# MRANI

## MAGAZINE 2025

*Championing Diversity & Inclusion*

**SPOTLIGHT ON OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT**



**RECAP FROM MRANI 2024**

*The Economic Impact of Diversity: Ethnic Minority Businesses in Northern Ireland*

**START YOUR BUSINESS**

*A Tribute to Anna Lo, MLA*

## MRANI AWARDS 2025- SHORTLIST

www.minorityawardsni.org.uk



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# About Us.

## Who We Are

Minority Recognition Awards NI (MRANI) is a not-for-profit organisation based in Northern Ireland. We are dedicated to showcasing the significant contributions of ethnic minority professionals and businesses to the national economy. Through our initiatives, we highlight exceptional talent, foster integration, and bring together the whole community in celebration of a diverse and prosperous Northern Ireland.

## Our Pillars of Work

- **SUPPORT**: We strive to understand and address the unique issues affecting ethnic minority professionals and business owners, championing their integration and success within the workplace and wider society.
- **INTEGRATE & EDUCATE**: We bridge communities through a dynamic programme of workshops, networking events, and our flagship awards ceremonies, creating spaces for dialogue, learning, and collaboration.
- **INNOVATE:** MRANI actively encourages and supports innovation and creativity within ethnic minority communities, recognising that new ideas are vital for driving the country's economic growth.
- **CELEBRATE:** We believe in the power of recognition. Our annual awards ceremony is the cornerstone of our efforts to embrace diversity and publicly honour outstanding achievements.

## Our Mission

MRANI is committed to recognising, promoting, and advocating for the rights, integration, and well-being of ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland. We achieve this through awards, events, and initiatives that celebrate their achievements, highlight their contributions to the economy, and raise public awareness.

## Vision for the Future

To foster a truly inclusive and diverse society in Northern Ireland where individuals from all ethnic minority backgrounds are valued, respected, and empowered to thrive.

# Meet our team



**Diane Davis**
*Director*



**Lawrence Wright**
*Director and Treasurer*



**SIMON BAR**
*Adviser*



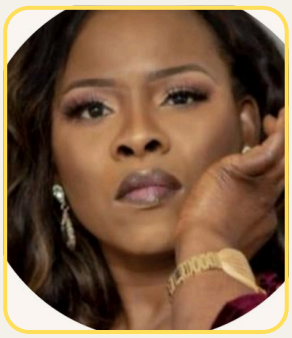
**Steve Pollard**
*Adviser*



**John Ferris**
*Adviser*



**Magdalene Ajani**
*Head of Leadership*



**Oyedamola Bolajoko**
*Event Manager*



**James**
*Head of Fundraising*



**Nico Aleykom**
*Consultant*

# Meet our team



**Catherine Mazs**
*Secretary*



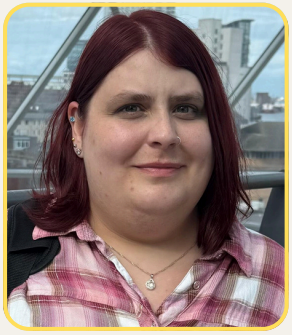
**Collette Andriyhuck**
*Secretary 2*



**Barineka Maagbo**
*Head of Marketing*



**Noah**
*Research*



**Ellie MCkee**
*Marketing Assistant*

Thank you to our 2025 awards sponsors!

Contact us to become a sponsor

Northern Ireland offers a supportive environment for entrepreneurs, with various resources and initiatives available. To start your business here, consider factors like your business idea, market research, legal requirements, and financial planning.

Register your company, obtain necessary licenses and permits, and explore funding options like government grants and loans. Building a strong network and seeking professional advice can also be invaluable. By carefully planning and utilizing the available resources, you can successfully establish and grow your business in Northern Ireland.

This year has been an inspiring journey of collaboration and impact, made possible through the support of our incredible sponsors.
In July, we worked alongside The Mind Tribe to deliver the Next-Gen Leader 2025 programme, empowering young leaders to step confidently into the future. The energy, ideas, and commitment shown by participants highlighted the importance of investing in tomorrow's changemakers today.

