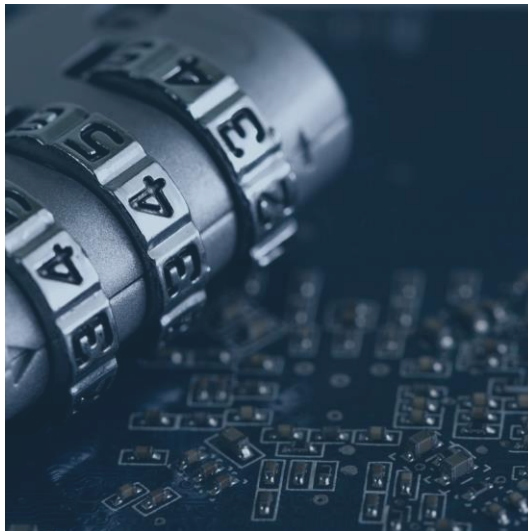


**ERS**  
Research &  
Consultancy



# Evaluation of Scale Up 4 Growth (S4GG), University of the West of England, Bristol

February 2023





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**Quality assurance**

Cathryn Rogers  
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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

ERS Ltd was commissioned in August 2021 to undertake a Summative Assessment of the Scale Up 4 Growth Gloucestershire (S4GG) Programme, funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Launched in 2020, S4GG was a 2-year, 9-month programme designed to accelerate high-growth potential (HGP) SMEs in the region to achieve their growth ambitions. Whilst based on the Scale Up 4 Growth (S4G) Programme which operated in the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), S4GG aimed to provide similar scaling up support but with emphasis on digital/cyber elements. The programme was delivered across the GFirst (Gloucestershire) LEP area by UWE Bristol (lead partner), National Westminster Bank Plc (NatWest) and Gloucestershire College. S4GG aimed to provide two distinct strands of support, grant funding and workshops. Grants were awarded to support businesses facilitate growth in job creation and turnover. Four workshops focussing on the adoption of digital technology were also delivered across the duration of the programme.

To inform the independent summative assessment, ERS undertook a document and data review based on information shared by the client. Online consultations were also conducted with the programme management and delivery teams. E-surveys, developed by ERS, were disseminated via email to SMEs supported by the programme.

## Relevance and Consistency

S4GG contributes to ERDF Priority Axis 3 (PA3): Enhancing the Competitiveness of SMEs. The rationale for S4GG is based around an “imperfect information” market failure where SMEs may be unaware of how to access, or may undervalue, the benefits of support for growing and improving their business. Public investment via programmes like S4GG can help resolve this information failure by providing opportunities for SMEs to learn from and work with experts and specialists.

The delivery team were confident in securing ample demand for S4GG based on their previous experience with the S4G Programme and multiple other ERDF programmes. Surveys with beneficiaries confirmed the demand and rationale for the programme. The long-term impact of the two S4GG strands will be an increase in competitiveness in high growth sectors and the development of new markets, in turn encouraging further investment into the region.

## Progress

The programme was part-funded through ERDF, with public sector funding contributed by UWE Bristol. Private sector match-funding was also provided by the SME beneficiaries in receipt of grant funding. The budget for S4GG was £3,388,189, with ERDF providing £1,482,520, and the remainder sourced through private match funding. Although there was some variance due to grants being claimed earlier than anticipated, programme expenditure finished in line with contrasted expenditure. In terms of output targets, most have been exceeded, with the exception of one (C5 – Number of new enterprises supported). Targets which were significantly exceeded were C8 – Employment increase in support enterprises and C29 – Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to firm products.

## Delivery and Management

The organisation, experience, and proactiveness of the team was reported to have ensured effective management and internal communication. The learning from previous programmes, some of which were delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic, equipped the team with the resources and knowledge to effectively deliver S4GG. Both partner organisations were seen as useful by consultees as they were able to provide strategic advice and practical support. Beneficiaries thought positively of the



programme, with the majority stating it was well managed, organised, and that staff understood their needs. Key success factor for the S4GG programme included: flexible and tailored support; regular communication between grantees and the programme team; clear funding criteria; interactive workshop sessions; a hybrid offer of face-to-face and online workshop attendance; and a proactive programme team amending workshop content and listening to feedback. Challenges for the programme included: the match funding element being a barrier for smaller businesses; changes to the programme timeline; attrition during the programme's lifetime; and having to modify content to ensure it was engaging to businesses at different stages and from a range of sectors. The ERDF horizontal themes were integrated within the operation and delivery of S4GG, largely through rigorous policies and procedures at UWE Bristol. An active approach was taken when considering the location and set-up of workshops to ensure sustainable methods were prioritised.

## Outcomes and Impacts

From surveys with SMEs and online consultations with the delivery team, it appears that S4GG has given beneficiaries greater capacity for growth and developed their business skills and cyber/digital knowledge. Grantee businesses surveyed gave the most common outcomes of the programme as: increased sales; development of new products and services; and accessing infrastructure. Workshop attendees who were surveyed gave the following as their most common outcomes: increased understanding of cybercrime; development of processes to protect their business from cyber threats; and increased awareness of training and upskilling opportunities. In addition, S4GG allowed UWE and the partner organisations to build relationships with businesses in the GFirst LEP and strengthen their networks across the region.

Most beneficiaries surveyed thought that in the absence of the programme, they would not have been able to achieve their outcomes at the same speed. S4GG was able to make the process of scaling up easier for many of these businesses. The economic impact assessment reveals that to date S4GG has created £1,310,312 net additional GVA and 19.7 FTEs.

## Value for Money

The S4GG delivery team have ensured value for money, through utilising the University and region's resources, for example marketing resource and venues. They have also held regular meetings to review the programme's budget and progress. Grant applications were independently assessed to ensure there was a fair process, and that the right beneficiaries i.e., those likely to generate economic benefits for the GFirst LEP, could access the programme.

In terms of benchmarking, S4GG is comparable to similar local and national business support programmes. S4GG delivered efficiently when it came to the unit cost for the number of enterprises supported to introduce new to firm products (C29), indicating success in driving innovation to market. However, the programme was inefficient with the unit costs for the number of enterprises receiving support (C1) and the number of new enterprises supported (C5). Businesses attributed little of their job and GVA returns to the programme, but this is unsurprising at this stage as the scaling up process takes time. The economic impacts of COVID-19 will have also affected businesses' ability and confidence to scale-up.



## Recommendations

The Summative Assessment has identified a few considerations for policy makers and any future similar programmes. These include:

### Funders and policy makers

- Within Gloucestershire, there is a verified need for programmes that provide tailored support for SMEs across all sectors looking to scale up. There is also demand for further funding that supports these businesses to overcome barriers to growth and assist them in cyber security.
- Universities and renowned organisations make good partners for business support initiatives due to their ability to connect businesses to research and academic expertise, to leverage their extensive networks and to use pre-existing organisational systems, thereby ensuring efficiencies.
- Match funding can be a barrier for start-ups and smaller businesses. Amending requirements to not have to match fund when receiving grants under a certain amount could persuade more SMEs to access support. Providing microgrants would allow businesses at different levels to receive support and introduce a new level of flexibility to work with different people.

### Similar programmes

- Including one-to-one sessions within the programme model could assist with SMEs acknowledging that the programme has directly helped them scale by providing them tailored advice.
- Including a range of topics within workshop sessions to tailor to all types of businesses and their sectors. Finding out this information in advance could help with the planning and organisation of sessions.
- Scoping out what type of support local, new SMEs need would maximise how efficient and personalised provision could be.



# 1 Introduction

In August 2021, ERS was commissioned by the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) to undertake a Summative Assessment of the Scale Up 4 Growth Gloucestershire (S4GG) programme. Starting in 2020, S4GG was a 2-year, 9-month programme designed to accelerate high growth potential SMEs in the Gloucestershire region to support them to achieve their growth ambitions. The programme was based on the Scale Up 4 Growth (S4G) Programme, which operated in the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). S4GG aimed to provide similar support to SMEs wishing to scale up, whilst emphasising the inclusion of digital/cyber elements that can facilitate business growth. The overall objective was to increase the growth capacity of businesses across the region through grant funding and/or workshops. By providing funding and cyber/digital business support, S4GG enabled beneficiaries across all sectors to attract investment and grow in regional, national, and international markets. The programme was delivered across the GFirst (Gloucestershire) LEP areas, including Gloucester, Tewkesbury, Cirencester, Stroud, Forest of Dean and Cheltenham.

The programme was part-funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), with public sector funding contributed by UWE Bristol. Private sector match-funding was also provided by the SME beneficiaries in receipt of the grant funding strand of support. The budget for S4GG was £3,388,189, with ERDF providing £1,482,520, and the remainder was sourced through private match funding. S4GG contributed to ERDF Priority Axis 3 (PA3): Enhancing the Competitiveness of SMEs. Specifically, it contributed to 3d – supporting the capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises to grow in regional, national, and international markets and to engage in innovation processes.

## Delivery model and structure

The programme was delivered by UWE Bristol, and the Research, Business, and Innovation Department (RBI) in particular. It was led in partnership with National Westminster Bank Plc (NatWest) and Gloucestershire College. Within this partnership, UWE Bristol was responsible for contributing their expertise in marketing, business models/supply chain and innovation, while NatWest contributed their knowledge in the areas of entrepreneurship, finance, and investment during workshops. Gloucestershire College were brought onboard to provide a regional anchor for the programme, through which the programme team was able to obtain insights on the regional business landscape. The College was able to gain access to a network of businesses in the region from a promotional perspective and also hosted the two-day workshop as part of the programme.

The programme aimed to promote growth in the GFirst LEP area by running two strands of growth-enabling activities: grant funding and workshops. The delivery of these activities took place between October 2020 and March 2023. Grant funding was available for local SMEs with innovative growth projects, helping them to generate growth in job creation or turnover. 35 grants valued between £10,000 and £40,000 were to be awarded to SMEs. An additional round of funding took place in July 2022 where grantees were invited to apply again to access funds remaining from the initial allocation to SMEs. The workshops were designed specifically for SMEs who were interested in developing and/or adopting new digital and cyber technologies, aiming to help them address their growth challenges and increase their understanding of digital and cyber opportunities that could act as solutions.

## Programme evaluation

ERS was commissioned to undertake the independent evaluation in accordance with the ERDF Summative Assessment Guidance. A detailed document and data review was undertaken, which included the following information shared by UWE Bristol: ERDF Funding Application; logic model; and monitoring data. This review, alongside an inception meeting informed the development of research tools for the primary research strands of data collection. Two e-surveys developed by ERS were then disseminated by the UWE Bristol team to SME beneficiaries of the grant funding and workshop strands.



In total, 39 survey responses were received from both surveys. Finally, online consultations were conducted with seven members of the programme management and delivery teams in order to understand areas of best practice, lessons learnt, and recommendations for future provision. Feedback forms disseminated by UWE Bristol at workshops were also gathered and analysed to form part of the programme evaluation.





## 2 Relevance and Consistency

This chapter explores the socio-economic and policy context, rationale for the programme, programme design, and objectives. It is structured as follows:

- Context
- Rationale
- Programme development and design
- Programme aims

### The regional socio-economic context

The GFirst LEP aims to promote economic growth, increase the number of jobs, and provide opportunity for businesses in the region. Its business base is primarily characterised by the location of GCHQ in its region, the Government's central digital intelligence and security agency. As such, 'there is a strong concentration of skills in cyber security within the region' and sector growth is concentrated within the IT and Digital industries particularly within cyber-tech and cyber security<sup>1</sup>. This has resulted in a 185 per cent growth in the number of registered active cyber security firms across the geography in the ten years leading up to 2017<sup>2</sup>.

Given the area's primary sectors are within the IT and digital spheres, both spheres that are typically highly productive, the Strategic Economic Plan for Gloucestershire notes that the GFirst LEP produces a GVA per head of £26,093. This outperforms the South West average of £23,091, although is lower than the UK average of £26,621<sup>3</sup>.

There are significant growth opportunities within the area. A recent survey by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport highlighted that only 36 per cent of businesses have cyber security policies in place<sup>4</sup>. Consequently, there is a high growth potential in the cyber-security sector that the GFirst LEP area is well placed to capitalise on. Furthermore, financial services are the most significant export in terms of value produced by the wider region including Gloucestershire, totalling £1,495m in annual revenues<sup>5</sup>. With the rise of fintech and the need for cyber security within the financial sector, there are clear opportunities for growth.

