

Summative Assessment **EVALUATION**

Vedas Recruitment & Training Ltd

PROPEL2GROW

'HIGH GROWTH POTENTIAL'
LANCASHIRE SME SUPPORT
2016-2022

Summative Evaluation Report
compiled by

INNOV8 CONSULTING
JUNE 2022

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

innov8 Consulting (innov8) has been commissioned by Veda Recruitment & Training Ltd (Veda) to conduct a Summative Evaluation of the Propel2Grow 'High Growth Potential' Lancashire SME Business Support Project which has run from 2016-2022 ('Propel2Grow' or 'the Project').

Our consultants have been delivering business diagnostics, consultancy support and evaluation to clients since 2005.

innov8 has a track record of successful delivery of business solutions to a range of public sector and corporate clients nationally and delivery into funded projects to support SME businesses across various sectors.

innov8 has been selected to assist the project in their requirement to submit a Summative Assessment as part of the project closure procedure.

This report is the formal output from the Summative Assessment research and analysis.

The logo for Propel2Grow, featuring the word "propel2grow" in a bold, sans-serif font. The "2" is stylized with a blue circular graphic containing a white star, resembling a planet or a gear.

European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

1.1 *Purpose of this report*

This is a Summative Assessment Report. It consists of the final evaluation conducted in relation specifically to the Propel2Grow project.

An opportunity exists for further assessment to be undertaken in a years time in order to derive more quantitative data tracked over time in order to capture further outputs and outcomes and build a complete narrative of the beneficiary SME journey.

The contents of this report are aligned with ERDF summative assessment guidelines the progress, outputs and outcomes of ERDF investment in the Propel2Grow project. The contents of this report are aligned with ERDF summative assessment guidelines as published in the ERDF Project Summative Assessment Guidance - Appendices

ESIF-GN-1-034 Version 4 (published 1 July 2020).

1.2 *Summative assessment approach and methods*

The summative assessment is driven by a need to understand the practicalities of delivering 'Propel2Grow', capture additionality, quantify value for money, and set out lessons learned and best practice which can applied in future projects. The evaluation also reflects an independent review of project performance.

The evaluation is underpinned by five key requirements, as set out in national programme guidance. These are:

1) Relevance and consistency:

exploring the continued relevance and consistency of 'Propel2Grow' in light of the impacts of COVID-19 during the delivery period.

2) Progress against contractual targets:

setting out project progress when measured against contractual targets, over/under performance and projected lifetime results at project closure.

3) Experience of delivering and managing the project:

outlining the practical experience of implementing and managing the project, lessons learned and evidence of best practice which can be applied to the delivery of other projects.

4) Economic and societal impacts attributable to the project:

demonstrating the economic impacts attributable to the project, capturing those that were intended, actual and also wider outcomes which have provided added value to the local economy and society within Lancashire.

5) Cost effectiveness and value for money:

a robust assessment of cost-effectiveness and value for money based on the balance of quantified costs and benefits, in light of intended and unintended impacts.

In developing the methodology for compiling the research in order to complete this evaluation, innov8 adopted the following modular approach:

CONSULT

With the project lead and delivery partners to understand demonstrable impacts that can be derived by their support packages.

COLLATE

The range of outputs, outcomes and impacts at both a business and project level to determine the effectiveness of the support offered

SUMMARISE

Data at a granular (business) level surveyed for each of the participants in the programme who submit a response, and to 'expand' to the effects at a macro/project level

COMPILE

A comprehensive summative assessment evaluation report, supported by accompanying presentation slides, to enable the managing agent to communicate an impartial and yet compelling narrative of the project's impact, inform future funding plans and celebrate successes.

1.3 *Evaluation research*

Evaluation research undertaken to inform this report includes:

- An online meeting conducted with the Project Manager to establish successes and lessons learned from the project's perspective at project level
- Desk based review and analysis of monitoring data provided by the project.
- A beneficiary impact and NPS survey to establish successes and lessons learned at beneficiary level.

1.4 *Data sources*

The evaluation uses a range of secondary data (for context), alongside primary qualitative and quantitative data gathered using the methods described above, to evidence progress against the project's stated objectives and outcomes. Pertinent data aligned to project objectives are presented in graph format in the section "Project Outcomes & Impact".



2. CONTEXT

This section addresses the business context in which the project was designed and explores the nature of SME business growth for which it was seeking to address, the project objectives and rationale for the delivery approach adopted. It consists of:

- Review of background documents to the project, including the projects original application form and other internal project management and delivery documents.
- Meetings with the project management team..
- National benchmark data compiled from independent sources.

The programme:

- Vedas Recruitment & Training obtained match funded ERDF monies to run the programme commencing in 2016 having previously delivered 'Propel' from 2012-2015.
- Scoping and delivery of the work streams commenced during summer of 2016 (prior to the current pandemic)
- Supporting SMEs with High Growth Potential was determined to be a core aspect of the Local Industrial Strategy
- As part of the programme Vedas would invest in a marketing strategy and brand awareness and to support the programme.
- Through collaboration with Boost and other partners an opportunity to deliver a flexible suite of growth interventions was identified that complemented and provided a continuation path without duplication for high growth potential businesses - builds on the work done by Boost and other High Growth programmes in order to provide a ongoing journey for businesses to invest in their own success.
- The project collated a cohort of private sector of deliverers that could be included as part of the delivery – enabling rapid execution from known, vetted and proven suppliers



Supporting
GROWTH

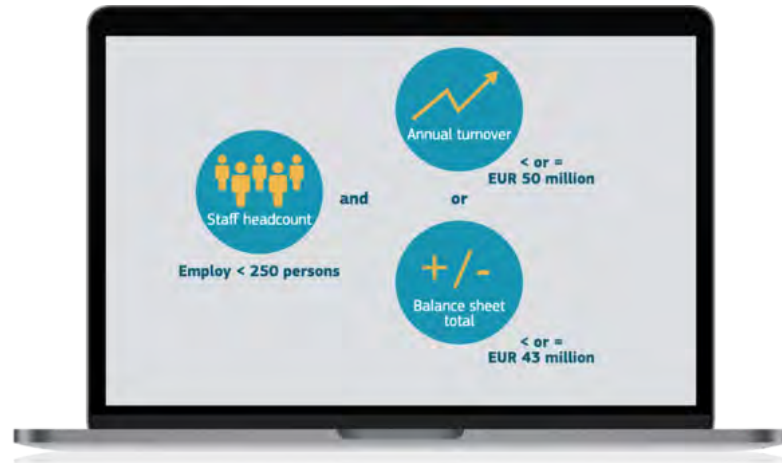
Definition

SME'S DEFINED

In ERDF terms, Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are defined in the [EU recommendation 2003/361](#).

The main factors determining whether an enterprise is an SME are

1. staff headcount
2. either turnover or balance sheet total



To be eligible for ERDF funding SME businesses must not be in the following restricted sectors:

- a) Fishery and aquaculture sectors supported through the European Fisheries Fund (EFF).
- b) Primary production, processing and marketing of agricultural products supported through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).
- c) Coal, Steel, Shipbuilding and the production of synthetic fibres.
- d) Banks and insurance companies (non-productive sector).
- e) Establishments providing generalised (school age) education (statutory duty on local authorities). (Technical education or vocational training outside the remit of statutory bodies may be eligible).
- f) Provision of local social welfare facilities, when these are not directly linked to activities of an economic nature specifically related to the objectives of the Programme, e.g. hospitals, nursing homes, fire stations, day nurseries, child minding facilities, sports facilities, parks and public libraries.