A special thank you goes to Danske Bank, which not only provided funding but also sponsored and hosted an engaging Financial Literacy Workshop and Networking Event. Their commitment to fostering financial well-being and equipping communities with vital knowledge has left a lasting mark, and we are proud to stand alongside them in driving meaningful change.

We are equally grateful to our other valued sponsors, Ulster Bank, Queen's University, Titanic Belfast, Belfast City Council, Yetunde Kitchen, Buddlelite, Craic NI, and Go Succeed, whose generous support has helped us create spaces where learning, leadership, and innovation thrive.
Together, these sponsorships reflect the power of collaboration in building stronger, more inclusive communities.

**If interested, contact us and become our headline sponsor today!**

# SECOND MINORITIES RECOGNITION AWARDS IN NORTHERN IRELAND in 2024




MRANI AWARDS WINNERS 2024

**BELFAST** – In a landmark event that resonated with inspiration and unity, the **Minorities Recognition Awards Northern Ireland (MRANI) 2024** was held, creating a powerful atmosphere of inclusivity and appreciation. The ceremony successfully brought together a distinguished gathering of leaders, professionals, and community representatives from the corporate, non-profit, government, and minority sectors, all united in a common purpose: to champion diversity and honour the exceptional contributions of individuals and businesses from minority backgrounds.

The gala was more than an awards ceremony; it was a potent declaration of the value that diversity brings to every facet of society. It served as a vital platform to showcase outstanding work, innovative projects, and deeply inspirational stories of triumph against adversity, underscoring the immense potential that is unlocked when communities embrace talent from all walks of life.

*A Showcase of Outstanding Achievement Across Sectors*

The heart of the evening was the presentation of awards, which spanned an impressive range of industries and disciplines. Each category highlighted the profound impact made by individuals whose dedication and excellence are shaping a more inclusive and dynamic Northern Ireland.

# SECOND MINORITIES RECOGNITION AWARDS IN NORTHERN IRELAND in 2024




MRANI AWARDS WINNERS 2024

Among the celebrated winners were:

- **Advancing Diversity & Inclusion Advocate:** Awarded to a visionary individual who has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to breaking down barriers and fostering equitable environments within their organization and the wider community.
- **Arts, Media & Advertising:** Recognising a creative professional whose work amplifies diverse voices, challenges stereotypes, and enriches Northern Ireland's cultural landscape.
- **STEM Champion (Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths):** This award honoured innovators and leaders in fields including healthcare, technology, and research & development, celebrating their groundbreaking contributions that drive progress for all.
- **Young Businesswoman of the Year:** Bestowed upon a dynamic entrepreneur who has built a successful enterprise while inspiring the next generation of leaders from minority communities.
- **Inspiring Champion & Outstanding Achievement:** These prestigious awards celebrate individuals whose personal journeys and remarkable accomplishments serve as a beacon of resilience, leadership, and empowerment for others.

# MRANI LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD




## ANNA LO

In a defining moment of the evening, the Minorities Recognition Awards Northern Ireland (MRANI) 2024 presented its highest honour, the Lifetime Achievement Award, to Anna Lo MBE, a visionary leader whose lifelong dedication has profoundly shaped the landscape of equality and inclusion in the region.

The audience rose in a heartfelt standing ovation to celebrate Ms. Lo, a trailblazer whose career is a testament to the power of resilient advocacy.

Her groundbreaking achievement as Northern Ireland's first elected politician from an ethnic minority background was not just a personal victory but a pivotal moment for representation, proving that leadership should reflect the full diversity of the community it serves.

The award recognises a lifetime of dedicated service spent supporting ethnic minorities and championing the values of equality and mutual understanding. Anna Lo has consistently been a powerful voice for the voiceless, tirelessly working to break down barriers and build bridges across communities.

“We are immensely proud to present this award to Anna Lo,” the organisers stated. “Her remarkable contributions have not only paved the way for future generations but have also left an indelible mark on our society. Her work is a powerful reminder that each of us has a role to play in forging a more inclusive and compassionate world for all.”
The award serves as a fitting tribute to a woman whose unwavering commitment continues to inspire action and drive positive change across Northern Ireland.