97.3 per cent of the GFirst business base are SMEs employing fewer than 50 people. As such, there is a large demographic of dynamic businesses that are positioned to capitalise on opportunities. This is already being planned by one of the central players in the cyber sector within the GFirst LEP region; the Cyber Resilience Alliance sets out ambitions to develop employment in the sector from 5,000 FTEs in 2018 to 10,000 by 2025<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cyber Resilience Alliance – Appendix A <https://www.cyberresiliencealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Cyber-Resilience-Alliance.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Gloucestershire Local Industrial Strategy 2019 [gloucestershire\\_draft\\_local-industrial-strategy\\_2019-updated.pdf](https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/10000000/gloucestershire_draft_local-industrial-strategy_2019-updated.pdf) ([gfirstlep.com](https://www.gfirstlep.com))

<sup>3</sup> Strategic Economic Plan for Gloucestershire 2.0 <https://www.gfirstlep.com/downloads/2018/sep-2-update2018v3.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Cyber Security Breaches Survey 2019 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/813599/Cyber\\_Security\\_Breaches\\_Survey\\_2019\\_-\\_Main\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/813599/Cyber_Security_Breaches_Survey_2019_-_Main_Report.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Gloucestershire Five Foundations of Productivity Evidence Report [https://www.gfirstlep.com/downloads/2019/gloucestershire\\_five-foundations-of-productivity-evidence-report\\_2019.pdf](https://www.gfirstlep.com/downloads/2019/gloucestershire_five-foundations-of-productivity-evidence-report_2019.pdf)



Despite this, there remain clear barriers to economic growth particularly for the aforementioned SME base. The challenges faced by scaling up SMEs are well recognised and include access to finance, new talent, and new markets. There is no lack of support for start-up businesses, as evidenced by the Start and Grow Enterprises programme, but there is a gap in specific provision to support businesses with their ambitions to scale up.

## Market failure rationale

The rationale for public investment must be evidenced by a clear case of a market failure, whether that be relating to issues of: public goods, externalities, asymmetric/imperfect information, imperfect competition and/or co-ordination problems<sup>6</sup>.

The rationale for S4GG is based around an “imperfect information” market failure. This is frequently used to describe the rationale for public investment in business support, as it is thought that many may be unaware of how to access or may undervalue the benefits of support for growing and improving their business. Evidence suggests this is particularly true for SMEs<sup>7</sup>. This is because they are less likely to engage with external information sources or have the capacity/knowledge to investigate support to grow their business effectively. It might also be the case that informed SMEs lack the capacity and skills to capture and develop innovation opportunities. Public investment can help resolve this information failure by providing opportunities for SMEs to learn from and work with experts and specialists.

In addition, market power results from insufficient competition to ensure that a market operates efficiently. High start-up costs can deter entry by competitors, creating market power. This can be a particular challenge for those businesses operating, or seeking to operate, in the science and technology sector, where there is a need for continual R&D and high resource requirements in order to achieve innovation and growth. Additionally, not all the benefits of innovation are felt by the innovator, where new products create developments and opportunities for wider sectors. There are therefore externalities to innovation. By alleviating some of the start-up risks, public investment can support SMEs to develop, grow and support wider innovation.

SMEs are commonly being led by very driven individuals or teams of entrepreneurs who have often not received any formal training in how to grow their business, identify barriers to growth and develop solutions to address these. The topics of scale up support and understanding a growth mindset are important for businesses and providing a peer-to-peer learning environment can help with this.

## The policy context

The S4GG programme was in strategic alignment with key stakeholder authorities including the UK government, the GFirst LEP and ERDF Operational Programme.

The S4GG Programme primarily addressed Priority Axis 3 (PA3): Enhancing the Competitiveness of SMEs:

- 3c – Supporting the creation and the extension of advanced capacities for products, services and development.
- 3d – Supporting the capacity of small and medium sized enterprises to grow in regional, national and international markets and to engage in innovation processes.

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<sup>6</sup> HM Treasury (2018) The Green Book, available at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/685903/The\\_Green\\_Book.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/685903/The_Green_Book.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Department for Business Innovation & Skills (2014) Innovation Report 2014

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/293635/bis-14-p188-innovation-report-2014-revised.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/293635/bis-14-p188-innovation-report-2014-revised.pdf)



The UK Industrial Strategy outlines the aspiration for the UK to be the best place in the world to start and grow a business. The strategy recognises that SMEs face barriers to scaling up, including a lack of finance and emphasises the importance of providing support and investment to facilitate the growth of businesses with the greatest potential<sup>8</sup>. This priority is additionally shared with the ERDF Operational Programme which outlines the priority to help SMEs develop capacity and productivity drivers that create growth and jobs<sup>9</sup>. The S4GG programme directly aligns with these strategic priorities by providing specific support for businesses to scale up their operations.

The GFirst LEP has additionally committed to assisting these enterprises to expand and grow, increase productivity, and realise long term potential, particularly through supporting the adoption of digital technology and cyber security.

## Business support provision in the region

S4GG prided itself on specialising in business growth, particularly for businesses going through digital transformation. This separates it from other business support schemes in the region. There are a few small business schemes in the GFirst LEP that are operated via the Growth Hub network which has an incubation space to help start-up businesses. The S4GG programme team viewed the Growth Hubs as complimentary to the programme. In addition, programme team consultees noted that the University of Bristol has specialisms in scaling up, although its offer is more restrictive and geared towards SMEs with an existing relationship with the University and belonging to certain sectors. Despite these similarities, due to its locality outside the GFirst LEP, it is understood that the University of Bristol's remit does not necessarily affect the uniqueness of S4GG's offer to the area.

The programme also focussed on supporting businesses going through a digital transformation or adoption, rather than providing generic growth advice. This specialism, provided via a mixture of free support and grant funding, is not known to have been in place in the LEP area before S4GG. Likewise, although tailored support to specific businesses, workshops, and one-to-one coaching are available forms of support in the area, there has been little grant funding in the region to allow SMEs to grow. Similarly, although other schemes focussing solely on R&D may be present, S4GG's eligible costs for grant funding have been more open to expenditures such as premises and marketing.

A programme team consultee noted that the presence of a business support programme like S4GG could be an opportunity for businesses to consult and have conversations with others outside of their usual networks and support systems. It can be vital for those who are at a certain stage and who find it difficult to access training and support to access wider networks and forms of support. A consultee also highlighted that during the pandemic, which led to the digitising of many businesses' offerings and platforms, more businesses have needed to become aware of securing their data and systems. Having a trusted provider like UWE Bristol allowed the University's academics and networks to support businesses in the region to scale up and learn more about the cyber/digital aspects of business.

## Programme development and design

As a higher education institution, UWE Bristol plays an active role in informing regional strategy and policy, and as such has a deep understanding of the market and how to fulfil the needs of local enterprise. This, as well as having well-established processes in place, ensured that S4GG was designed to address market failures and that it delivered via a model that was suitable and receptive to the needs of businesses within the locality.

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<sup>8</sup> UK Industrial Strategy (2017)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/664563/industrial-strategy-white-paper-web-ready-version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664563/industrial-strategy-white-paper-web-ready-version.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> ERDF Operational Programme 2014 to 2020

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/949377/ERDF-Operational-Programme-Dec-2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/949377/ERDF-Operational-Programme-Dec-2020.pdf)



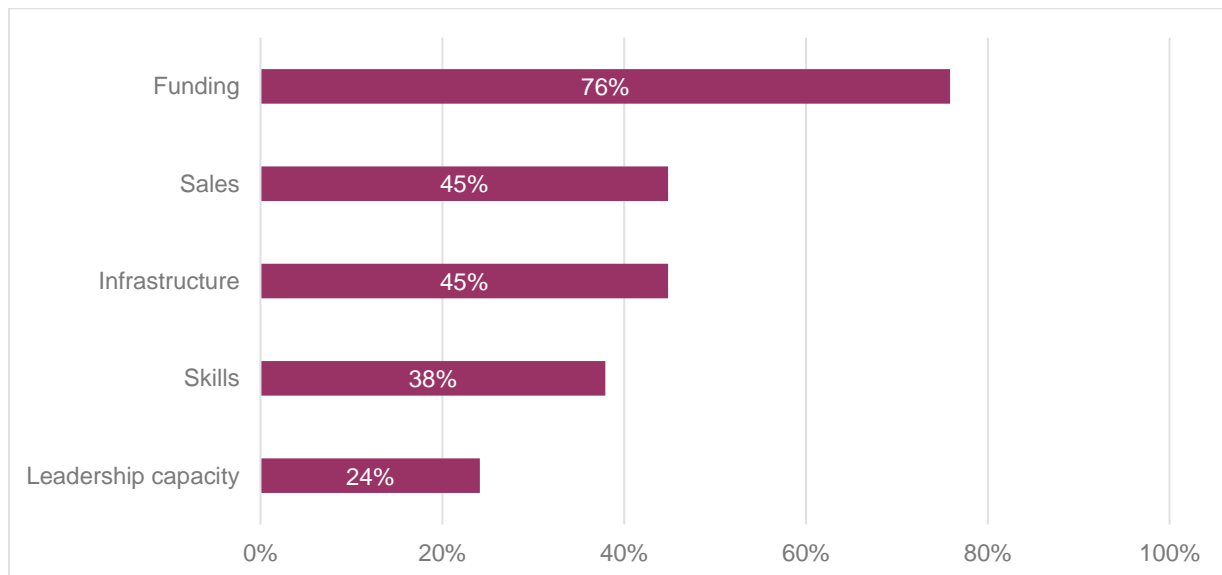
The programme team were confident that there would be ample demand for S4GG based on the team's previous experience delivering similar support provision, including the S4G programme. S4GG was based on a tried and tested model used previously in the West of England, with the cyber element included at request of the GFirst LEP due to gaps in support within the region. As with its predecessor programme, having both workshops and funding available was proven to be valuable for businesses at different stages as it provided them with the chance to pursue different options. For example, a business might want to only access workshops and receive practical advice if they were not ready for funding and were unable to provide the match funding required, whereas another business might be more comfortable and ready to accept a grant to scale up their business.

UWE Bristol's two delivery partners enabled the programme to reach more businesses. With NatWest's long-established relationship with the University, they were able to add credibility to S4GG. Furthermore, with their growth mindset, trusted reputation, and enterprising nature, the organisation has been a suitable good fit for the S4GG programme. Gloucestershire College was able to offer their experience and expertise in designing the workshops, their network, and locations for three of the workshops.

### Beneficiary motivations for participating

Grant recipient survey respondents indicated a range of barriers to business growth and scaling up. Figure 2.1 below shows clearly that funding was a critical obstacle to growth, given that over three quarters of respondents cited this as a key barrier (n=29). This indicates that grant funding is the correct format of support for this cohort of businesses. Additionally, 45 per cent of businesses cited sales and infrastructure as a barrier to growth, with the least prevalent barrier being leadership capacity (24 per cent). When asked if they had received other financial support before, 52 per cent of survey respondents said they had not, with S4GG grant funding being the first they had accessed (n=29).

Figure 2.1: Grant recipient survey respondents' barriers to growth (n=29)



Workshop attendee survey respondents had a number of reasons for participating in the workshops. Figure 2.2 overleaf shows that the majority cited reasons associated with cyber skills and knowledge. 70 per cent of SMEs cited learning more about cyber security and fraud as their reason for attending the workshops (n=10). In addition, half of businesses cited help with identifying digital and cyber security gaps within their business and help with growing and improving their business through digital means as reasons for participating in the workshops. This illustrates the successful marketing of the



programme as a support workshop for businesses with cyber issues or wanting to increase their cyber security.

On the other hand, the least cited reasons for participation in the S4GG workshops included establishing a relationship with University and academic staff (10 per cent) and identifying and overcoming barriers to growth (30 per cent). It is notable that a number of the workshop participants did not cite growth as a key reason for participation in the workshops, despite growth being a core objective of the scheme.

**Figure 2.2: Workshop participant survey respondents' reasons for participating (n=10)**



## Programme objectives, outcomes, and impacts

S4GG aimed to support SMEs within the GFirst LEP to scale up their businesses whilst supporting them with cyber/digital aspects. The programme did this through two distinct yet complimentary strands of support: providing grants and delivering workshops.

The programme's target outputs were:

- 71 enterprises receiving support, 36 of which attended workshops and 35 grant recipients (C1)
- 35 enterprises receiving grants (C2)
- 36 enterprises receiving non-financial support (C4)
- 13 new enterprises supported (C5)
- £1,857,143 private investment matching public support to enterprises (C6)
- 35 new jobs created across the supported enterprises (C8)
- 24 enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products (C29)
- 36 enterprises receiving information, diagnostic, and brokerage support (P13)

The outcomes and impacts listed within the programme logic model are noted overleaf. Performance against these aims and objectives is discussed in chapter three of this report.



### Intended Outcomes

- Increase the amount of private investment in the region
- Increase the number of new jobs created in the region
- Increase the number of new to firm products by participant SMEs

### Intended Impacts

- Build stronger relationships and networks between participating SMEs
- Increase the high growth capacity of SMEs in Gloucestershire
- Build on the 'knowledge capital' of individual entrepreneurs embedded in the LEP region with respect to 'scale up' and cyber/digital challenges.

## Summary

The GFirst LEP works to promote regional economic growth, increase the number of jobs available, and provide opportunity for businesses. Growth within the LEP is concentrated within the IT and Digital industries particularly within cyber-tech and cyber security. Although there is no lack of support for start-ups, there is a gap for supporting businesses intending to grow and scale up.

The S4GG Programme primarily addressed Priority Axis 3 (PA3): Enhancing the Competitiveness of SMEs. The rationale for the programme is based around an “imperfect information” market failure. This is frequently used to describe the rationale for public investment in business support, as it is thought that many businesses, including SMEs may be unaware of how to access, or may undervalue the benefits of support for growing and improving their business. It might also be the case that informed SMEs lack the capacity and skills to capture and develop innovation opportunities. Public investment can help resolve this information failure by providing opportunities for SMEs to learn from and work with experts and specialists.