Further categorisation within the SME definition can be derived by using the following criteria:

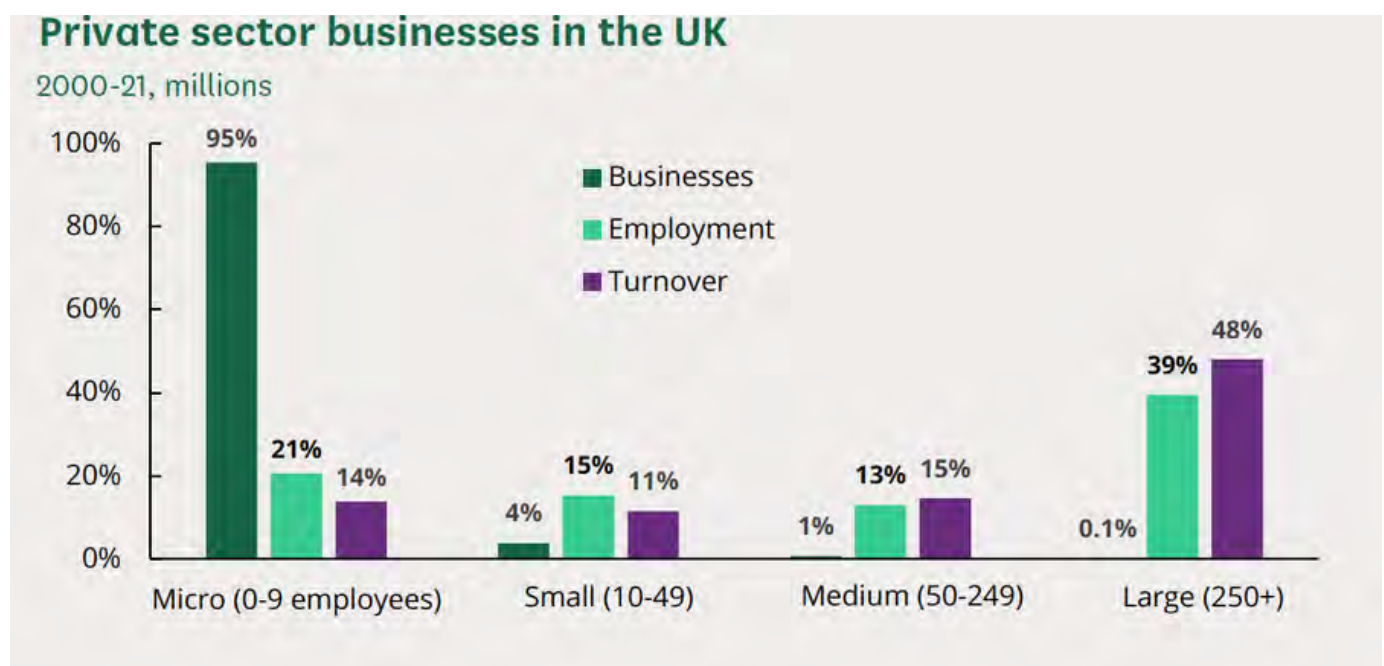
Enterprise category	Headcount: annual work unit (AWU)	Annual turnover	or	Annual balance sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ EUR 50 million	or	≤ EUR 43 million
Small	< 50	≤ EUR 10 million	or	≤ EUR 10 million
Micro	< 10	≤ EUR 2 million	or	≤ EUR 2 million

Independent research

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Research published by BEIS in 2021 found:

- There were 5.6 million private sector businesses in the UK
- Businesses can take a number of different legal forms and can range from self-employed sole traders to large multinationals
- Over **99% of these businesses were defined as an SME** employing between 0 and 249 people.



- 75% of businesses in the UK had no employees.
- The service industries accounted for 76% of businesses, 79% of employment and 72% of turnover.
- The manufacturing sector accounted for 5% of businesses, 10% of employment and 14% of turnover.
- The retail industry (out of scope for ERDF) accounted for 35% of turnover, but only 10% of businesses
- In 2020, 16% of SMEs employers were led by women
- In 2020, 6% of SME employers were minority ethnic group (MEG) led
- Between January 2020 and January 2021 (covering the period impacted by COVID19) the total number of businesses in the UK decreased by 6.5%

WHY SME'S MATTER

- SMEs employ over 16.3m people, by far the the largest segment, versus 10.6m employed in larger businesses.
- SMEs turnover nationally £2,199 billions annually, versus £2,139 billions annually for larger enterprises
- SMEs are Diverse – with an all encompassing and inclusive ownership and workforce
- SMEs are Innovative – 4 in 5 SMEs have introduced or improved a new product/service/process in the last 3 years
- SMEs are Cross Sector – span the economy and the majority are non-tech
- SMEs are Resilient – in every year of the operation of the Propel2Grow project, business births have outstripped business deaths (including the period affected by COVID19) where the birth rate was 12% versus death rate of 11%.
- Growing SMEs are Good Citizens – 64% offer opportunities to young people through work experience, internships and apprenticeships.

	Businesses 000s	Employment 000s	Turnover £ billions	Businesses %	Employment %	Turnover %
With no employees	4,175	4,539	303	75%	17%	7%
SMEs (0-250 employees)	5,583	16,333	2,199	99.9%	61%	49%
Of which:						
Micro (0-9 employees)	5,337	5,540	612	95%	21%	14%
Small (10-49 employees)	211	4,111	510	4%	15%	11%
Medium (50-249 employees)	36	3,474	650	1%	13%	15%
Large (250+ employees)	8	10,639	2,139	0.1%	39%	48%
Total, all businesses	5,591	26,972	4,449	100%	100%	100%

Source BEIS Business Population Estimates 2021



Source ONS, Business Demography, 2020, House of Commons Library calculations

Independent research

LOCAL LANDSCAPE

Research conducted by the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership in the collation of their Strategic Economic Plan for 2015-2025, found:

- Lancashire has one of the largest local economies in the North of England, valued at over £23 billion, is home to over 40,000 businesses employing in excess of 600,000 people, and has a population of 1.4m. A large and multi-faceted area with a diverse geography, the county boasts a rich industrial tradition, set within a network of densely populated urban centres which are themselves surrounded by outstanding countryside and coastal fringes
- Although Lancashire has experienced sustained growth in the last decade, with readily identifiable economic 'hotspots' such as the cities of Preston and Lancaster, the area's average performance still consistently lags behind that of the UK and neighbouring city regions. For example, between 2007 and 2011, Lancashire's economy grew by 4.4% compared to 6.5% nationally and 4.9% regionally; Lancashire's GVA per capita being 77% of the UK average
- Today, the economic performance of Lancashire is more than 20% below the national average, in terms of GVA per resident. Without strategic interventions Lancashire's GVA gap with the rest of the country is predicted to increase. Although Lancashire's economy is predicted to grow by 27% over the next ten years, it will still fall behind the rest of the UK whose average growth is forecast to be 33%. This will exacerbate the existing long-term trend and further deepen Lancashire's productivity and income gaps.
- If Lancashire is to maximise its economic potential it will need to fully exploit its key innovation, skills, and sector base
- Independent economic analysis has highlighted the presence of business and industrial clusters in growth sectors across, and within, key locations in Lancashire. The analysis indicates our local clusters have emerged as a result of natural or historical advantage. For example, Lancashire's tradition in the aerospace, advanced manufacturing and nuclear sectors provides Lancashire with a strong platform on which to develop, sustain and grow clusters of international importance.
- Lancashire's continuing focus on strengthening its industrial base by targeting the innovation, skills and supply chain solutions required to ensure Lancashire remains globally competitive and attractive to international investors will ensure the long-term viability of the area over the coming years.
- These sectors have the potential to deliver a scale of growth which will have a transformative impact on the local economy

Source : Lancashire Enterprise Partnership - Lancashire Strategic Economic Plan 2015-2025

Independent research

LOCAL LANDSCAPE

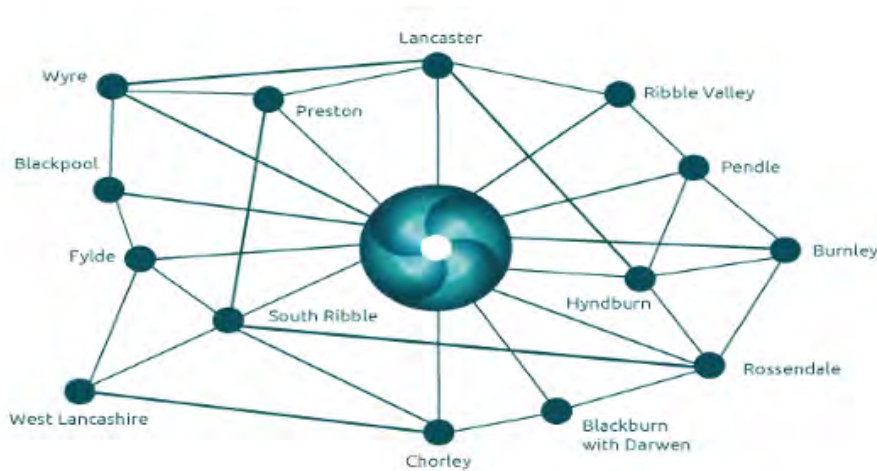
- Despite the highest proportion of people employed in the SME sector, the North West remains the second lowest region in England in terms of economic prosperity, 5th region in the UK in terms of GDP and it is also the fourth region in the country for Business Births and Deaths*

Source : Barclays UK Prosperity Survey 2014.

