative economic impact of COVID-19, YSYS will be building on the finance workshops, access to angels, wellbeing support and guidance on alternative finance methods it delivered right in the middle of the pandemic.