The S4GG programme directly aligns with the priorities of the UK Industrial Strategy. Few other programmes exist in Gloucestershire that meet these objectives and provide the same opportunities as S4GG. UWE is in a unique position in offering specialist scale up support, that builds on their experience and networks to SMEs from all sectors.

The programme team were confident that there would be demand for a programme like S4GG in Gloucestershire. Surveys with beneficiaries confirmed the demand and rationale for the programme.

The aim of the S4GG programme was to support SMEs within the GFirst LEP to scale up through two distinct but complementary strands of support: grant funding and workshops. The long-term impact of these two strands will be the building of stronger networks between SMEs and high growth capacity for businesses, along with building on the 'knowledge capital' of individuals in the region with respect to 'scaling up' and cyber/digital challenges.



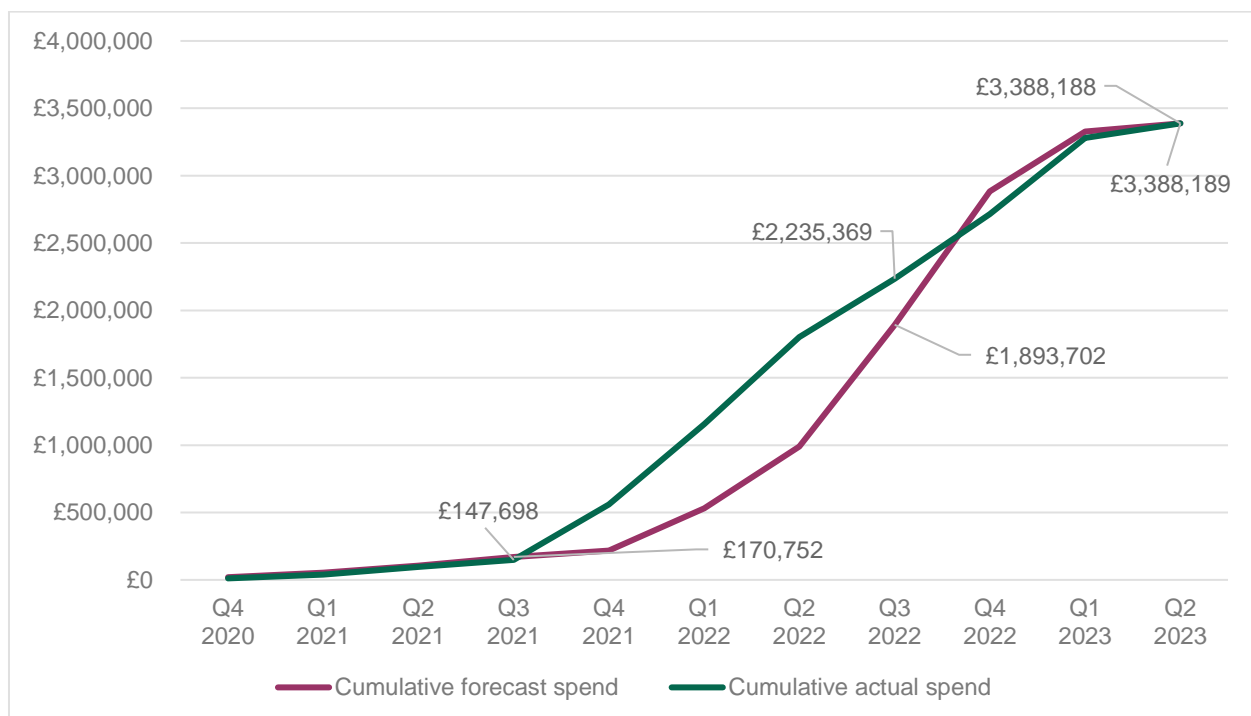
### 3 Progress

This chapter outlines the programme's performance against expenditure and output targets, as set out within the ERDF funding agreement. It concludes with an overview of the profile of beneficiaries that the S4GG programme has engaged with.

#### Programme expenditure

The budget for S4GG was £3,388,189, with ERDF providing £1,482,520 (revenue funding). Figure 3.1 below shows the cumulative actual spend against the cumulative contracted spend per quarter over the lifetime of the programme. As can be seen, actual spend matched target spend over the programme's lifetime, and as such there is no cause for concern around expenditure. However, there is a clear overspend between Q3 2021 and Q4 2022, which programme team members suggested was due to grants being claimed much earlier than anticipated. Following this, more recent grant expenditure was scaled back, which allowed for the scheme to meet its expected budget. Q3 was also when an additional round of funding was introduced for SMEs on the programme. This was due to funding still left over from some companies withdrawing from the programme, consequently allowing an increase in spend during the following quarters.

Figure 3.1: Cumulative actual programme spend against cumulative contracted programme spend



#### Outputs and results

Table 3.1 overleaf compares the programme's total outputs against targets, including future forecasts against lifetime targets. Progress has been measured against actual outputs to date.

S4GG has consistently performed well against its target outputs. Seven out of eight targets have been exceeded, in some cases by a substantial margin. The achievement of targets C1, C2, C4 and P13 indicate that sufficient demand for the support offered by S4GG and that the team have marketed the programme exceptionally well to recruit existing businesses. Despite this, the C5 target is noticeably low. This could be explained by several factors – for instance, it could be the case that S4GG has not





marketed itself in the right places or in the right way to attract new businesses. Alternatively, the initial target that was set could have been unrealistically high for the scheme. S4GG is primarily focussed on business growth and capacity expansion, which is perhaps more appropriate for SMEs which are already established but possibly stagnating. As such, lower progress against this outcome is not as concerning, as the programme's rationale naturally prioritises other outputs which have been successfully achieved.

The vast overperformance in achieving targets against outputs C8 and C29 indicates that S4GG has delivered its intended outcomes extremely well. S4GG supported the creation of more than three times as many jobs as initially targeted and has exceeded new to the firm products delivered exceptionally well. Employment increase and delivery of new products to the firm are two key vehicles for business growth, which is the core objective of the programme. As such, these are two critical success factors that initially indicate the significant achievement of the scheme's intended outcomes.

Table 3.1: S4GG programme outputs and targets achieved (Q4 2022)

Output	Lifetime target	Actual to date	Per cent of lifetime contracted target achieved
C1 – Number of enterprises receiving support	71	73	103%
C2 – Number of enterprises receiving grants	35	36	103%
C4 – Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	36	41	114%
C5 – Number of new enterprises supported	13	1	31%
C6 – Private investment matching public support to enterprises (Grants)	£1,857,142	£1,962,186	106%
C8 – Employment increase in support enterprises	35	123.5	353%
C29 – Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	24	33	138%
P13 – Number of enterprises receiving information, diagnostic and brokerage support	36	41	114%

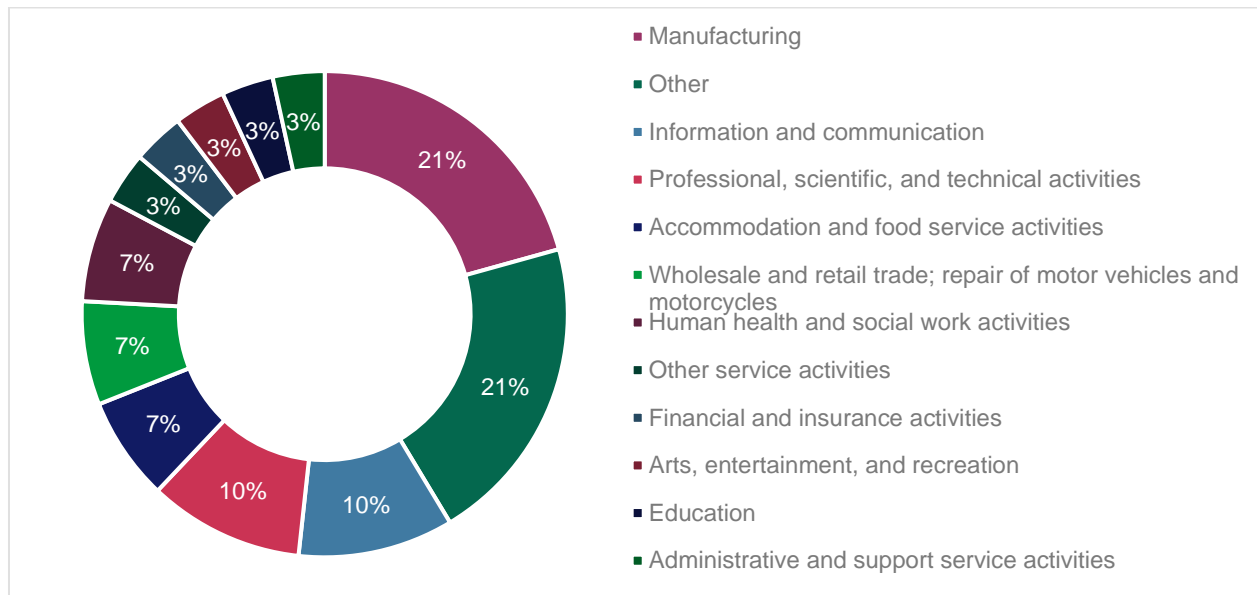
## Beneficiary profile

SMEs responding to the grant funding survey were from a vast array of sectors. Figure 3.2 overleaf shows that respondents identified with 12 different sectors (n=29). The two most popular sectors of operation were manufacturing and 'other' (21 per cent each). When prompted, firms selecting 'other' described themselves as brewing, e-commerce, and fresh produce packaging. The range of sectors reinforces the broad appeal of the grant funding element of the S4GG programme.



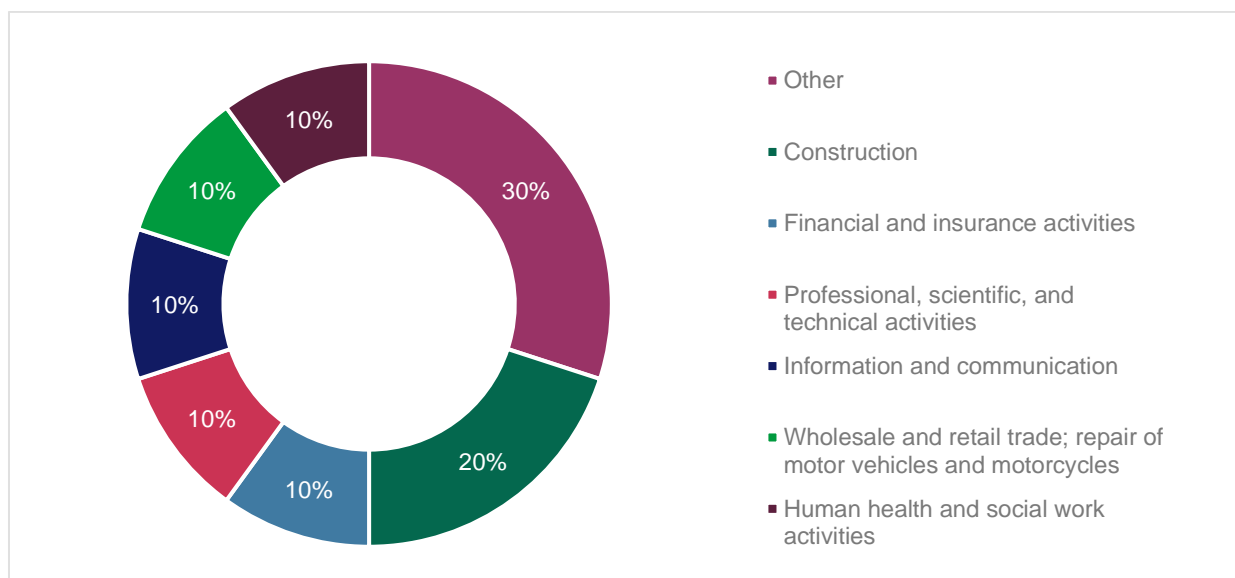


Figure 3.2: Grant recipients survey respondents' business sector (n=29)<sup>10</sup>



Similar to respondents who received grant funding, those who took part in the workshops were from a range of sectors, illustrating the broad appeal and reach of the S4GG programme. On the face of it, survey respondents came from seven sectors, however three of those ten respondents identified themselves within 'other' sectors (n=10). When asked to specify their sector, these businesses identified themselves as graphic design, fleet management and vehicle tracking, and events and hospitality businesses. As such, the only sector with multiple SMEs operating within it was construction, with two respondents. Figure 3.3 below shows the distribution of sectors of workshop participant survey respondents.