- It naturally follows that if increased economic growth is going to be delivered within this region, it is the SME sector that is best positioned to deliver. Despite this, GVA per FTE and Employment rates are below the average for England.

BUSINESS CASE

This project was initially positioned to achieve an increase in GVA of £7m, create 499 new jobs and launch 57 new products to the market. The project was scoped to deliver within the county of Lancashire across all boroughs of the region (inc. those represented by unitary authorities).



By dovetailing with other local and national support programmes, the project was designed to support the capability and capacity of SME businesses within Lancashire to achieve high growth (minimum 20% p.a) by providing in depth market and current state analysis, strategic direction, and then the practical implementation of these growth strategies by developing people capability / operational capacity / new product development through access to world class specialist providers. The beneficiaries receive ongoing account management throughout the process to maximise success.

The target beneficiaries are SMEs within Lancashire, including Start-up businesses i.e. newly created businesses, who have the desire and realistic potential to achieve high sustainable growth i.e.

- SMEs with fewer than 10 employees - that over 3 years have the potential to increase employment by 7 members of staff OR increase turnover by £0.75million per annum
- SMEs with more than 10 employees with the potential to increase either turnover OR staff employed by an average of 20% per annum over the 3 year period
- Start-up businesses with the potential to achieve turnover of £1million within 3 years of starting trading OR to have at minimum of 10 employees within 3 years.

Whilst sector specific exclusions and eligibility regulations apply to ERDF funding. 'Propel 2 Grow' was designed to develop strong and inclusive partnerships with local stakeholders to signpost businesses that cannot be supported by the 'Propel 2 Grow' offer. This includes the Lancashire Growth Hub (Boost) or other sources of support – whether public or private - to ensure all companies that seek support, have received the appropriate help or guidance.

STRATEGIC FIT

This project has focused on Priority Axis 3: Enhancing the Competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises, supporting the high growth potential of small and medium sized enterprises (subject to sector eligibility) through enhancing and/or complementing existing high growth support provision, specifically in relation to the following priorities:

Investment Priority 3c - Supporting the creation and the extension of advanced capacities for products, services and development. Specific objective: Increase the growth capacity of small and medium sized enterprises

Investment Priority 3d - Supporting the capacity of small and medium sized enterprises to grow in regional, national and international markets and to engage in innovation processes Specific objective: Increase growth capability of small and medium sized enterprises.

The growth journey of a typical beneficiary briefly consisted of :

1. a diagnostic / discovery phase in order to compile current state analysis
2. in depth analysis and research to scope the best interventions to achieve the 3 key growth areas/objectives
3. matching with the best in class provider to implement development of capacity and capability in order to achieve their objectives
4. account management and guidance throughout the process
5. monitoring and capture of key metrics and then to signpost next steps

Where the project commenced work with a beneficiary a need was identified to be adaptable to whatever initiatives or support that have been provided by partners or others in order to avoid duplication.

Key unique features of the project:

- 'Propel 2 Grow' has utilised Veda's existing relationships and network of private sector world-class consultants, learning providers and sector specialists. The experienced associate network being skilled to deliver new target operating models, new product development (incorporating market analysis/research, product development testing, trial and commercialisation, process re-engineering incorporating new digital opportunities).
- Access world-class people diagnostics, profiling and tools to ensure businesses have the required behaviours, capabilities and skills to ensure potential for growth.
- Obtain baseline data from within to assess where gaps have existed
- Be able to support new start-ups and companies trading less than 1 year - specifically by removing cost as a barrier to participation for selected services (match-funded by Veda themselves).
- Harness new and emerging technologies to ensure that delivery can be delivered digitally from end to end should this be a requirement to fit with the time constraints of the beneficiary.

COVID 19 IMPACTS

From March 2020 both the project and beneficiary businesses experienced unprecedented disruption not least as a consequence of the first national lockdown.

A high proportion of beneficiaries were understandably concerned with **business survival as opposed to business growth.**

The project encountered some turbulence during 2020 as consequence of a downturn in new to project businesses enrolling in the programme and existing business deferring or cancelling previously scoped interventions.

The project responded by reprioritising to this need by relaxing the growth criterion for new participants and in turn re-positioned the offer as "Propel 2 Recover, Sustain and Grow".

The rationale was that immediate need was to support businesses through the disruption by ensuring business survival in the short-term, as a pre-cursor to enable growth later, once the economic shock had subsided and ensuring businesses were equipped for the inevitable need of new business operating models to see them through the pandemic period and to become fit for the future.

During this period the project delivery was moved to 100% online. Fortuitously the design of the onboarding of businesses had already moved to digital completion of forms and signatures. However traditional face to face interventions were moved online - both by the internal project team and external consultants and suppliers.

As the country emerged from the pandemic the model transitioned to hybrid delivery but was able to revert back to online during subsequent lockdowns.

The projects offer transitioned away from solely baseline diagnostics + consultancy to also offer initiatives to support business in their immediate pandemic response and prepare their teams for new methods of working in addition to themed consultancy.

Impacts of COVID19... /(continued)

Specifically a number of workshops were offered to all beneficiaries (including new and previously enrolled businesses) on areas such as:

- Leading your remote workforce workshop
- Personal brand, resilience and self-motivation workshop
- Leading virtual teams workshops
- Gearing for change workshop
- Leading change workshop
- Self-managing mindsets workshop
- Virtual sales and servicing 1 & 2 workshops
- Operational planning workshop
- COVID safe workspaces workshop
- Harnessing Digital Tools workshop
- Commercial resilience 1 & 2 workshops
- Strategising / Re-strategising workshop
- Digital value proposition workshop

Additionally, further people orientated tools and diagnostic analysis were offered to ensure that business's key personnel were equipped for change and new ways of working

- Behavioural Analysis
- Managing Remote Workers Analysis
- Talent Selection Analysis
- Management Strengths Analysis
- Leadership Skills Analysis
- Strengths and Limitations Analysis
- How to Manage Analysis
- Sales Audit
- Sales Interview Questionnaire
- Management Audit
- Management Interview Questionnaire
- Admin / Tech Audit
- Call Centre Audit
- Training Needs Analysis
- Career Guide Planning
- High Potential Trait Indicator Analysis
- TEIQue Emotional Intelligence Assessment
- GIA Aptitude and Ability Assessment

In order to remove any barrier to participation at a time when business budgets were under pressure, these activities were delivered at no charge to the beneficiaries and privately match-funded by Vedas.

Source : Propel2Grow Project Manager

MARKETING

w: www.propel2grow.com t: 01282 832 211

the key to
business success
 is already in your grasp



propel2grow
 2inspire
 2innovate
 2create
 2achieve

Ask us today how **you** can take advantage of European funding to help your business grow

vedbs **boost**  **European Union**
 Lancashire's Business Growth Hub European Regional Development Fund

Identifying and marketing to target beneficiaries

The project employed a marketing manager and telemarketing assistant to assist in building a cohesive brand.

This team has undertaken various marketing activities to support awareness, engagement and onboarding of new clients.

- Design and development of a dynamic brand and identity
- Design, implementation and management of a website
- Introduction and management of social and online media platforms
- Editorial including online and PR coverage
- Content including blogs and case studies
- Marketing Plan
- Collateral and merchandise including pop up banners, flyers, business cards and e-shots
- Regular telemarketing to existing databases of contacts and to purchased new datasets
- Regular e-shots to existing databases of contacts and to purchased new datasets

In the latter stages of the project this resource was scaled back in response to a digital only approach post COVID and tasks were undertaken by the Project Manager and Account Management Team.