**Inspiring Discourse and a Catalyst for Change**

The ceremony was further elevated by insightful speeches from guest speakers, who shared compelling perspectives on the critical importance of diversity, inclusion, and the conscious act of celebrating often-unsung achievements. Their messages reinforced the idea that recognition is a key driver of continued progress.








Overall, the inaugural MRANI Awards 2024 was a resounding success. It did more than hand out trophies; it shed a brilliant and deserved light on the talent, resilience, and positive impact of individuals from minority backgrounds. The event has firmly established itself as a catalyst for future initiatives and cross-sector collaborations, paving the way for more inclusive workplaces, stronger communities, and a richer, more prosperous society for all of Northern Ireland.

The MRANI Awards 2024 have set a powerful precedent, proving that when we celebrate diversity, we truly celebrate excellence.

# SPOTLIGHT ON OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS




## Sandra Agoha

**Category: Hospitality**
**Sandy's African Food Hub**

Sandra (Sandy) Agoha is a Nigerian-born entrepreneur and community figure based in Derry, Northern Ireland. She is best known for opening Sandy's African Food Hub, the first restaurant in the city to focus on authentic African cuisine.

**Culinary & Cultural Impact**
Since launching in May 2023 on Bonds Street, Sandra's restaurant quickly became a local favourite, celebrated for its rich, authentic African flavours crafted using both local and African-sourced ingredients

**Business Growth & Recognition**
In 2024, the restaurant earned multiple accolades: she was named Highly Commended Business Person of the Year at the Derry Journal People's Awards and won Hospitality at the Ethnic Minorities Recognition Awards NI.

As the business grew, Sandra relocated the restaurant to a larger premises on Spencer Road to better serve the community with a more welcoming dining experience.

**Community Engagement**
Beyond food, Sandra actively supports and participates in events celebrating African culture—such as African Day events, Christmas Day community gatherings, Black History Month programs, and school intercultural events —fostering togetherness through food, music, and art.

**Resilience Amid Challenges**
Earlier this year, the restaurant was vandalised when its windows were smashed. Local officials condemned the act, reinforcing the community's support for Sandra and her family during this troubling time.

# CHAMPIONING DIVERSITY & INCLUSION



## Babita Sharma

**Advancing Diversity & Inclusion Advocate**

Babita Sharma is an award-winning broadcaster, documentary filmmaker, and author whose work has illuminated untold stories and celebrated cultural heritage. Best known as a former BBC World News anchor and presenter of Newsday, she has fronted acclaimed documentaries including Dangerous Borders: A Journey across India & Pakistan and Booze, Beans & Bhajis: The Story of the Corner Shop

.

Her bestselling book, The Corner Shop, explores the vital role that immigrant communities have played in shaping modern Britain, blending personal memoir with social history.

Beyond broadcasting, Babita is a passionate advocate for diversity, inclusion, and mental health. She has mentored young journalists from underrepresented backgrounds, worked with the charity Mind, and currently serves as a Trustee of United for Global Mental Health and Patron of the South Asian Heritage Trust

Today, she continues to use her voice on global stages from the UN World Investment Forum to COP27 championing representation, equity, and cultural understanding.
Babita Sharma stands as a powerful advocate for a more inclusive world both on screen and beyond.

She's engaged in speaking events like Cardiff Conversations, addressing disinformation and media literacy, and delivered a podcast series, Whose Truth? exploring how disinformation affects topics like COVID-19, climate change, misogyny, and conflict



Babita Sharma (Advancing Diversity & Inclusion Advocate Individual) sponsored by Belfast CityCouncil