Figure 3.3: Workshop participants survey respondents' business sector (n=10)

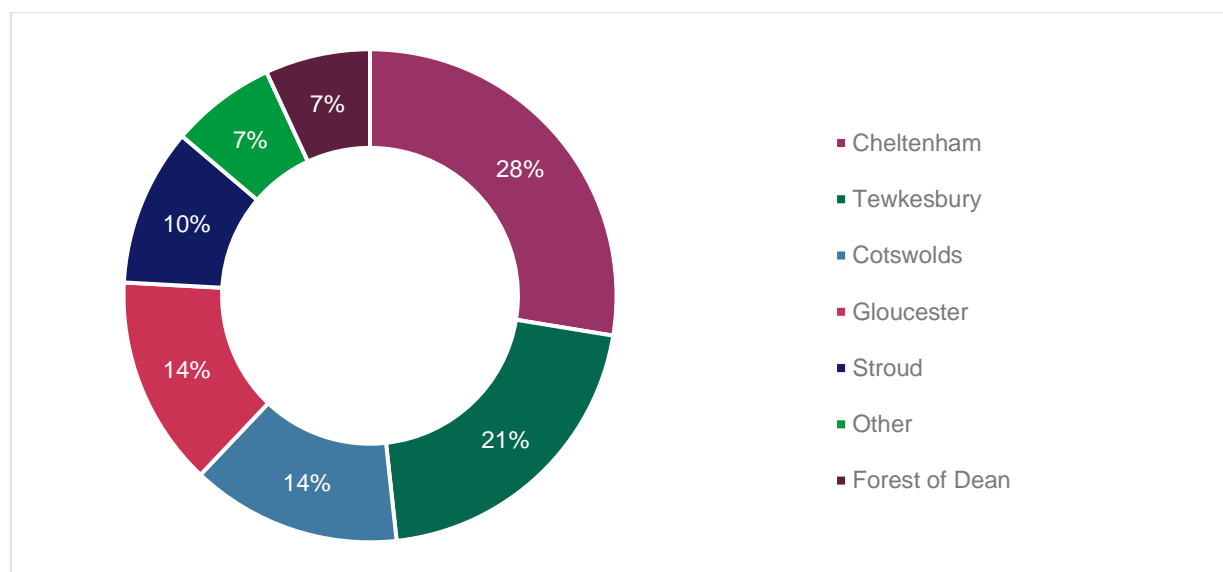


<sup>10</sup> Percentages within figure may not add to 100 due to rounding.



SME survey respondents who received grants were located in a highly diverse number of areas, as can be seen in Figure 3.4 below. These businesses were most likely to be located in Cheltenham (28 per cent), followed by Tewkesbury (21 per cent) (n=29). Despite the workshops attracting their highest proportion of participants from Gloucester, only 14 per cent of grant recipient respondents were located in Gloucester. Grant recipient respondents were least likely to be located in the Forest of Dean (7 per cent). The range of locations credits the marketing team's ability to reach SMEs in various locations in need of the programme's support. In addition, it illustrates the demand for S4GG across the GFirst LEP's authorities.

Figure 3.4 Grant recipients survey respondents' business location (n=29)<sup>11</sup>

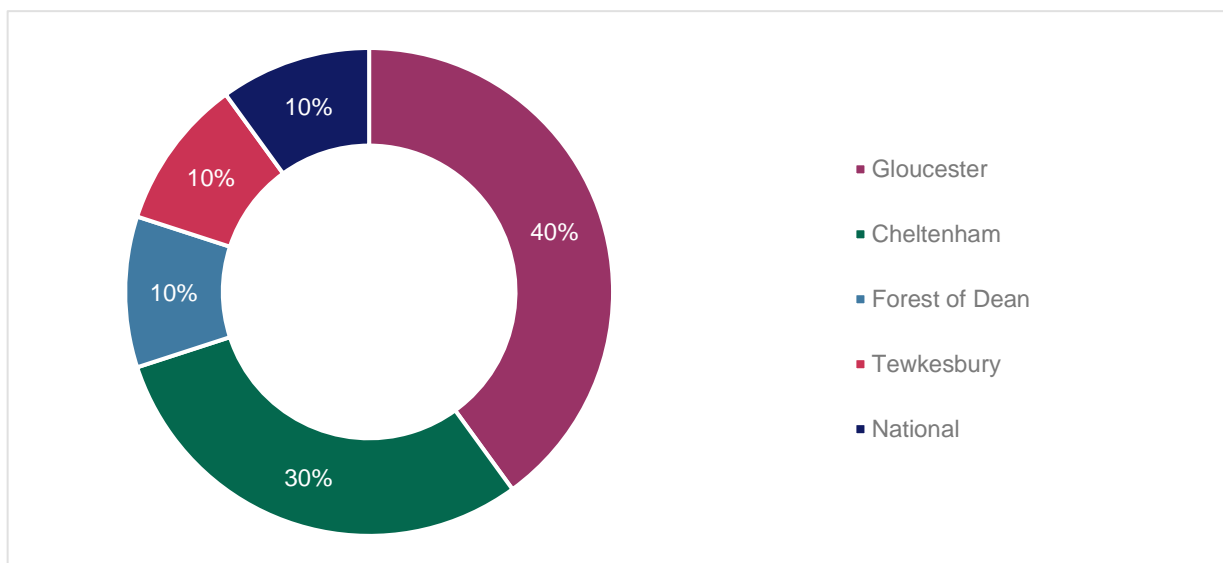


Survey respondents who attended the workshops were most likely to be located in Gloucester (40 per cent) or Cheltenham (30 per cent), and these areas accounted for seven of the ten respondents (n=10). Figure 3.5 overleaf shows the geographic diversity of workshop survey respondents' locations. The first three workshops were delivered in person at the Advanced Digital Academy at the Cheltenham Campus at Gloucestershire College, and the fourth at the Gloucestershire Growth Hub, with the option of attending online at all sessions. The intention was to make the programme accessible to as many eligible businesses within the Gloucestershire area. This was successful as the programme was able to attract participants from the Forest of Dean and Tewkesbury. However, there was a notable absence of businesses from Stroud and the Cotswolds, illustrating the potential need to better market the scheme in those areas.

<sup>11</sup> Percentages within figure may not add to 100 due to rounding.



Figure 3.5 Workshop participants survey respondents' business location (n=10)



## Summary

The budget for S4GG was £3,388,189, with ERDF providing £1,482,520 in revenue funding. Overall, programme expenditure began and finished in line with forecasted expenditure, though there was some variance between the end of 2021 and end of 2022, which can be explained by grants being claimed earlier than anticipated. While remaining within projected expenditure limits, all output targets bar one have been fully achieved (and in many cases exceeded), which showcases the overwhelmingly positive effect of S4GG on businesses in Gloucestershire.

The only output target which has not been successfully reached relates to supporting new enterprises (C5), suggesting that the programme has not marketed itself in the right places or the right way to attract newly established businesses, or that the target was too high for a programme focusing on scaling up. Despite this, the programme has overdelivered on several targets (including the creation of new jobs (C8) and new products supported (C29)), suggesting that it still had a highly positive impact overall.

SMEs responding to surveys represented a broad range of sector backgrounds, demonstrating the programme's success in reaching a wide range of businesses. This applied to both workshop attendants and grant funding recipients. In addition to a broad range of sectors, businesses were also geographically spread, although most businesses attending workshops were located within Cheltenham and Gloucester, and most grant funding recipients Cheltenham and Tewkesbury.



## 4 Delivery and Management

This chapter of the report reviews the delivery and management of the S4GG programme, focussing on:

- Programme set up
- Governance, management and partnership
- Monitoring and reporting
- Recruiting beneficiaries
- Beneficiary feedback
- Best practice and challenges of programme delivery
- Contributions to ERDF horizontal principles

### Programme application, contracting and set up

The S4GG delivery team were experienced in working on a number of previous ERDF programmes. The team were therefore organised and understood how to set up a European funded programme. The experience of the team enabled the application and initial set up stages to run smoothly, with the team considering the impacts of COVID-19 and learnings from previous programmes, notably S4G, when writing the bid.

Delivery partners on the programme shared similar values, which made writing the programme application relatively easy and efficient. An initial meeting at an early stage of the programme with NatWest and Gloucestershire College yielded useful information which allowed partners to develop a sense of each other's agenda and engagement with the programme. The long-standing and existing relationships between partners clearly helped with the successful delivery of S4GG.

### Governance, management and partnership working

Consultees all described the management team as being highly organised, proactive and helpful in creating a good dynamic within the team. While it was a challenge to deliver a programme during the pandemic, the team had experience of delivering during restrictions, and they had already started to run similar programme prior to S4GG. This meant that learnings from the earlier programme, particularly relating to online delivery, were embedded into the design of S4GG. Processes for the programme were refined and evolved in light of the pandemic. For example, the programme team could not meet businesses face-to-face during the initial stages of the programme, so they produced a short video talking through the claims spreadsheet to help businesses. This highlights the team's adaptability and capability to evolve delivery during a difficult time.

As UWE Bristol began delivering a larger number of ERDF projects, the team tried to combine governance meetings to make things more efficient for senior management. This was done by having combined meetings for the senior team covering all ERDF projects (with attendance from one lead for compliance, one for finance, and one for business development). However, this caused frustration for delivery staff, who subsequently began to feel that they were too far removed from senior decisions and found it challenging that communications needed to go through more 'layers', becoming more prone to misinterpretation. Hence, partway through programme delivery, the decision was made to revert to the original governance procedure used on previous ERDF projects. This consisted of weekly operations meetings (for delivery staff only), and separate regular board meetings with the senior team. One member of the team mentioned that they were keen to start including a 'celebration' aspect to governance reviews, to review what had been achieved and its value for the University.



In general, the partnerships with Gloucestershire College and NatWest were considered to have been beneficial, even though partners had very different remits in their scope. The partnership with NatWest provided benefits on a strategic level, as the NatWest team were able to provide advice and support to the programme team on considering new avenues and approaches and linking up with new partners. As a recognised and trusted brand, NatWest also helped to elevate the reputation of the programme, which was thought to be important given that UWE Bristol was delivering in a new area. Gloucestershire College provided support on a more practical level, by providing venue space for workshops (which was not part of their partnership agreement as they had to bid separately for this), in addition to links and networks within the region to support the promotion of the programme. One programme team consultee did feel, however, that partners could have been more proactive and contributed more to the programme.

### Internal communication sharing

The communication between UWE and delivery partners was considered to have been effective. Regular partnership updates and information shared via email helped with the day-to-day delivery of the programme. A programme team consultee mentioned that information sharing with the wider team was helpful to reflect on best practice, as well as to cross-reference with other ERDF programmes at UWE Bristol. When the delivery team were able to debrief after workshops on what worked well and what could be improved, best practice was used to develop the workshops. Consultees also commented on the strong relationships between programme team members and reported that they had a good understanding of each other's roles and priorities.

### Monitoring and reporting

All programme team consultees praised the team's effective and efficient monitoring processes, which have been built and refined over years of working on ERDF and other business support programmes. The monitoring system is highly detailed and includes a programme risk register as well as a beneficiary risk register. An audit completed during the programme did, however, highlight the importance of refresher training in understanding the funding guidance, which the team has taken on board. The claims forms used by beneficiaries has been highlighted as being robust, and able to capture a lot of information.

Following the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a shift and MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, now known as the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) was no longer allocating individual ERDF funding managers to programmes. Instead, a generic email address for support was provided, which was felt to have led to less comprehensive and helpful support as the individuals responding to queries were not required to have an in-depth understanding of each individual programme.

### Recruiting beneficiaries

The S4GG programme was marketed through NatWest and Gloucestershire College's respective local networks, alongside the Growth Hub connections and GFirst LEP's support in marketing the opportunity through their newsletters, social media, and their business team. This allowed the programme to be offered to SMEs across the LEP area and reach a large customer base in Gloucestershire. Despite the programme being new to the region, there was a large initial interest from SMEs from different sectors, which had not been anticipated by UWE Bristol.

Involving partners with an embedded local knowledge of the area was thought to have raised the number of viable applications the programme received. Access to these networks also meant that there was limited additional spend for advertising space in regional newsletters, on the Gloucestershire College website, and blog posts (including UWE Bristol's own Research, Business and Innovation –



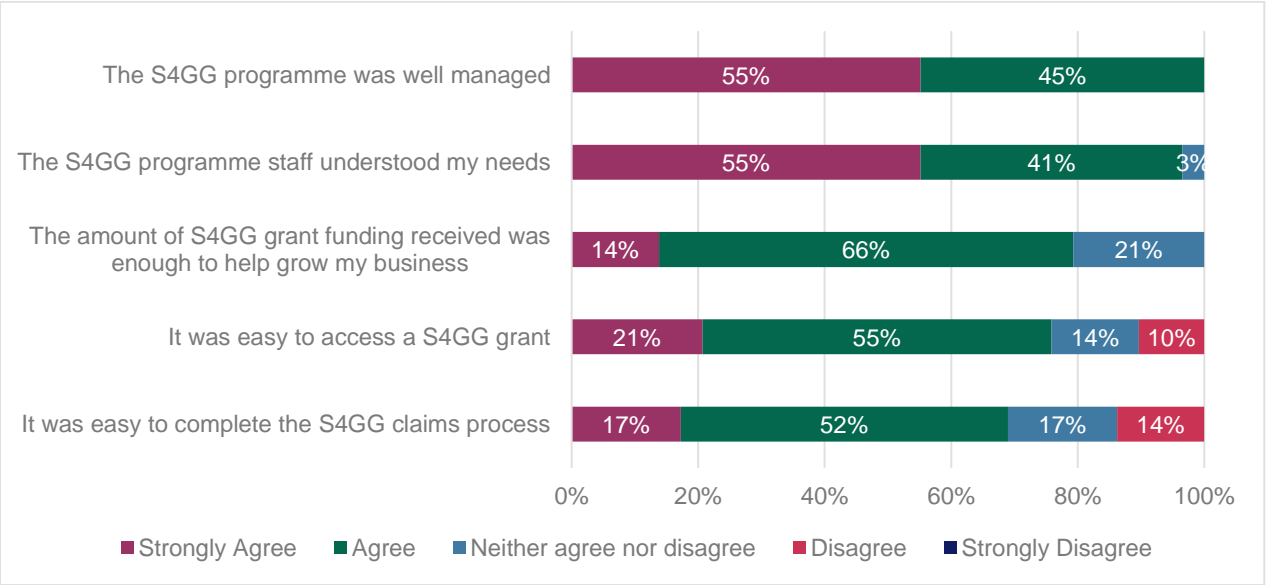
RBI – blog). In addition, this allowed for limited expenditure on press releases and a business publication to boost the programme’s reach. UWE Bristol were also able to promote S4GG via a paid social media campaign, making the most of the different channels available. Throughout their marketing, the S4GG programme team would monitor spend, and which types of marketing were working best for showcasing the programme.