Sample copy: www.propel2grow.com
 and sample marketing flyer provided by the project.

£2000 of business analysis at no cost

Inform > Diagnose untapped opportunities in your business

Plan > Discover an achievable roadmap to drive immediate growth

Grow > Unlock the power of your people and business

What is Propel 2 Grow ?

Propel 2 Grow is an ERDF funded business support programme specifically designed to assist Lancashire businesses in achieving their growth plans.

What can we do for you?

Companies that have engaged with us have seen within 12 months turnover increase by up to 25% and gross profit by as much as 50%!

We're all about results

We have supported our clients to deliver job growth for Lancashire, deliver immediate impacts on productivity and profit, launch new products, elevate their marketing and harness digital opportunities. To date we've helped bring in an additional £10m to our local economy.

How does the programme work?

We use a variety of online tools to understand the opportunities and challenges your business may be facing today and then suggest workable solutions to *propel* your immediate growth.

These findings are then presented to you in a **Pulse Report** - developed with the help of market leading experts and Lancashire companies. This report is yours to keep and will focus on how you can:

- > Grow your bottom line
- > Develop competitive advantage
- > Improve efficiency and effectiveness
- > Upskill your people
- > Access specialist support

Let's talk
For further
information talk to
our team today

boost
Lancashire's Business
Growth Hub

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Delivery CONCLUDED

3. PROJECT PROGRESS

The project delivery was initially scoped and agreed to commence in Q3 2016 and project activity to conclude at the end of 2018

- **Activity end date - 31.12.2018**
- **Financial end date - 31.03.2019**

In December 2018 the project was extended with the following end dates

- **Activity end date - 31.12.2021**
- **Financial end date - 31.03.2022**

A subsequent further extension was granted in 2022 to extend the project to the final conclusion:

- **Activity end date - 31.03.2022**
- **Financial end date - 30.06.2022**

At the time of report compilation, all delivery activity has now concluded.

During June 2022 the desk-based evaluation has been compiled for the project including further qualitative research, consisting of a survey to gauge impacts and net promoter score values.

The final project claim and project close down is due to be completed at the end of June 2022.

Progress against agreed milestones in the GFA can be found in the following table:

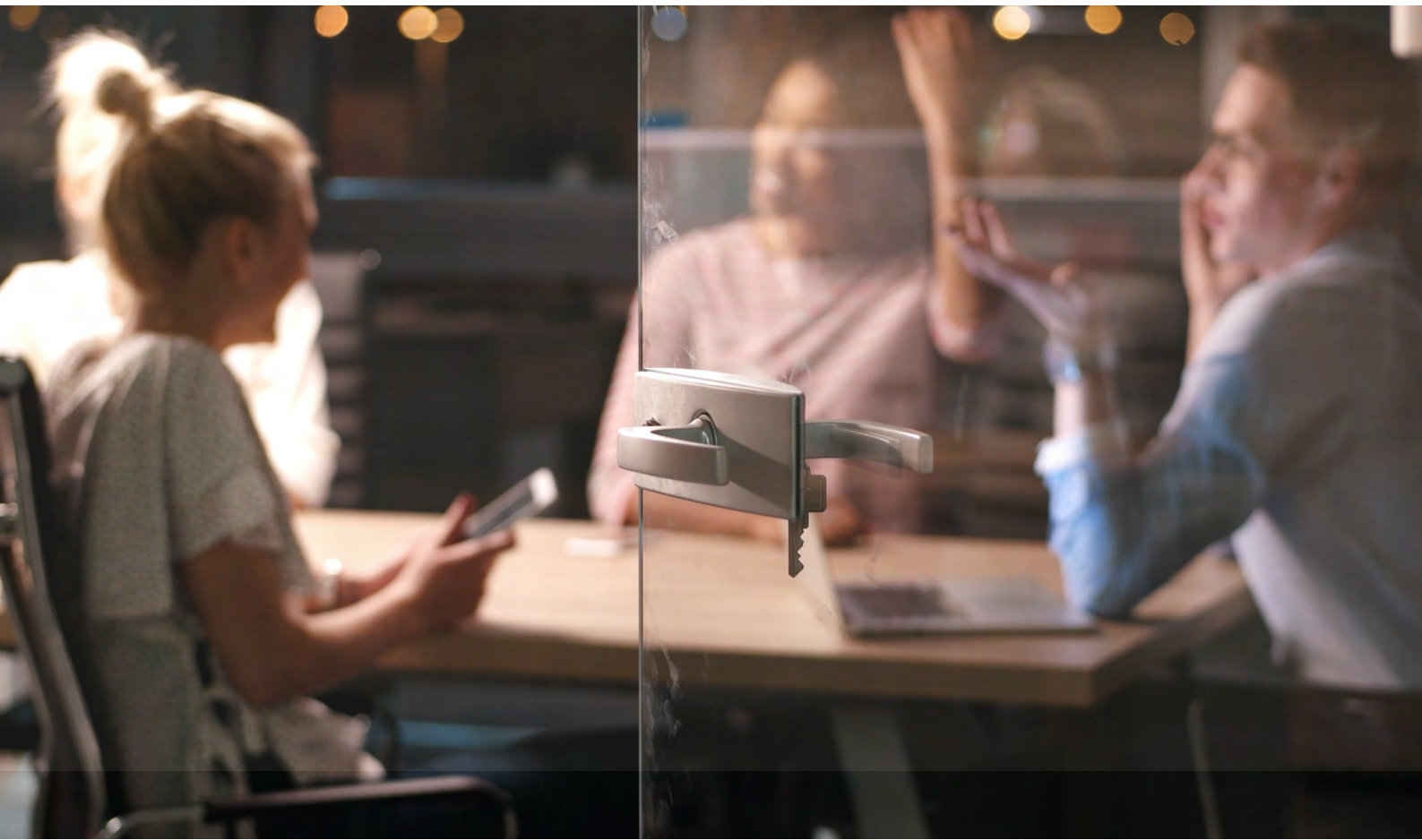
Milestone	Target Date	Variance
Commencement of marketing activities and onboarding of beneficiaries	01.07.2018	Achieved
Commence the procurement process of services required to deliver the project	01.10.2018	Achieved
Conclude procurement / award successful tenders	14.12.2018	Concluded Q2 2019
Commencement of diagnostic support for beneficiary companies	01.01.2019	Achieved
Commencement of the application process for sector specific support (grants)	01.01.2019	Achieved
Commencement of sector specific support projects to beneficiaries	01.04.2019	Achieved
Commencement of quarterly review meetings with beneficiary SMEs	01.04.2019	Achieved
50% of C1 businesses assisted output achieved	30.06.2020	Achieved
100% of C1 businesses assisted output achieved	31.12.2021	On target up to COVID now at 88.8%
50% of C29 new to firm products output achieved	31.12.2020	Achieved
100% of C29 new to firm products output achieved	30.06.2022	Ongoing
50% of C08 job creation outputs achieved	31.12.2021	Achieved
100% of C08 job creation outputs achieved	30.06.2022	Ongoing
100% of all outputs captured and reported	31.03.2022	Now 30.06.22
Activity completion date	31.12.2021	Activity end date agreed to be extended to 31.03.2022 using existing underspend.
Financial completion date	31.03.2022	Financial end date agreed to be extended to 30.06.2022

Delivery, governance, management.

4. PROJECT DELIVERY AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 Introduction This section provides narrative on the implementation of the project including delivery performance, governance and management. It considers the elements of project delivery that have gone well, as well as those where opportunities for improvement have been identified. Specifically, the following questions are addressed:

- Has the project been well managed and governed to date?
- Has a compliant and successful approach to procuring services been applied?
- Has the project been delivered by the right personnel?
- Is the project identifying and engaging with the right beneficiaries?
- Is the project delivering its intended activities, to a high standard?



4.2 Project Delivery

4.2.1 Roles & responsibilities

Project Manager. Overall day to day responsibility for the management of the project and liaison with the Managing Authority, Authorise activity to deliver work packages to beneficiaries, monitor progress via ongoing performance management and reporting, and where necessary implement a Corrective Action if delivery goes off-track:

- review applications and recommend, defer or decline funding to beneficiaries; then finally accept the completed packages delivered by the external consultants to ensure alignment with the originally agreed scope.
- due diligence
- project assessment and assurance
- financial assessment
- state aid
- case review panel.