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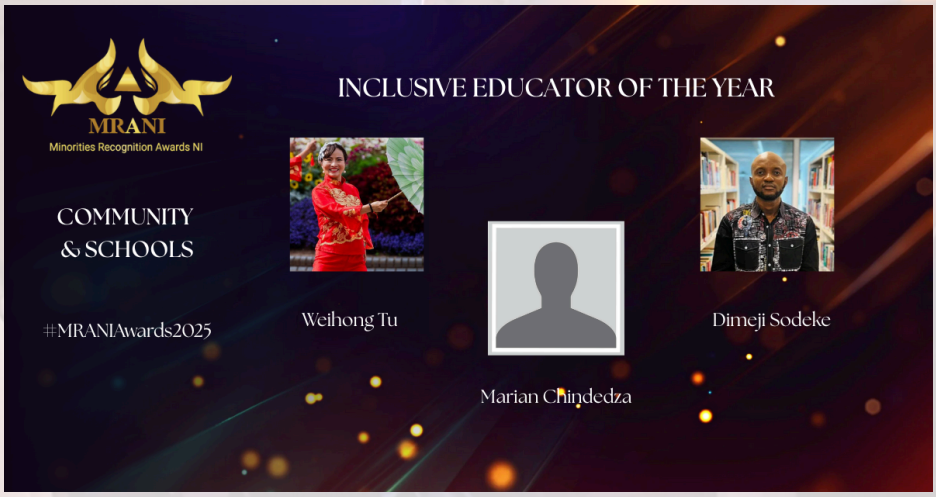
# MRANI AWARDS 2025- SHORTLIST



# A Tribute to Anna Lo, MLA




She wasn't just a politician; she was a pioneer. Anna Lo didn't just take a seat in the Northern Ireland Assembly; she shattered a centuries-old ceiling, becoming a powerful voice for the voeless and a living symbol of a changing Belfast.

Anna's story is one of incredible resilience. She arrived in Belfast from Hong Kong in 1974, intending to stay for just a year to learn English. Instead, she found a home, a cause, and her life's work. She witnessed firsthand the challenges faced by ethnic minorities, from racism and social exclusion to bureaucratic indifference.

Rather than simply enduring, she began organizing. Before her political career, Anna was a formidable community activist. She worked with the Chinese Welfare Association and helped establish the Belfast Chinese Women's Group, creating vital support networks and advocating for those who struggled to have their voices heard. Her activism was rooted in a simple, powerful belief: everyone deserves dignity, respect, and a fair chance.

As an MLA for the Alliance Party, Anna Lo was a tenacious and principled advocate. Her platform was built on the core issues she lived and breathed:

- **Anti-Racism & Diversity:** She was the undisputed champion for ethnic minority communities in Northern Ireland, constantly pushing for better legislation, support services, and representation.



- **Women's Rights:** A fierce feminist, Anna advocated for women's health, economic empowerment, and protection from violence. She understood the intersecting challenges faced by women of color.
- **Social Justice**: She fought against poverty, advocated for better housing, and worked towards a more compassionate social welfare system.
- **Human Rights:** Her commitment to human rights was unwavering, shaping her stance on both international issues and local policies.

Even in the face of vile racist abuse and threats, which sadly intensified during her career, Anna Lo never wavered. She condemned the hatred with clarity and courage, using the attacks to highlight the urgent need for the work she was doing.

Anna Lo retired from politics in 2016, but her impact is indelible. She paved the way for a new generation of leaders from diverse backgrounds. She forced Northern Ireland to look in the mirror and see itself not as a monochrome society, but as the multicultural, multi-ethnic community it truly is.

She proved that one woman's courage could challenge the status quo, that a soft-spoken yet unwavering voice could echo through the halls of power, and that building bridges between communities is not just possible, it is essential.

Anna Lo's career was a masterclass in using political power for profound social good. She was, and remains, a true Ms., a woman of substance, strength, and spectacular achievement.

This tribute is inspired by the real-life legacy of Anna Lo, MLA for South Belfast (2007-2016). Thank you for your service.