The programme team reflected that the messaging to attract businesses to the workshops could have been clearer from the outset. Initially, the first workshop attracted a number of cyber businesses, which was not the target audience for the programme. From this, there was a significant pivot in advertising to non-cyber businesses who were looking to understand more about the cyber landscape and improve their cybersecurity and data protection knowledge.

### Beneficiary feedback

Grant recipients were asked about their views on different aspects of programme delivery, to which responses were highly positive; these can be viewed in Figure 4.1 below. Of the 29 businesses who responded to the grant survey, 100 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the programme was well managed. A large majority also noted that their needs were well understood by programme staff (96 per cent). Responses relating to the sufficiency of the grant were also encouraging, with two thirds of respondents agreeing that the funding was enough to help their business grow; 14 per cent strongly agreed with this statement. In terms of ease of access to the grant and completion of the claims process, responses were slightly more mixed. While the majority still agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to access grants and complete claims processes (76 per cent and 69 per cent respectively), 10 and 14 per cent (respectively) disagreed with these statements. This finding suggests that there is room for improvement in terms of the grant access/claim processes.

Figure 4.1: Grant survey respondents’ views on programme delivery (n=29)



When asked for their views on whether there was anything missing from the programme’s offer, most grant recipient survey respondents stated that there was nothing missing. One respondent felt that having a longer Q&A session with the panel during one of the workshops would have been beneficial. Another noted that they would have benefitted from featuring more case studies on businesses that have adapted to the digital landscape, as an understanding of their challenges and how they have

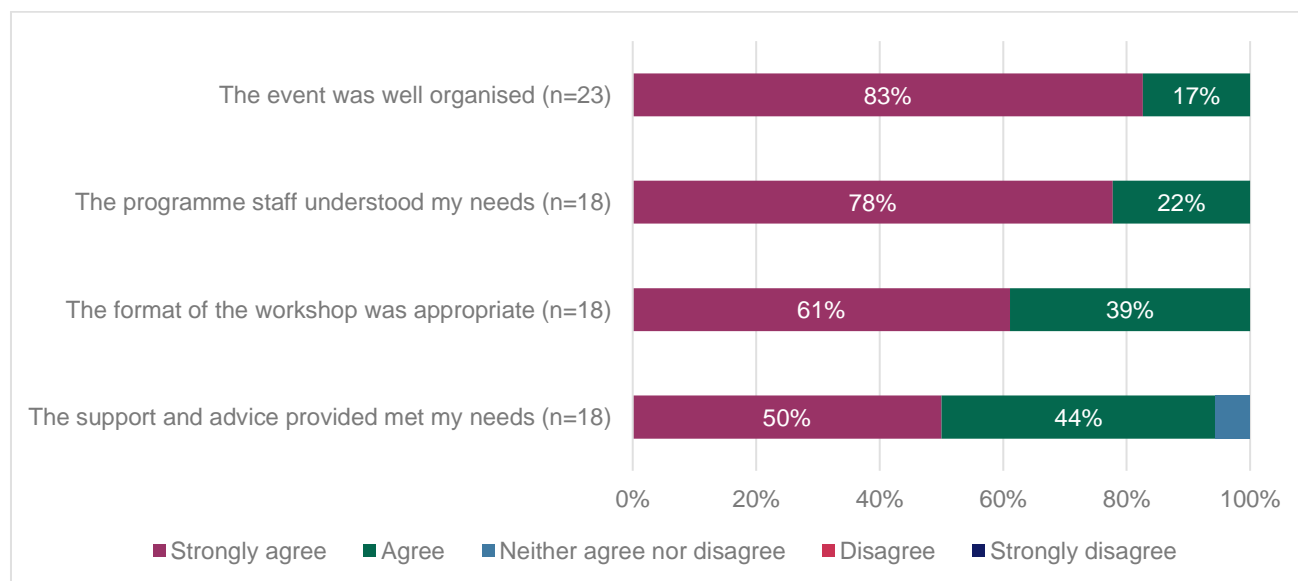


overcome these could have provided useful learnings. Finally, this attendee expressed an interest in sessions on disaster recovery and automation.

Respondents were also asked about areas in which S4GG could potentially improve its offer. The most frequent response centred around the application and claims processes, which businesses referred to as “complex”, or in need of simplification. Several respondents stated that although the programme team were helpful with administration and processes, and that simplifying this could encourage more businesses to take up the support offer. Other specific feedback included a suggestion for the programme team to formulate an offer that participating businesses could use to access necessary software, as the cost of this is a barrier to SMEs.

In addition to surveys conducted by ERS, feedback forms were also completed by attendees of the four workshops, which took place in 2021, 2022, and 2023. As can be seen in Figure 4.2 below, all attendees reported finding the workshops well organised (n=32), and of the attendees of the two workshops delivered in 2022 and the last workshop delivered in 2023, all thought that the support and advice provided met their needs and that the format of the workshop was appropriate. 96 per cent of those who attended these three workshops agreed or strongly agreed that the programme staff understood their needs (n=27)<sup>12</sup>. In terms of further support, 69 per cent of respondents stated they had been referred by the programme team to additional support, including external links, support, and funding opportunities (n=26)<sup>13</sup>.

Figure 4.2: Workshop attendees’ views on the quality of delivery (UWE Bristol feedback form responses)



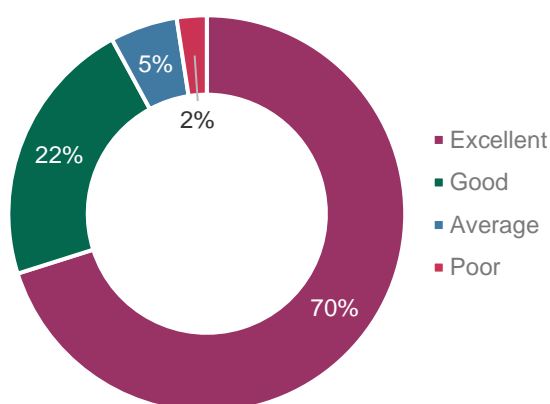
As can be seen in Figure 4.3 overleaf, 70 per cent of respondents to the workshop feedback forms found the sessions to be of “excellent” quality, with a further 22 per cent rating the sessions “good” (n=23). 100 per cent of businesses that attended the last workshop held in February said they would recommend the workshops to others (n=9).

<sup>12</sup> These questions were not included in the feedback form for the 2021 workshop.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*



Figure 4.3: Quality ratings for workshop sessions (UWE Bristol feedback form responses) (n=23)



Positively, most respondents to the workshop feedback forms reported there was nothing missing from the support they had received. However, two respondents had suggestions for improvements. One felt that having a longer question and answer section with the panel on one of the sessions would have been useful. The second respondent felt that featuring more case studies on businesses that have adapted to the digital landscape, their challenges and how they have overcome them would have been useful, alongside topics on disaster recovery and automation.



***An exceptionally interesting course, [it has] given me lots to do when I get back to my organisation.***

**Beneficiary survey respondent**



***A very well-run course with attentive, friendly, and approachable speakers. Lots of content and helpful information without being overbearing and hard to understand. Ongoing support and resources sound fantastic.***

**Beneficiary survey respondent**



***The wide range of topics were really useful and tied into the overarching theme of business growth.***

**Beneficiary survey respondent**

## Success factors and best practice

The S4GG team thought that the strong networking and experience of delivery staff were key success factors for the programme. Due to having provided similar provision before, both the grant and workshop strands were delivered relatively smoothly.

## Grants

The success factors and best practice of the programme's grant funding included:

- The flexibility and tailored support provided to businesses allowed for a personal approach whereby the programme was able to work with each grantee on a one-to-one basis.
- Regular communication between grantees and the delivery team throughout the process, beginning at the initial stages where businesses could access support with their draft application.





- Outlining clear criteria for the additional round of funding and ensuring that all grantees were aware that there was an additional pot of funding available as part of the S4GG programme.
- Having local representatives on the decision-making panel who could understand the dynamics of the region.
- Involving bid-writers and business development managers at the beginning of the programme to support companies with their draft applications.

## Workshops

The success factors and best practice of the programme's workshops included:

- Messaging on workshops was improved so that the most suitable SMEs could attend and get the most out of sessions.
- The workshops were amended progressively throughout the delivery period, allowing the content to be improved and tailored to the needs of attending businesses.
- Workshops successfully catered for start-ups and companies in more advanced stages of their development.
- Workshop sessions were interactive, including ice breakers, speakers, panel discussions, and group activities. Having this balance and variety of content catered to different ways of learning, which created an inclusive and engaging environment. This encouraged beneficiaries to return for the second workshop day.
- Feedback was proactively used to modify content, such as by condensing certain topics into more intensive sessions.
- The cyber angle of the content allowed the programme to assist companies who are not familiar with protecting their cyber assets.
- Face-to-face support after the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, alongside online support to include businesses who were unable to travel to the venues, created a hybrid offer that enabled attendance to be as high as possible.



***The team are an expert delivery group; we wouldn't have done so well without these people. There was real dedication and a strong working relationship. It was a masterclass in watching project delivery. We all have the right values.***

**Programme team consultee**



***Outstanding course, really impressed with the quality of every element, and the excellence of the content.***

**Workshop attendee**



***Excellent workshop which covered some of the most important aspects for small businesses.***

**Workshop attendee**



## Challenges

Overall, the team members were positive about the delivery of the programme, with only some consultees mentioning a few challenges within the delivery of the two strands.

## Grants

The challenges of the programme's grant funding included:

- The match funding element of the grant was seen as a barrier for smaller, newer businesses that are less able to produce or access the funds to participate in the programme.
- The timeframe of the programme slipping meant that contracts had to be amended.
- Encouraging people to go through the process involved with claiming the grant money they had been allocated, due to the amount of paperwork involved. The minimum claim of £10,000 was also a barrier, due to the match funding requirement.

## Workshops

The challenges surrounding the programme's workshops included:

- Connectivity was an issue for some companies that were based in rural areas in the region, which may have impacted their decision to (or the extent to which they could) take part in S4GG.
- Attrition was an issue, as some businesses had to drop out of the programme due to unavoidable circumstances. In addition, some speakers also became unavailable at short notice. Specific reasons mentioned for dropping out included speakers falling ill, family emergencies, and being unable to travel.
- Having to modify certain content to ensure that it was sufficiently engaging for businesses, which was a challenge due to their diverse sectors and support requirements. Ascertaining which topics would most interest businesses in advance of workshops, and what they would most benefit from, was also difficult.
- Hosting the workshops at Gloucestershire College was seen as less attractive to some businesses, as it was not a convenient location, and not viewed as an attractive venue for some businesses.

## Contributions to ERDF horizontal principles

S4GG sought to deliver support to a high standard, in line with the horizontal themes of the ERDF, namely equality and diversity, and sustainable development.

### Equality and diversity

As outlined in the programme application form, it was anticipated that S4GG would meet the expectations of the public sector equality duty. The programme aimed to contribute to the elimination of unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations. Female participation was actively sought by promoting S4GG to women's business and technology networks, scheduling events during business hours to accommodate those with young children and ensuring that written material included gender positive language. The application form also suggested that care would be taken to ensure that opportunities available to beneficiaries were not restricted by educational background, health problems, or other circumstances that could be a barrier to engagement. This was intended to minimise the risk of disadvantaging particular groups. To support this, most consultees commented that applications for S4GG grant funding were assessed fairly by a representative panel.



When considering where the workshops would be located and who would host them, equality and diversity was considered. The S4GG team made efforts to include a balance of speakers, and actively reflected on how attendees could best access the venues. These considerations resulted in involving more female speakers, as well as having the sessions take place on the ground floor of Gloucestershire College to increase accessibility. The team also carefully considered the demographic of the region, including minority populations and areas of deprivation, and used this information to choose different networks to tap into when marketing the programme. Care was taken to ensure that workshops were not overcrowded, creating a comfortable and safe environment, especially given the risks of COVID-19. Finally, all workshop attendees were asked to complete the business support evidence form, which included an optional equality and diversity section; this information was recorded as part of the programme and reported to funders.