Vedas Senior Management Team (Managing Director or CEO) – Acting as Project Board. Provides project oversight and escalation path for any potential queries. Accountable for the success or failure of the project at a macro level:

- provide unified direction to the project and Project Manager.
- provide the resources and authorised the funds for the project.
- review business case
- provide strategic direction
- recommend, defer or decline the overall project funding.

Project Accountant - responsible for the projects financial performance and reporting, raising any exceptions or concerns to the Project Manager

- Compilation of forecast and actual expenditure records
- liaison with the Managing Authority as first point of contact for financial queries
- expenses, payroll issues and payables
- compliance checking of financial evidence prior to payment of beneficiary claims

Key Account Managers – generate awareness; engagement of SMEs; screen and support of applications; organise/attend events, workshops, one-to-one sessions;

- Generate awareness amongst known target beneficiaries
- engage with SMEs whether self-generated leads or produced from marketing activity / referral
- screen and support applications
- organise/attend events
- conduct diagnostic activities with target beneficiaries in conjunction with the Business Support Team
- provide ad-hoc workshops
- provide one-to-one sessions
- report progress or exceptions to the Project Manager.

Business Support Team - provide beneficiary level support in elements provided as part of the projects internal offer:

- Disseminate and compile 'Pulse' baseline diagnostics
- analyse and interrogate baseline 'Pulse' data to understand key messages, opportunities and work-ons and identify Key Result Areas of focus in order to drive growth
- act as point of contact (in conjunction with Account Manager) to present and explain findings and recommendations.

Marketing Team – generate awareness; engagement of SMEs; screen and support applications; organise/attend events, workshops, one-to-one sessions;

- Compile branding
- produce, host and service Propel2Grow website
- conduct social media campaigns
- conduct digital marketing
- conduct telemarketing
- produce collaterals for ad-hoc marketing and events
- monitor, report and adapt to marketing ROI
- report progress to the Project Manager.

Project Co-ordinator - maintain robust document management and ensure timely issuance of any project related documentation.

- Beneficiary enrolment applications (inc compliance checking)
- process applications for match funding within agreed quarterly budget
- point of contact for all completed beneficiary claims before compliance checking and sending on to Project Manager for approval.

4.3 Management & Governance

In-depth interviews with stakeholders to inform this summative assessment has indicated that the Propel2Grow project has been well managed and governed to date.

4.3.1 Timeframes

Review of Propel2Grow progress reports highlights the following key points:

Effectively established & concluded in line with anticipated timeframes -

The project delivery has concluded within the specified timeframes.

4.3.2 Controls

Effective ongoing activity management of and financial control -

Robust mechanisms for governing project activity and finances were found to be in place – there has been a three stage check and audit of beneficiary claims prior to payments. There have been no incidents on incorrect payments made to beneficiaries. The project underwent an Article 125 audit in August 2019. A yellow advisory was issued as an expense receipt was found to be missing for 1 x coffee purchased. As a result of this advisory a 2 step authorisation process was established (Project Manager to check all expense claims prior to submission to the Accountant) and there have been no issues reported since,

4.3.3 Most Economically Advantageous Procurement

Procurement compliant with Public Sector Procurement guidelines

Procurement activity was undertaken in Autumn 2016 (at the inception of the project). All records were audited as part of the Article 125 audit and found to be compliant. The process was repeated when the project was extended in Spring 2019 and the same process was adopted except that all documentation was submitted electronically as opposed to on paper (signed by EIDAS compliant e-signature). A complete set of electronic records have been inspected by the Managing Authority during their regular quarterly project reviews and again found to be compliant.

Findings are that the tendering process was successful in determining the quality of suppliers and did indeed meet with the requirements in the tender. All tenderers underwent a qualitative and commercial appraisal (weighted 50/50).

4.3.4 Eligibility of beneficiaries

Beneficiaries have been found to be deemed eligible for ERDF support in relation to the following:

- **Appropriate business size - SME as determined by the EU definition**
- **Eligible postcode areas within Lancashire**
- **Not operating in ERDF restricted sectors**
- **Predominantly serving B2B customers**

Prior to COVID19, the purpose of the project was to support **High Growth potential businesses and start-ups**. The characteristics of High Growth Potential business was communicated as follows:

- *Commitment to Growth* – entrepreneurs having the will, desire and ambition to scale. Difference between wanting their business to grow and making it happen
- *Building an Extensive Management Skillset* – whilst entrepreneurs have a given expertise, crucial to growth is an expanded skillset achieved through building a team with broad and complementary skills
- *Building a Collaborative Network* – having a mind-set that allows for partnerships outside of the business extending to suppliers, customers and other forms of service providers and partners
- *Establishing Consistent Processes* – need for implementing standardised and repeatable processes using delegation along with investing in systems and training
- *Developing a Core Competence* – in order to create a strategy it's important for a business to identify a core competence that provides the capability to compete and to then invest in focussed growth
- *Articulate Competitive Strength* – entrepreneurs looking at their business through their customers eyes and utilising this insight to strengthen processes and knowledge in order to develop a competitive edge.

At the enquiry stage, clear guidelines were in place designed principally for use by Project's Account Management personnel in order to assess SME beneficiaries at the early stages of considering an application.

Guidance and training was provided for early stage assessment of suitability to provide key information about the objectives of the programme, compliance, and eligible/ineligible activities.

4.3.4 Eligibility of beneficiaries

Early stage communication provided to beneficiaries stated the eligibility criteria and aims of the Propel2Grow project, including their obligations during and after their project participation. This documentation is present on every enrolment form and is held electronically in the beneficiary file and digitally signed by each beneficiary to confirm their understanding and acceptance.

Project controls:

The project has been able to demonstrate the **eligibility checks** that have been in place for the Account Management Team (supported by the Project Coordinator) to adhere to, i.e.:

- Business size meets the ERDF requirements of an SME
- Postcodes are checked upon enrolment (and subsequently validated during quarterly output upload to the Managing Authority)
- Business SIC codes are checked to ensure beneficiaries are not operating in non-eligible sectors
- Business must declare their customer base and sign a declaration as part of their enrolment process.
- All documents are stored in an electronic folder (by beneficiary) for subsequent validation and regular sample spot-checks are undertaken by the Project Manager.

4.3.5 State Aid - eligibility and reporting

Beneficiary levels of prior state aid is captured and declared as part of the onboarding process and paperwork.

There have been **zero instances** where beneficiaries have exceeded State Aid thresholds in relation to either De Minimis or GBER Article 18.

Beneficiaries receive a **State Aid Estimate** as to the value of their expected support at the commencement of scoping their support package.

A further confirmation of **Actual State Aid** received is sent upon completion.

State Aid Dispersement is reported quarterly on ESIF form 8-001 Progress Report.

4.4 Branding & Marketing

Prompt development and effective dissemination of the Propel2Grow brand and compliance with ERDF rules.

Samples have been provided of marketing collaterals (including some that were rejected and not used on the basis of not being compliant when checked internally).

The end to end marketing solution, consisted of:

- Name development,
- Brand identity and rollout
- Website development
- Communications strategy and planning
- PR and content programme
- Social media management
- Telesales
- Digital marketing.

A further opportunity could have been exploited to make greater use of video capture of beneficiary case studies for upload onto a dedicated Youtube or Vimeo channel.

4.5 Delivery stage

Regular communication has taken place with suppliers through project management meetings, phone calls or via Zoom. In every instance the objectives of the delivery are checked to ensure are relevant to the aim of achieving business growth (or post pandemic to contribute to re-stabilising the business).

The ongoing project management has also enabled the continued development and shaping of project proposals ensuring effectiveness and relevance in the context of project objectives and the context of beneficiaries need to respond and pivot as part of their pandemic response.

Participant feedback suggests a perceived high standard of delivery. This is further validated by the project's positive Net Promoter Score.

(Further details can be found in Section 5 of this report).

4.6 Reporting & Close down

The project reporting and metrics were agreed at the onset of the project to facilitate the collation and reporting of project MI.

There have been no gaps in reporting and all claims, progress reports have been submitted promptly without exception.