# GALLERY





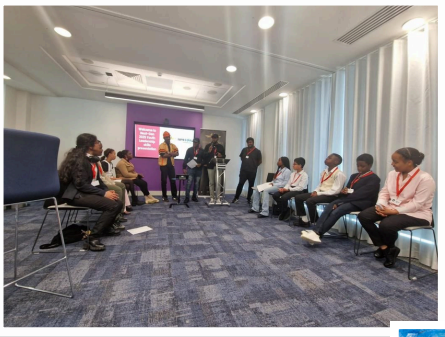

THE MINORITIES BUSINESS NETWORK NI (MBNNI) IS OFFICIALLY LAUNCHED













Next-Gen Youth Leadership Programme and the debate, proudly organised by the Minorities Recognition Awards NI in collaboration with Homeplus NI.

# GALLERY





We welcome our new members and collaboratively plan for an outstanding awards ceremony, ensuring the continued growth of MRANI!

GALLERY






EVENT AT DANSKE BANK

What an inspiring and insightful event hosted by Origin at Danske Bank , focused on "Building a More Inclusive Future - Generation of Change"

# GALLERY






EVENT AT DANSKE BANK

What an inspiring and insightful event hosted by Origin at Danske Bank , focused on "Building a More Inclusive Future - Generation of Change"




Our founder, Diane Davis (far right), alongside our Vice Chair, Oyedamola Bolajoko, recently attended the New Community Network (NCN) conference on Northwest Diversity, Culture, and Enterprise—by special invitation from NCN!



# GALLERY




An incredibly inspiring evening yesterday at our Women in Business and MRANI Multicultural networking event. A key takeaway from Magdalene Ajani, our Head of Leadership at MRANI, truly resonated with us all

GALLERY

# The Economic Impact of Diversity: Ethnic Minority Businesses in Northern Ireland

*NOAH AGBO*




Ethnic minority businesses (EMBs) are more than symbols of cultural diversity; they're engines of economic growth. Across the UK, EMBs make a substantial contribution to Gross Value Added (GVA), innovation, export activity, and employment.

Northern Ireland stands to benefit even more if the right support, recognition, and connections are cultivated. Recent UK-wide data indicate that around 250,000 ethnic minority-led firms generate approximately £25 billion annually in economic contribution.

Despite making up a smaller share of firms than average, EMBs tend to display higher ambition: more likely to plan for growth, to take risks, to innovate, and to trade overseas than non-minority small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

In Northern Ireland, though, evidence is more limited. A 2014 Joseph Rowntree Foundation study showed that ethnic minority communities often face labour market segmentation, lower wages, and under-representation in higher-paying sectors, even where education and skills are high.

The same study noted that for many, barriers such as language, recognition of overseas qualifications, and lack of networks constrain economic mobility.

Combining the UK findings with local insights suggests a strong untapped potential in Northern Ireland: if EMBs in NI could match the growth trajectories, access to finance, innovation, and export engagement seen elsewhere, their contribution could increase significantly.

For example, EMBs across the UK are about 30% more likely to report product/service innovation than non-minority firms. They also show greater appetite for risk and growth: 65 % of EMBs aim to be much bigger; 61 % are actively planning to grow (versus 43 % of all SMEs).

In Northern Ireland, though, evidence is more limited. A 2014 Joseph Rowntree Foundation study showed that ethnic minority communities often face labour market segmentation, lower wages, and under-representation in higher-paying sectors, even where education and skills are high.

To ensure EMBs fulfil their potential in Northern Ireland, collaboration is needed between government, economic development agencies, universities, and community organisations.

Universities can undertake targeted research to generate up-to-date statistics on minority business ownership, sector presence, turnover, and employment. Economic development bodies (such as Invest NI) can tailor grant, business support, export advice, and procurement policies to address the specific barriers EMBs face.