A programme team member highlighted that more could be done to diversify the panel of assessors, and additional training on equality, diversity and inclusion was undertaken by a team member. This was intended to highlight the importance of inclusion and fairness in programmes at UWE Bristol and to allow RBI teams to make this theme more of a priority moving forward.



***I have undertaken additional EDI training in an attempt to look at better ways to highlight the need for this conversation amongst the wider team and the wider set of projects that RBI deliver.***

**Programme team consultee**

## Environmental sustainability

UWE has an active sustainability plan in place, with dedicated staff, processes, and procedures to ensure sustainable considerations are appropriately addressed. The University is certified to the ISO 14001 Environmental Management System. The programme application notes that UWE Bristol will follow best practice on environmental management when organising activities. This includes appropriate onsite recycling facilities, locally and responsibly sourced produce (e.g., Fairtrade), online technology to avoid unnecessary travel, venues served by public transport, and encouraging car-sharing. The S4GG team noted that they are mindful of being paperless and share as much information as possible between the team and beneficiaries digitally. The main exception to this is where there are funder requirements for hard copies and wet signatures. Lecture capture technology is also used to keep an online archive to support with evaluation and reporting requirements for the programme. During workshops, the team are conscious of reducing waste, by providing jugs of water rather than plastic bottles. Re-usable metal bottles and thermal travel mugs have also been given to participants to use at the workshops and take home to minimise single-use items. In addition, most recent workshops have included only vegetarian food to reduce the programme, and the university's, carbon footprint. Finally, the first three workshops were hosted at Gloucestershire College's Cheltenham campus at the Advanced Digital Academy, which is carbon zero and generates heat and electricity on site.



## Summary

Overall, it was felt by consultees that S4GG was well managed, with an organised and proactive management team. While delivering during the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging, prior experience meant that the programme was in the hands of a team equipped with learnings from previous programmes. These learnings included how to implement detailed monitoring processes.

As delivery partners, both NatWest and Gloucestershire College were seen as useful by programme team consultees, with the former providing strategic advice and positive brand association, and the latter providing local and practical support. In terms of communication, there were several channels facilitating this, including regular partnership email updates, verbal updates between programme team members, and workshop debriefs in which best practice was discussed.

The programme was marketed through NatWest and Gloucestershire College's networks, along with the regional Growth Hub network and GFirst LEP, which allowed for impactful local reach, while keeping promotion costs low. In addition to this, social media proved to be a useful tool for targeted campaigns. Areas for improvement highlighted by the programme team included clearer messaging in the programme's early stages.

Beneficiaries of the programme were positive overall about the programme's delivery, with the majority stating that it was well managed and organised, that staff understood their needs, that the grant funding was accessible and sufficient for growth, and that the claims process was easy. Positively, most respondents also felt that there were no significant gaps in the programme's provision. In terms of ERDF horizontal principles, equality and diversity were considered in several aspects of decision-making, including promoting to women's business networks, using gender positive language, and choosing speakers that were diverse and representative. In addition to this, environmental sustainability was considered and implemented through using local produce and venues, switching to paperless operations, limiting in-person interaction where unnecessary, and maintaining consciousness of wasteful behaviour.

When asked about key success factors, the programme team highlighted willingness to change and adapt practice in relation to messaging for workshops, as well as workshop content. Other positives highlighted were the interactivity of sessions, the variety of content, the cyber angle of the sessions and hybrid in-person/online provision. With regard to the grant funding, success factors included providing one-to-one support, regular communication from the delivery team, and local representation on the decision-making panel.

Finally, a few challenges were also highlighted, which included the size of the geographic area covered by the support, programme drop-outs, having to fit session content to the needs of varied businesses, and the match funding element, which excluded some smaller businesses with limited funds.



## 5 Outcomes and Impacts

This chapter of the report features the emerging outcomes and impacts experienced by the SME beneficiaries and the delivery team, the counterfactual (what would have happened in the absence of the programme) and the Economic Impact Assessment.

### Outcomes for beneficiaries

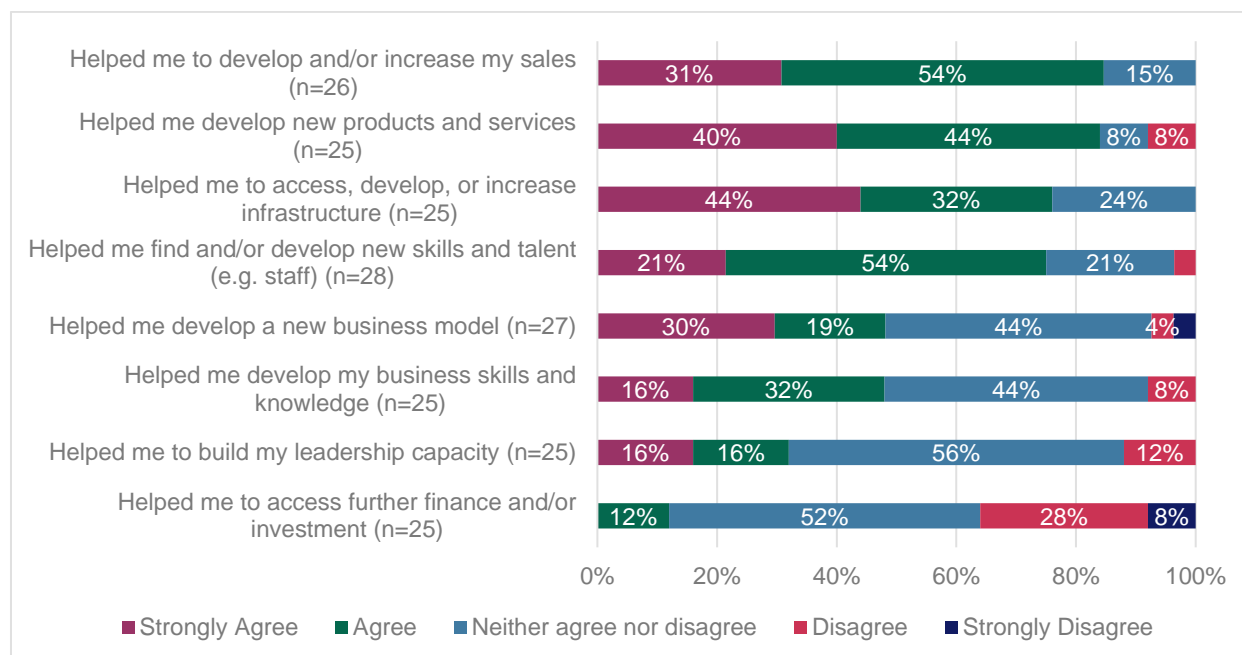
The two surveys, along with the workshop feedback forms, highlighted various outcomes and impacts from the beneficiaries' perspectives. The following sections explore each strand in detail.

#### Grant funding

Grant recipients were consulted through a survey, which received 29 responses. Of these businesses, 90 per cent stated that the grant funding support had been either effective or very effective in supporting them to achieve outcomes.

When asked specifically what outcomes the funding had had on their business, respondents gave positive responses overall. As shown in Figure 5.1 below, the most popularly stated outcomes were around increased sales, development of new products and services, and access to/increases in infrastructure; over three quarters of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their business had felt these outcomes (n=26, 25 and 25 respectively). The majority of respondents (65 per cent) also agreed or strongly agreed that the grant funding had positively impacted the skills and talent development in their business (n=28). These figures demonstrate that grant funding was largely used to grow activities and product/service offerings, more so than for leadership capacity development, or shifting towards new models of operation for instance.

Figure 5.1: Perceived outcomes of grant funding on businesses



In addition to the above outcomes, two thirds of respondents were referred to other support by UWE Bristol, allowing them to receive assistance above and beyond what the programme could provide (n=29). When asked what type of support they were referred to, most businesses referenced training



schemes (e.g., those focussing on management, branding and business growth). In addition, some businesses were recommended further consultative and/or technical support, and two businesses reported being signposted to further funding. This feedback evidences the programme team's willingness to provide ongoing support to participating businesses and support their onwards journeys beyond the programme.

In addition, 76 per cent of respondents felt that the grant funding they had received via the programme would support their (continued) growth in the future (n=29). Among those that gave further feedback on their expected growth and growth prospects, several businesses noted that they were expecting their products and/or services to grow in scale, while one business fed back that the grant had helped them to launch a completely new product that they would look to take to market in the future. Another popular advancement was investment in new technology and/or machinery, which businesses hoped would facilitate growth and increase productivity.



***S4GG has allowed us to completely change our business model, so now we have the ability to scale significantly, grow new ranges and effectively set ourselves up for growth, despite going through one of the most challenging periods we have ever faced.***

**Beneficiary survey respondent**



***Having found highly skilled staff and developed an excellent website, we intend to grow further!***

**Beneficiary survey respondent**

Programme team consultees noted that businesses had increased their workforces thanks to the programme's support. One consultee reported that a "couple of companies [had] doubled in size" since receiving grant funding, while others were looking to build additional sites. One consultee described that they had observed businesses being able to make decisions and act more quickly thanks to the grant funding, in the absence of lost income and reserves during the COVID-19 pandemic.



***[A] couple of catering companies, they wouldn't have had the ability to grow if it wasn't for the small grant [that] we gave them.***

**Programme team consultee**



***[The funding] came at a good time for a lot of companies. Some hotels [on the programme] were able to improve their outdoor dining experience.***

**Programme team consultee**

As well as boosting activities, two programme team consultees noted that the grant funding provided had also created opportunities to increase employment. It was reported that alongside hires within the region, many SMEs were taking on people outside the area. Although these jobs were not reported on,



they should still be acknowledged as an added benefit to businesses on the programme; the effects of the pandemic made remote working a common method for business to adopt.

Finally, one programme team consultee remarked that the grant funding support helped them to prepare to seek out and apply for future funding opportunities, showing an increased awareness around opportunities local to businesses.

## Workshops

Programme team members were consulted to gain their insights on outcomes for businesses. One significant outcome that was reported across both strands of support was an increase in beneficiaries' confidence, both in their business offer and personal confidence to lead a small business.



***[It has given] a boost to businesses that have not yet made the leap.***

**Programme team consultee**

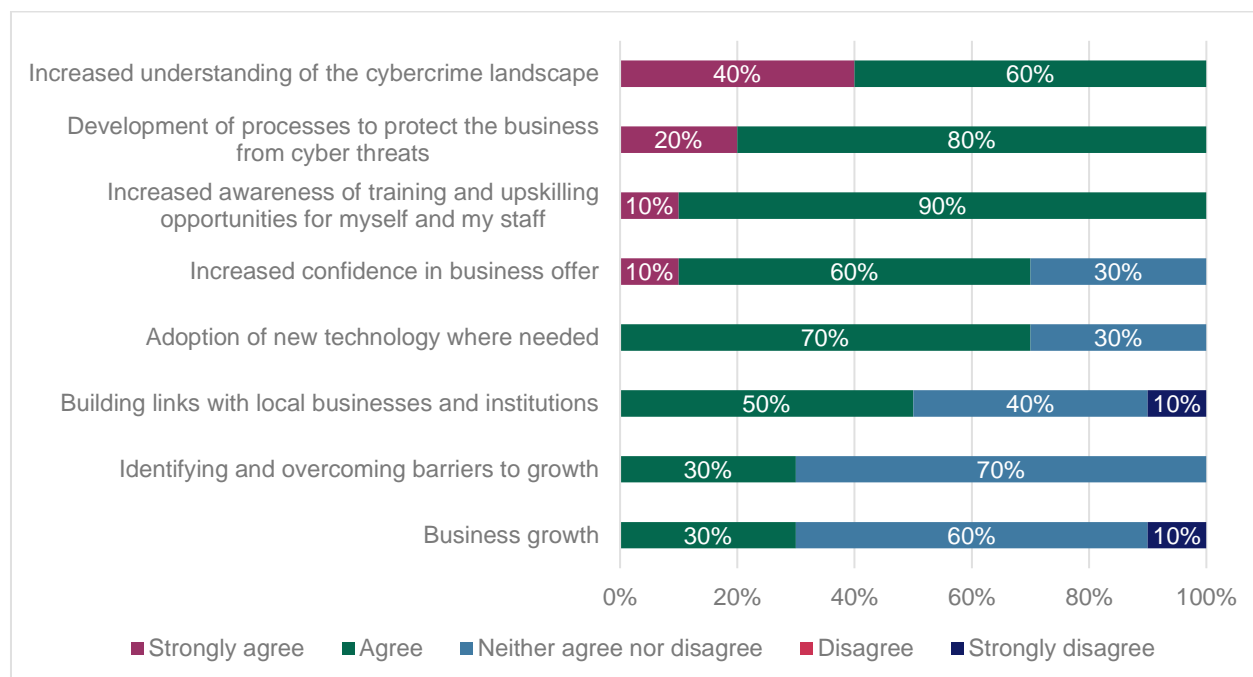
In addition, one programme team consultee stated that the workshops specifically allowed businesses to carry out projects that they would not have been able to do otherwise, which they expect to facilitate growth going forward. In particular, post-COVID reliance on technology has increased in general, and workshops have been especially impactful due to this. Another benefit of the programme's workshops was the networking opportunity that they provided for businesses, as they provided a useful forum for discussing and sharing the challenges that businesses faced.