However there was an error identified in the reporting of some of the sub metrics: *namely a C4 output was counted each time a beneficiary received grant funding as opposed to once only per beneficiary.* This was corrected during December 2021 and a re-upload of claims were made to remedy this misunderstanding. In assessing the project performance, our evaluation has been made post the correction using the agreed and verified output counts.

Project close down paperwork and final claim is due for completion by the Financial end date - 30th June 2022. We have no reason to believe there will be any delay in submission.

A woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark blazer over a white shirt, is leaning over a desk and working on a laptop. The background is blurred, showing an office environment.

CONCLUSION

This project has been well managed by an experienced, dedicated and compliant team.

Management processes have been found to be robust and immediate corrective actions have been put in place if and when required.

The project has been delivered to a high standard and all reasonable efforts to engage the correct beneficiaries have been adopted and adhered to.



Propel2Grow

5. OUTPUTS, OUTCOMES & IMPACTS

This section provides both data and evaluative narrative relating to the projects performance of namely:

The evaluation will provide an interim evaluation of :

- 5.1 Summary of outputs achieved to date versus project lifetime targets
- 5.2 Summary of outcomes
- 5.3 Summative Assessment Logic Model
- 5.4 Summary of Impacts from beneficiary feedback
- 5.5 Beneficiary feedback
- 5.6 NPS Survey results
- 5.7 Summary of performance

It is recommended that - if practical - outputs and outcomes are re-appraised one year on after the activity end date as by definition, certain outputs cannot yet be recognised in this data or that not enough time has been allowed for the outcomes to be realised.

This relates specifically to the following output indicators:

- C8
- C29

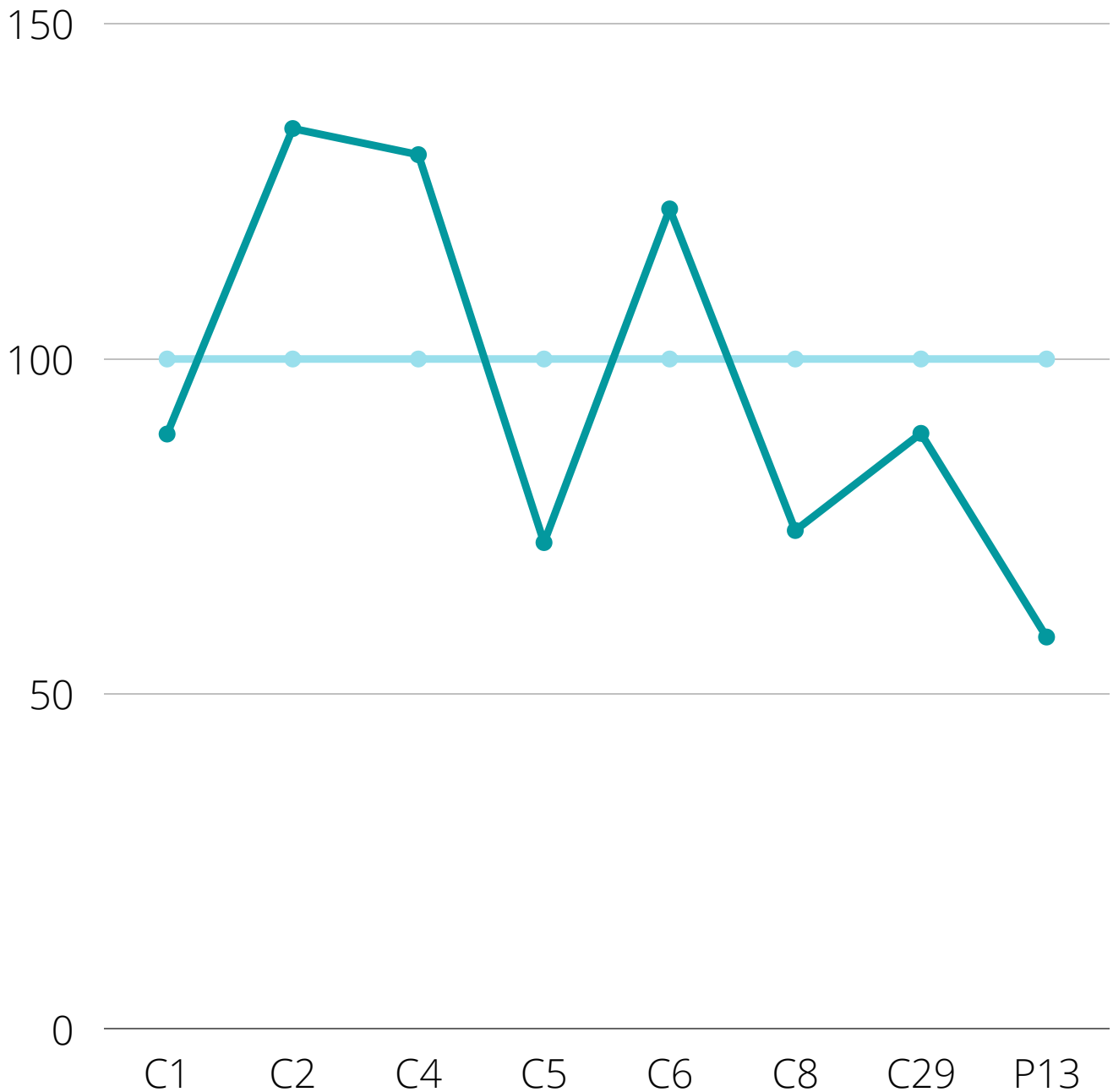
And the following outcomes:

- GVA by business, and in turn
- GVA at project level.

We would not normally recommend a further beneficiary impact, feedback or NPS evaluation as returns are likely to significantly diminished after 1 year plus since delivery.

OUTPUTS

% AGAINST PROJECT LIFETIME TARGET AT TIME OF EVALUATION (IP3C & IP3D COMBINED)



IP3c Outputs	Contracted total	Cumulative Actual to end Q1 2022
C01 - Enterprises receiving support	202	181
C02 – Enterprises receiving grants	107	144
C04 – Enterprises receiving non financial support	174	175
C05 – Number of new enterprises supported	34	16
C06 – Private investment matching public support (grants) (£s)	£308,855	£380,366
C08 – Employment increase in supported enterprises (FTE jobs)	220	178
C29 – Enterprises supported to introduce new to firm products	58	80
P13 – Enterprises receiving information, diagnostic & brokerage	39	30
IP3d Outputs	Contracted total	Cumulative Actual to end Q1 2022
C01 - Enterprises receiving support	431	381
C02 – Enterprises receiving grants	230	309
C04 – Enterprises receiving non financial support	378	381
C05 – Number of new enterprises supported	61	53
C06 – Private investment matching public support (grants) (£s)	£669,437	£799,710
C08 – Employment increase in supported enterprises (FTE jobs)	455	505
C29 – Enterprises supported to introduce new to firm products	116	152
P13 – Enterprises receiving information, diagnostic & brokerage	63	46