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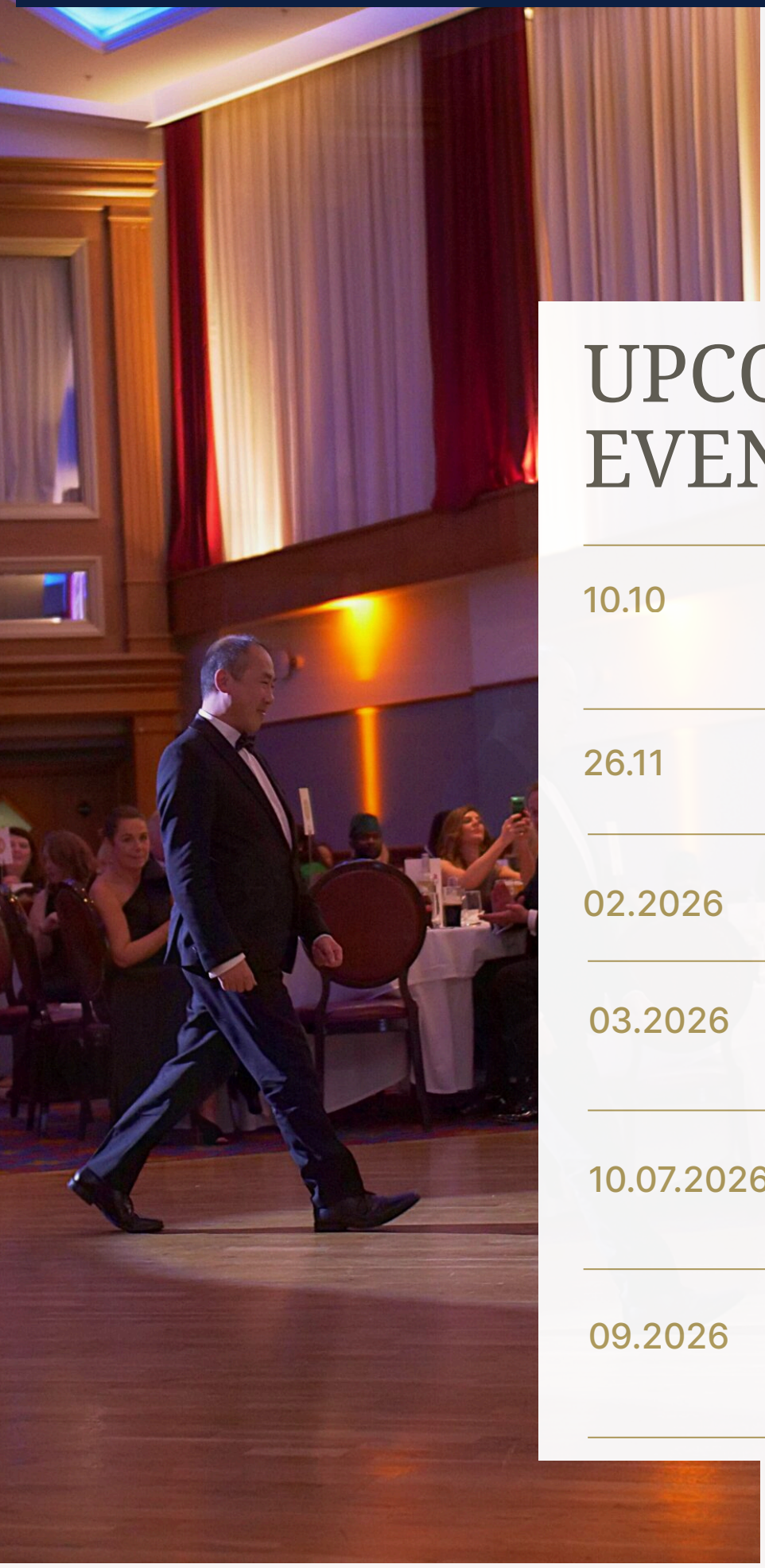
In conclusion, ethnic minority businesses are not just a social good; they are an economic imperative. Northern Ireland can unlock greater prosperity by nurturing diversity in entrepreneurship, ensuring all talented business people can contribute fully. With robust data, focused support, and collaborative action, the true economic impact of diversity in NI can be recognised, amplified, and sustained.



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# UPCOMING EVENTS

| | |
|---|---|
| 10.10 | MRANI Awards Night |
| 26.11 | UU Derry |
| 02.2026 | Nominations open! |
| 03.2026 | Launch and Learn how to nominate! |
| 10.07.2026 | Next Gen summer intensive |
| 09.2026 | Financial Literacy SUMMIT |



# CONTACT US

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ON OUR SOCIALS

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Thank You!

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