As well as programme team members, S4GG beneficiary feedback was also collected through surveys. Businesses that took part in the workshops were asked about outcomes that they had experienced as a result of attending. These responses are outlined in Figure 5.2 overleaf. Positively, 100 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that attending S4GG workshops increased their understanding of the cybercrime landscape, helped them to develop processes to protect their business from cyber threats, and increased their awareness of the training and upskilling opportunities available to them (n=10). Increased confidence in their business offer and adoption of new technology where needed were also popularly reported outcomes, with 70 per cent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had experienced these outcomes. These results demonstrate that the workshops were successful in encouraging upskilling within businesses and increasing their awareness and understanding of the cyber landscape and its potential impacts on their business. In terms of identifying and overcoming barriers to growth, and achieving business growth, fewer businesses reported these impacts. However, despite being less prominent, it is still a promising sign that some businesses' growth (prospects) were positively impacted.





Figure 5.2: Perceived outcomes of workshops on businesses (n=10)



## Outcomes and impacts for the programme team and partners

As well as positive outcomes and impacts for beneficiaries of the programme, various benefits were also felt by the programme team and partners. In particular, the programme team highlighted that delivering S4GG had raised lessons that can be taken into other programmes, such as running specific grant-writing workshops for SMEs.

Another programme team member highlighted the opportunity that the programme gave the team to build up a database of businesses that they had worked with across all programmes, which would allow them to later reach out via legacy and/or networking events. In addition, the consultee noted that these contacts would be useful for formulating case studies later down the line, which could be an important source of evidence in future funding bids. Lastly, this programme consultee commented that the programme had helped UWE Bristol to build relationships with Gloucestershire College. Going forward, relationships such as these could prove useful for the programme team.



***[S4GG made the] region more aware of UWE Bristol's activity, other programmes, and the many opportunities we have.***

**Programme team consultee**

A number of outcomes for Gloucestershire College, as a partner, were also highlighted. One programme team member noted that the programme came at a good time for the College, as they had just received funding for cyber security, and the programme created a revenue stream for them by showcasing their services to businesses. As well as this, the workshops provided an opportunity for businesses that were attending workshops to build relationships with the College which could outlive the programme.



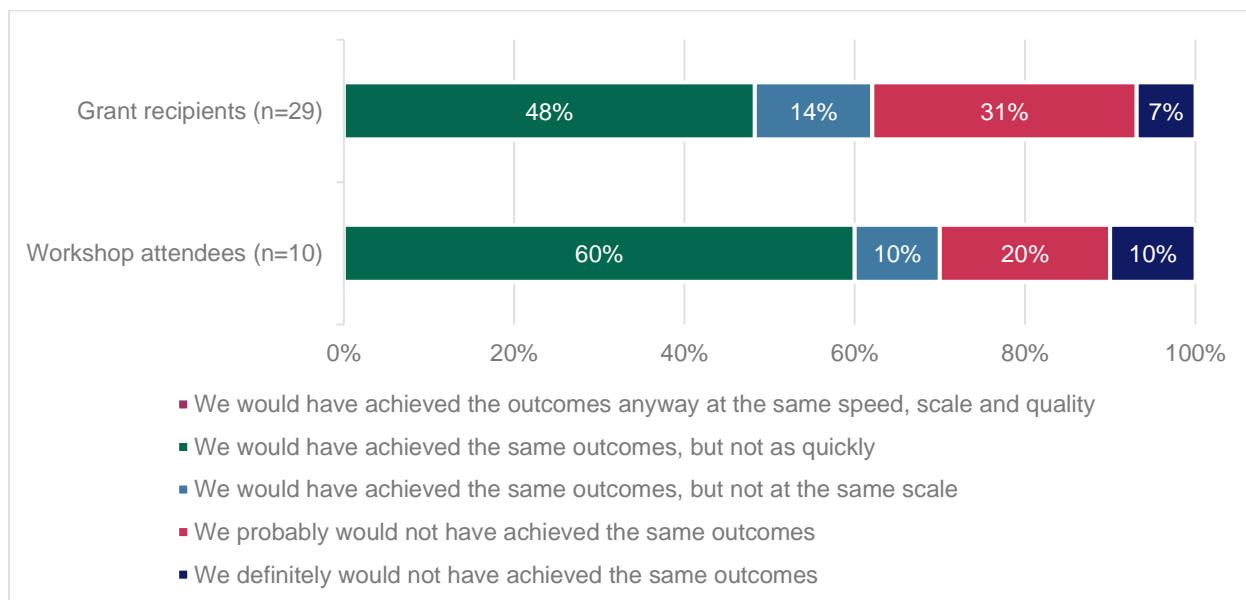


Overall, the programme appeared to be useful for UWE Bristol staff, and those involved in the programme more widely. This was due to a mutually beneficial relationship whereby UWE Bristol gained an insight into the Gloucestershire business landscape through working with partners such as Gloucestershire College, while raising awareness of support that they could provide to local businesses.

## Counterfactual

Beneficiaries were asked whether the outcomes they had achieved would have been possible without the S4GG workshops and/or grant funding, to which the response was positive. Figure 5.3 below shows the majority of businesses indicated that while they would have achieved the same outcomes in the absence of S4GG, their progress would not have been as quick, or on the same scale. In addition, 38 per cent of grant recipients reported that they probably or definitely would not have achieved the same outcomes without the programme's support (n=29). This number was slightly lower for workshop participants (30 per cent) (n=10). Interestingly, no beneficiaries across the surveys said that they would have achieved the *same* outcomes at the *same* speed, scale and quality without programme support.

Figure 5.31: What survey respondents thought would have happened in the absence of the programme



Programme team members were also asked what they felt what would have happened in the absence of the programme, to which the response was encouraging. Several consultees felt that it would have been hard for participating businesses to have found money which was “ringfenced for them” elsewhere, given their size and sector. One consultee even noted that some of the businesses would have struggled to survive the recent period(s) of economic downturn and would have grown a lot slower without the knowledge of cyber security that they obtained through the programme.



*[Without S4GG, there would be a good chunk of businesses not taking cyber security into consideration [and the] impact of not looking after data is transformational. In terms of finance, there was no other funding in the region in the same way, at the same time.*

**Programme team consultee**

Overall, the sentiment was that obtaining funding and business support would have been much more difficult without the S4GG support, as the support was provided purely for businesses' benefit. In addition, as noted by one consultee, the workshops created an environment for businesses to come together and benefit from each other's experiences, something greatly appreciated by many after the pandemic.

## Economic Impact Assessment

### Introduction and method

This section estimates the economic impact of the S4GG programme to date. The economic impact assessment covers economic impacts relating to beneficiary SMEs in terms of turnover and employment growth.

Economic impacts associated with turnover are then expressed as Gross Value Added (GVA), the measure of the economic value of goods and services produced, whilst employment impacts are expressed in Full Time Equivalents (FTEs). As per government guidance, both gross and net impacts have been calculated. To calculate net impacts, each factor of additionality<sup>14</sup> is considered and applied to gross outputs. To assess additionality, the ERS e-surveys included questions relating to any attribution of economic outputs that could be related to the support. This was done by asking beneficiaries "if [turnover/employment] increased, what percentage of this increase would you attribute to support from S4GG?" Other questions covered leakage and displacement effects (definitions of terms are provided later in this section).

Employment impact data was provided by 25 beneficiary SMEs whilst 24 SMEs provided data relating to turnover impact. Two SMEs reported a reduction in turnover and three SMEs reported a decrease in FTEs. However, this was likely caused by trading conditions resulting from COVID-19.

### Beneficiary SME economic impacts arising from S4GG engagement

This economic impact assessment calculates the benefits captured by beneficiary SMEs who have taken part in S4GG. The data provides the baseline figures for turnover, product input costs and employment, enabling gross changes to be derived.

### Gross change in turnover and employment

The first step of the impact assessment is to identify the average growth in turnover and employment across the beneficiary SMEs since they started to receive support from the S4GG scheme. The average change in turnover was £843,000 and the average growth in employment was 3.86 FTEs. This gross change in employment and turnover does not consider how much of that change is attributable to the support of the S4GG programme. This is considered using the concept of additionality.

<sup>14</sup> Impact arising from an intervention is 'additional' if it would not have occurred in the absence of the intervention.



## Additionality

Additionality refers to the impact arising from an intervention that is 'additional', i.e., if it would not have occurred in the absence of the intervention. There are five additionality factors, explained below:

### Leakage

- **Definition:** The proportion of outputs that benefit those outside of the interventions target area.
- How leakage is relevant to the employment outcomes of the scheme: the number of jobs that go to residents outside the GFirst LEP area.
- How leakage is relevant to the turnover outcomes of the scheme: the proportion of the turnover that benefits individuals outside of the GFirst LEP area.

### Displacement

- **Definition:** The proportion of outputs accounted for by reduced outputs elsewhere.
- How displacement is relevant to the scheme: the S4GG participants gain an increase in turnover and employment that has reduced other firms' employment and turnover within the GFirst LEP area.

### Deadweight

- **Definition:** The proportion of outputs that would have occurred without the intervention going ahead.
- How deadweight is relevant to the scheme: the proportion of turnover and employment increases that would have occurred in the absence of S4GG.

### Multiplier

- **Definition:** Further economic activity associated with additional local income, local supplier purchases and longer-term development effects.
- How the multiplier is relevant to this scheme: the additional employment and GVA generated in SMEs' supply chains and employees' wider spend.

Table 5.1 overleaf summarises the additionality findings of the e-survey against additionality estimates from HCA guidance<sup>15</sup> and BIS Research<sup>16</sup>. These authoritative secondary sources provide a means to compare the results of the S4GG survey and sense check our findings. The HCA Ready Reckoners and BIS reports are both 'meta-analyses' i.e., drawing on many studies to report typical values, as well as indicating the range of higher or lower estimates.

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<sup>15</sup> HCA (2014) Additionality Guide, Fourth Edition

<sup>16</sup> BIS (2009) Research to Improve the Assessment of Additionality.



Table 5.1: Factors of additionality (source: S4GG beneficiary e-surveys)

Additionality Factor	S4GG survey (December 2022)	'Ready Reckoners' Additionality Guide (2014)	BIS Additionality Research (2009)
<b>Deadweight – Employment</b>	65%	Below Low (25%)	Mean, Regional, Business development & competitiveness: 45.5%
<b>Deadweight – Turnover</b>	79%	Above High (75%)	Mean, Regional, Business development & competitiveness: 45.5%
<b>Displacement</b>	28%	29.3%	Mean, Regional, Business development & competitiveness: 25.0%
<b>Leakage</b>	23%	Below Medium (25%)	Mean, Regional, Business development & competitiveness: 11.5%

The estimate of deadweight for S4GG impacts associated with beneficiary SME employment benefits is 65 per cent. This is significantly higher than both HCA Ready Reckoners and BIS additionality research. This may be concerning, as it indicates that beneficiary SMEs do not think that S4GG has contributed much to their growth in employment over and above national benchmarks.

However, there is alignment between benchmarks and S4GG's impact on SME turnover, which is valued at 79 per cent. This is comparable to the Ready Reckoners but not BIS additionality research. This means that beneficiary SMEs do not believe that S4GG has significantly contributed to their turnover, and the deadweight value can be regarded as above average compared to similar programmes. This would imply that both employment and turnover increases have a low level of attribution to S4GG support.

The value calculated for displacement is based on the proportion of sales and competitors located in the GFirst LEP area. These two measures generate a low level of displacement of 28 per cent, which is roughly aligned to the Ready Reckoner and BIS additionality research. This would indicate that the S4GG scheme is unlikely to have displaced employees and turnover from many other local firms

Leakage of impacts from the programme are in line with what might be expected, at 20 per cent. This is obtained by assessing the proportion of employees living in the GFirst LEP area. Consequently, this indicates that benefits associated with employment will likely remain in the GFirst area.

As well as the additionality factors described above, it is also important to consider the multiplier effects, which capture the indirect and induced impacts in the economy. The multiplier used in this analysis is taken from HCA Additionality Guidance (2014) which suggests a multiplier of 1.51 at a regional level for 'Business Development and Competitiveness' interventions.

### Net Additional Impacts

The factors of additionality described above are applied to gross change in employment and turnover, in order to calculate the net additional impact, or the true impact attributable to S4GG. The findings



from the survey sample are extrapolated to the total number of businesses assisted to date and translated into GVA. Translation to GVA has been undertaken by using two methods. Firstly, businesses were asked to provide their product input costs (excluding wages) and business premises costs, enabling an assessment of GVA directly from their turnover and input costs. Where this is not available, data from the Annual Business Survey has been harvested to generate GVA:Turnover ratios for industries in the South West and applied to Turnover data supplied by SME respondents to generate GVA estimates. These figures are summarised in Table 5.2 below.