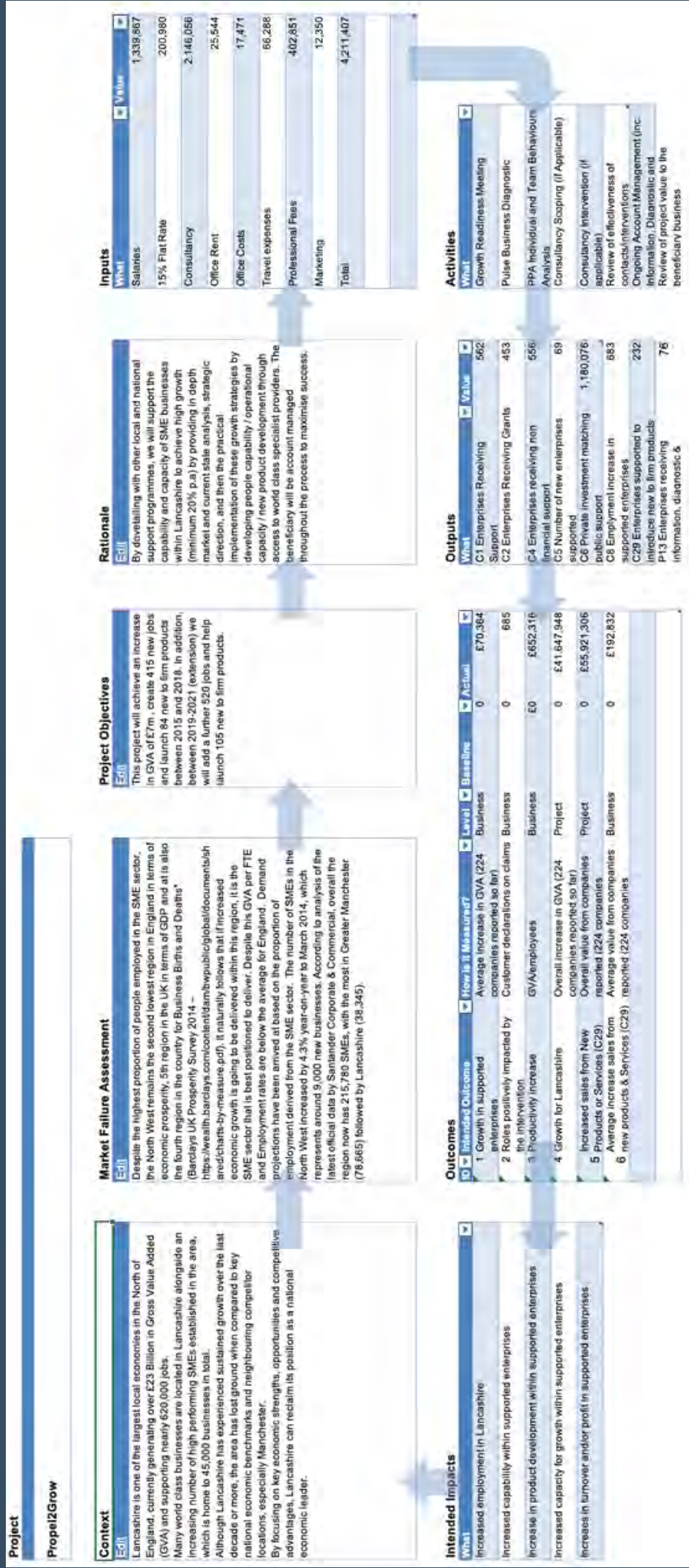
5.2 OUTCOMES

Intended Outcome	How is it Measured?	Level	Actual
Growth in supported enterprises	Average increase in GVA (224 companies reported so far)	Business	£70,364
Roles positively impacted by the intervention	Customer declarations on claims	Business	685
Productivity increase	GVA/employees	Business	£652,316
Growth for Lancashire	Overall increase in GVA (224 companies reported so far)	Project	£41,647,948
Increased sales from New Products or Services (C29)	Overall value from companies reported (224 companies reported so far)	Project	£55,921,306
Average increase sales from new products & Services (C29)	Average value from companies reported (224 companies reported so far)	Business	£192,832



OUTCOMES

5.3 SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT LOGIC MODEL



5.4 IMPACTS

In addition to the hard metrics, collated by the project, we independently canvassed beneficiaries to provide their view on the following:

- How confident are you that you will be in a position to create job openings within the coming year?
- Have you managed to create any jobs that can be attributed to your participation on the programme (and if yes, how many)?
- Have any of your team been positively impacted by your participation (e.g. new skills, new areas of responsibility, promotion or salary increment) and if yes, how many?
- Has your brand/marketing proposition improved as a result of your participation?
- Has your business managed to move into any new markets (geographically or by sector) as a result of your participation?
- Do you expect to create or introduce new products or services in to your portfolio in the next 2 years?
- Have you created or introduced new products or services into your portfolio?

Additionally, regardless of their initial reason for engaging with the project, as a means to gain insight into future programme needs, we asked beneficiaries to gauge how their businesses were impacted by macro factors within the business environment right now, specifically in relation to:

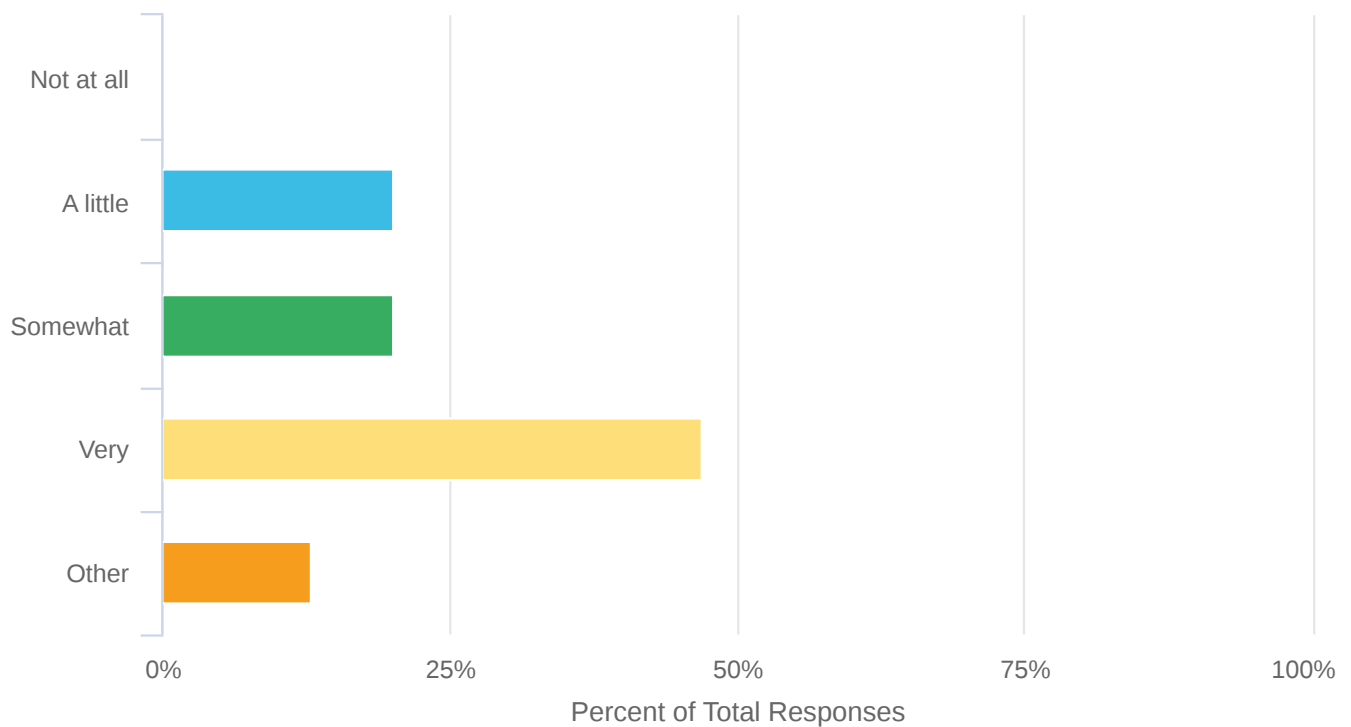
- Cost inflation
- Supply chain issues
- Brexit
- Impacts remaining from the pandemic
- People (recruitment or skills challenges)

A woman with long brown hair and glasses, wearing a light-colored striped shirt, is standing in a warehouse or storage area. She is holding a mobile phone to her ear with her right hand and looking down at some papers or a box with her left hand. The background is filled with numerous cardboard boxes stacked on pallets. The lighting is warm and focused on the woman.