**Table 5.2: New economic impact (those beneficiaries assisted to Q4 2022)**

Employment	FTE
Net Additional Employment per Business (FTE)	0.26 FTE
Net Additional Employment Impact (FTE) (extrapolated to 76 business assists)	19.67 FTE
Turnover and GVA	£
Net Additional Turnover per Business	£82,100.14
Net Additional Turnover Impact (extrapolated to 76 business assists)	£6,239,610.90
Net Additional GVA Increase per Business	£20,283.19
Net Additional GVA (extrapolated to 76 business assists)	£1,310,312.85

The economic impact assessment indicates that the programme, with respect to beneficiary SMEs, has created over £1.3m in net additional GVA and 19.7 FTEs to date. Like most assessments of economic impact, the quantified impact estimates are based on the perceptions of the businesses surveyed and are therefore indicative.



## Summary

Evidence drawn from surveys with S4GG beneficiaries and interviews with the programme team, indicate that the programme has made good progress towards achieving the outcomes and impacts set out within the logic model. Grantee businesses surveyed gave the most common outcomes of the programme as: increased sales; development of new products and services; and accessing infrastructure. Workshop attendees who were surveyed gave the following as their most common outcomes: increased understanding of cybercrime; development of processes to protect their business from cyber threats; and increased awareness of training and upskilling opportunities. Without S4GG, it was widely agreed that beneficiaries would not have been achieved the same outcomes at the same speed.

For UWE, the S4GG programme has built relationships with businesses in the GFirst LEP and strengthened their networks across the region. Partner organisations also highlighted that the programme was an effective way to showcase their work, specifically around cyber/digital elements.

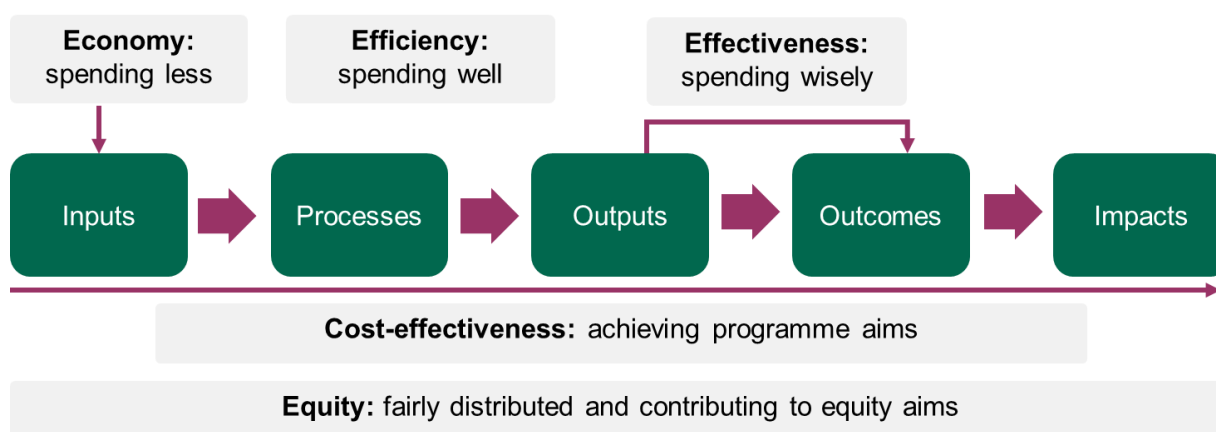
The economic impact assessment revealed that to date S4GG has created £1,310,312 net additional GVA and 19.7 FTEs. It is clear that for many beneficiaries participating in the programme, the knowledge and resources gained has helped them to navigate business growth more effectively. In light of current circumstances, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic downturn, many businesses on the programme have not seen the growth they might have expected. However, the vast majority thought that the S4GG support would help them grow at some point in the future.



## 6 Value for Money

This chapter provides an overview of the value for money provided by S4GG. The approach to assess value for money is underpinned by three principles: economy (spending less); efficiency (spending well); and effectiveness (spending wisely), as illustrated below in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: Value for Money, adapted from National Audit Office



### Economy

The S4GG programme team are experienced in delivering ERDF projects, and so have a good understanding of what measures are required to ensure value for money. The team ensured that costs were scrutinised and implemented a process whereby three quotes had to be sourced for every cost, with the best quality and price quote selected. Gloucestershire College were chosen to host three of the workshops as they were able to provide specialist knowledge and facilities within a set budget.

The primary cost of the scheme was the grants, as such, grant selection was carefully examined. Each grant application was assessed by two to three external consultants to ensure that the best grants were selected. To further ensure that the grant application process minimised costs, S4GG programme co-ordinators provided workshops to businesses to ensure that time was not wasted on in compliant applications. This led to minimal clarifications required by assessors, which reduced the time and cost spent assessing applications.

### Efficiency

To measure the efficiency of S4GG, unit costs for individual outputs recorded to date are measured. These are divided against the total forecasted programme end expenditure and then benchmarked against the mean performance of similar national programmes, as well as a similar innovation programme also run by UWE Bristol (DI4G – Digital Innovation for Growth).

As can be seen in Table 6.1 overleaf, the unit cost for the number of enterprises receiving support (C1) is £46,000. This is above the mean unit cost from national meta-analysis of £34,000, indicating that S4GG delivers inefficiently with respect to its achievement of C1 outputs. It should be noted that in the national benchmarking research, C1 unit costs are aggregated as a single mean unit cost. Despite this, C1 unit costs are similar to DI4G C1 unit costs, indicating that it has not necessarily performed poorly against comparable programmes. These results may simply indicate that the grant funding-centred nature of the scheme may make it more costly than other national support programmes.

The unit cost performance for the number of new enterprises supported (C5) is significantly above the national mean of £116,000 and DI4G's unit cost of £194,000, demonstrating S4GG'S inefficiency supporting new businesses.



Additionally, a core output to the objective of the scheme is to support innovation with an ultimate aim of delivering new products to the firm and/or market. The S4GG programme has been efficient in the pursuit of these objectives; output C29 unit costs are marginally higher lower than the average found by Regeneris. Additionally, it is almost a half of unit the cost of the DI4G programme, indicating success in driving innovation to market.

Cumulatively, it can be assessed that S4GG has generally performed relatively efficiently. Targets were regularly discussed at board meetings to ensure that inefficient targets were monitored intently, and that strategies could be introduced to encourage progress.

**Table 6.1: Unit costs of programme expenditure against other benchmarks**

Output indicator	Output	Unit costs against (£3.3m programme spend)	Digital Innovation for Growth (DI4G) unit cost	Regeneris National Research <sup>17</sup>
Number of enterprises receiving support (C1)	76	£46,413.54	£42,687.23	£34,000
Number of new enterprises supported (C5)	1	£3,388,188.10	£194,032.86	£116,000
Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products (C29)	33	£102,672.37	£203,272.52	£94,000

## Effectiveness

To provide a proxy for effectiveness, 'Cost per Net Additional Job' and 'Cost per £ of GVA' metrics are calculated and presented in Table 6.2 below.

**Table 6.2: Cost per Return-on-Investment metrics**

Impact metric	Total Investment to date	(Return-on-Investment) ROI
20 Net Additional FTE	£3,388,188	£172,267.78 per FTE
£1,310,312.85 Net additional GVA	£3,388,188	£1 return in GVA per £3 spent

The scheme generated a poor economic return upon first glance. S4GG has created a low amount of turnover in the supported businesses which has in turn generated a low net GVA value. This is primarily due to businesses attributing very little of their turnover increase to S4GG. In fact, on average, businesses stated that only 23 per cent of their turnover increase was due to S4GG.

Additionally, there is a high cost per net additional job generated of £172,000, which again demonstrates poor economic returns. This would appear unexpected initially, given that it was reported that S4GG helped to generate significantly more employment in supported enterprises than targeted.

<sup>17</sup> [England ERDF Programme 2014-20: Output Unit Costs and Definitions report, Regeneris \(2013\)](#). The mean unit cost for C1 outputs is based on 623 studies. The mean unit cost for C5 outputs is based on 24 studies.





However, respondent SMEs provided a low level of attribution to S4GG for their employment increase. As such, this reduces the number of jobs attributable to the scheme significantly, consequently generating a counterintuitively inefficient outcome of a high cost per net additional FTE.

Nonetheless, the relatively low job and GVA returns were somewhat unsurprising, considering that the programme has long-term objectives to scale up. Facilitating business growth is a difficult and incremental outcome that requires careful investment and strategy. As such, there is likely to be a time lag on both employment and GVA outcomes, that may come into fruition in the medium term.

In addition, there is a 'COVID-19 lag' attached to this programme, and this was felt to have caused two key issues. Firstly, businesses were sceptical about scaling up and were more focussed on consolidating their business to weather COVID-19, and as such generated less employment and GVA growth than would be anticipated in normal times. Additionally, COVID-19 presented supply chain problems that made production of goods to expand more difficult. Not only were materials more expensive, attaching more risk to expansion, but in many cases, firms were completely unable to procure the required materials for production, presenting a complete block to scaling up. As such, scaling up became less attractive during the pandemic. To conclude, it is difficult at this stage to fully assess the effectiveness of the S4GG scheme in terms of value for money.

## Summary

The assessment of the S4GG programme's value for money encompasses three key principles – economy, efficiency and effectiveness. In terms of economy, the programme team's experience in running ERDF projects meant that all costs were carefully considered and procured. Since grants were the most significant cost to the programme, applications for these were independently assessed to ensure fair and realistic assessments.

Benchmarking the programme's efficiency with regard to unit costs for individual outputs revealed that S4GG delivers inefficiently in terms of the number of enterprises receiving support, though the programme is not necessarily out of line with comparable programmes. This potential inefficiency also extended to the number of *new* enterprises supported. Positively, however, the programme delivered efficiently in terms of delivering new products to market, indicating its success in driving innovation locally.

Finally, effectiveness was difficult to assess completely at this stage, given that attribution of job increases to the programme was relatively low among surveyed beneficiaries, and that the programme generated relatively low turnover for SMEs. However, the programme explicitly aims to achieve longer-term impacts in relation to jobs created and increases in turnover, so it is expected that much of the benefit of the programme will not be realised immediately, or in the short-term. The effects of COVID-19 on the ability and confidence of businesses to scale is also to be considered.



## 7 Conclusions and Lessons Learnt

There is a confirmed demand for scale up support and a focus on assisting with cyber security and digitising SMEs within the GFirst LEP. The rationale for S4GG was comprehensive and strongly aligned to the ERDF programme aims. Most output targets have already been significantly exceeded, which is impressive, given that the programme has had to manage the effects of COVID-19 and refine processes accordingly.

Overall, governance and management structures underpinning the programme were deemed effective. Having a management and delivery team with experience on similar business support programmes, alongside their range of knowledge and expertise was widely considered a key success factor in delivering the programme. Beneficiaries thought the management and organisation of the grant funding and workshops was effective in meeting the needs and objectives of their businesses. Challenges included the connectivity of some businesses, affecting their ability to participate on the programme, along with some businesses not being able to provide the match funding requirement. ERDF horizontal themes were integrated within the operation and delivery of S4GG, largely thanks to rigorous policies and procedures at UWE Bristol. However, a more active approach could be taken to ensure diversity taken into consideration

Evidence drawn from e-surveys with S4GG beneficiaries and interviews with the programme team indicate that S4GG is achieving the outcomes and impacts set out within the logic model. Without S4GG, it was widely agreed that beneficiaries would not have achieved the same outcomes, at the same rate or to the same scale or standard. The economic impact assessment reveals that S4GG has created £1,310,312 net additional GVA and 19.7 FTEs, which is due to SMEs attributing little of their turnover and employment increase to the programme. However, with the long-term objectives of the programme being to support businesses to scale up, the impacts of S4GG may yet to be felt by many SMEs. The programme team worked hard to ensure efficiencies and the programme provided good value for money overall.

### Recommendations

UWE Bristol are an experienced deliverer of ERDF business support programmes and have been proactive at continually implementing learning. This Summative Assessment has identified a few considerations for funders and policy makers and future similar programmes. These include:

#### Funders and policy makers

- Within Gloucestershire, there is a verified need for programmes that provide tailored support for SMEs across all sectors looking to scale up. There is also demand for further funding that supports these businesses to overcome barriers to growth and assist them in cyber security.
- Universities and renowned organisations make good partners for business support initiatives due to their ability to connect businesses to research and academic expertise, to leverage their extensive networks and to use pre-existing organisational systems, thereby ensuring efficiencies.
- Match funding can be a barrier for start-ups and smaller businesses. Amending requirements to not have to match fund when receiving grants under a certain amount could persuade more SMEs to access support. Providing microgrants would allow businesses at different levels to receive support and introduce a new level of flexibility to work with different people.



### Similar programmes

- Including one-to-one sessions within the programme model could assist with SMEs acknowledging that the programme has directly helped them scale by providing them tailored advice.
- Including a range of topics within workshop sessions to tailor to all types of businesses and their sectors. Finding out this information in advance could help with the planning and organisation of sessions.
- Scoping out what type of support local, new SMEs need would maximise how efficient and personalised provision could be.