**BENEFICIARY
IMPACTS**

Job creation - confidence

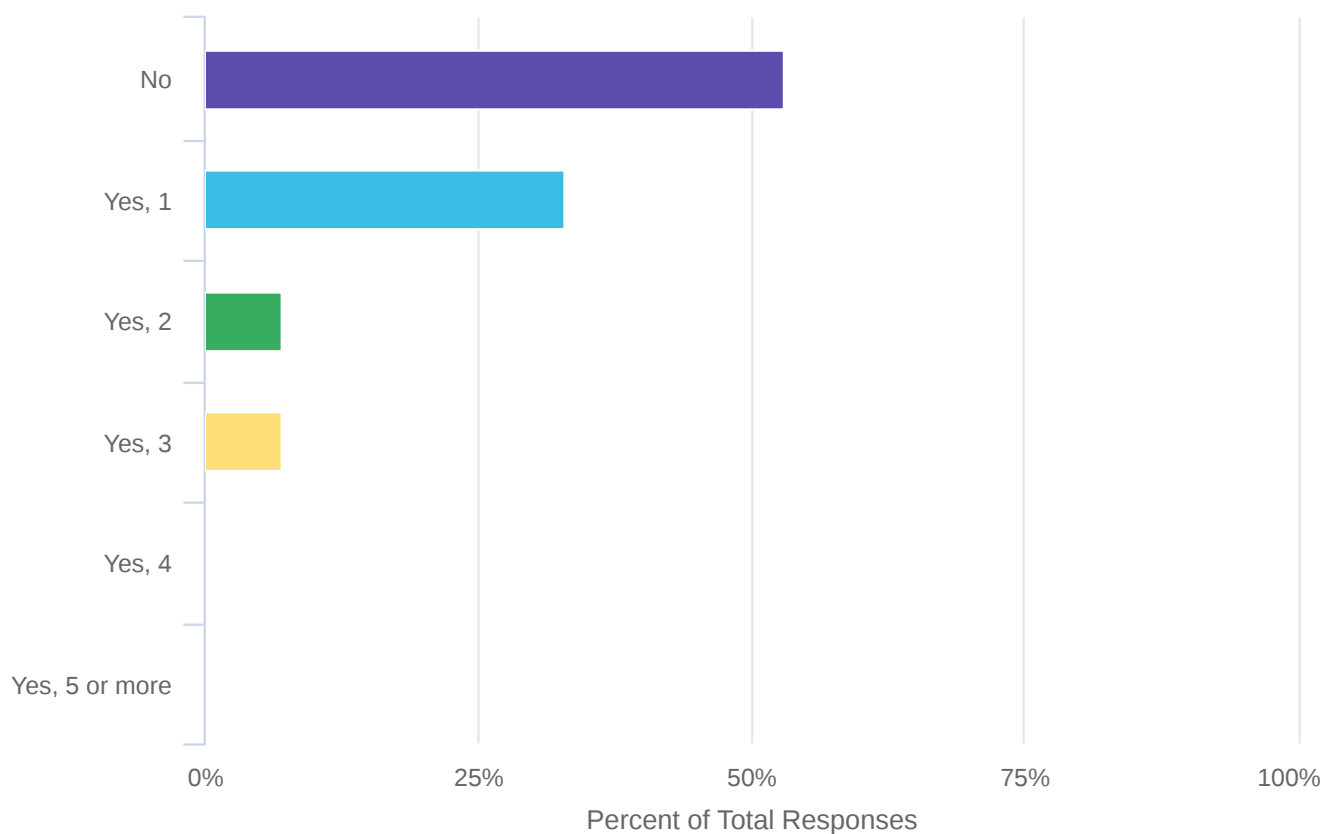
How confident are you that you will be in a position to create job openings within the coming year?



It is encouraging that 100% of business show some degree of confidence that they may create job openings this year, and it would be advisable for follow up in a year's time to ascertain whether this was borne out.

Job creation - actual

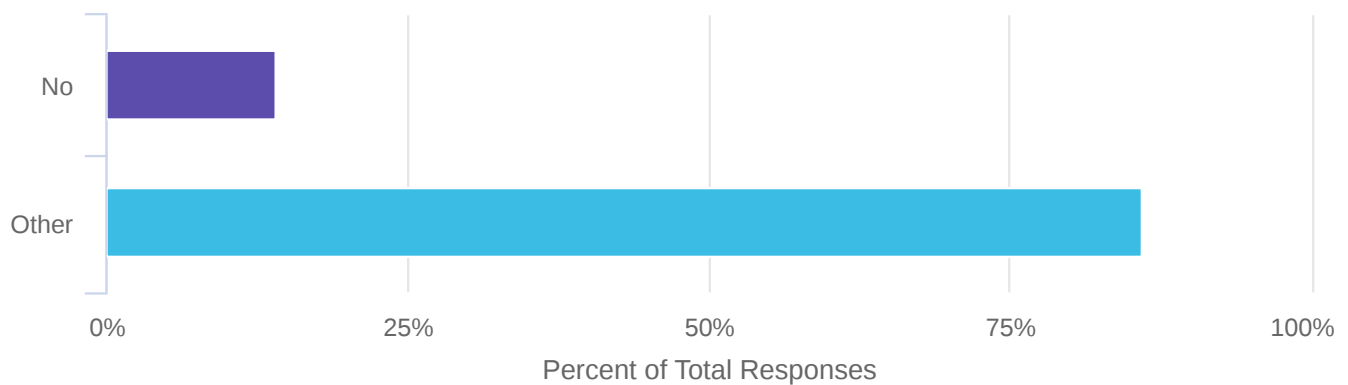
Have you managed to create any jobs that can be attributed to your participation on the programme (and if yes, how many)?



Actual job creation remains relatively soft, however in this context of the post COVID recovery this is perhaps not surprising. Despite that high percentage of business that are yet to create a job, the previous question relating to confidence over the next 12 months is encouraging.

Roles positively impacted

Have any of your team been positively impacted by your participation (e.g. new skills, new areas of responsibility, promotion or salary increment) and if yes, how many?

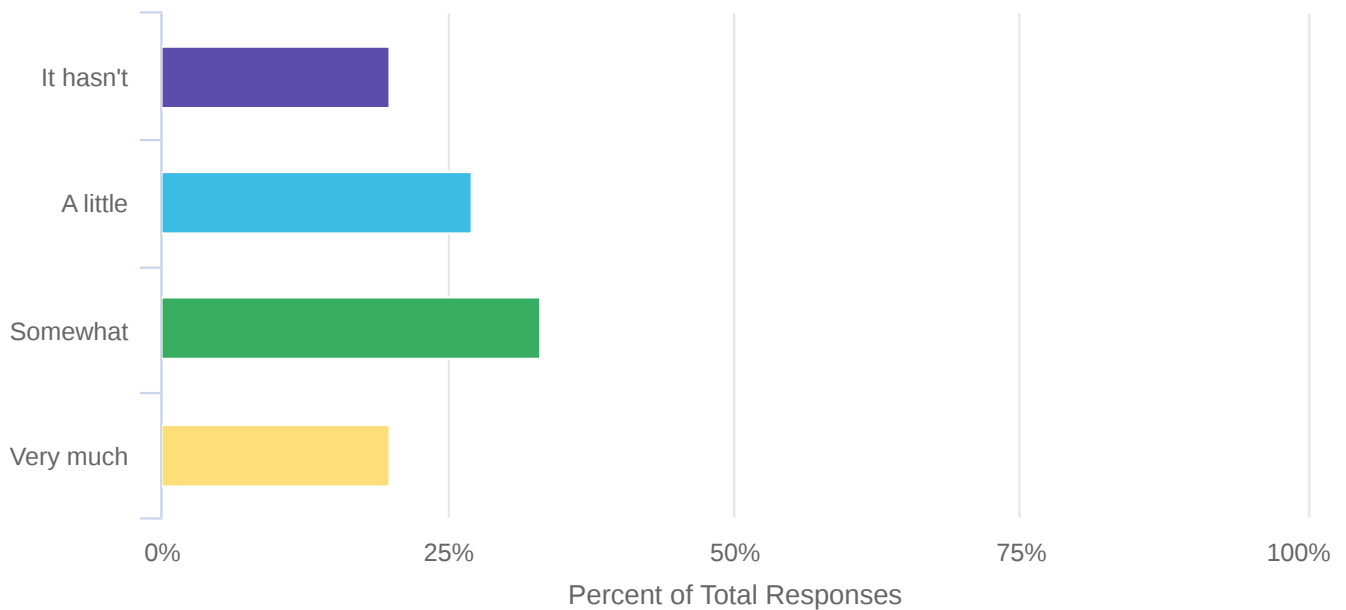


86% of respondents reported some degree of positive impact for individuals attributed to their programme. These were listed as new skills, salary increase, enhanced accountability, taking on more responsibility and wider understanding of their role within the business.

In relation to the number of roles impacted the affirmative responses ranged from 1 - 4.

Marketing

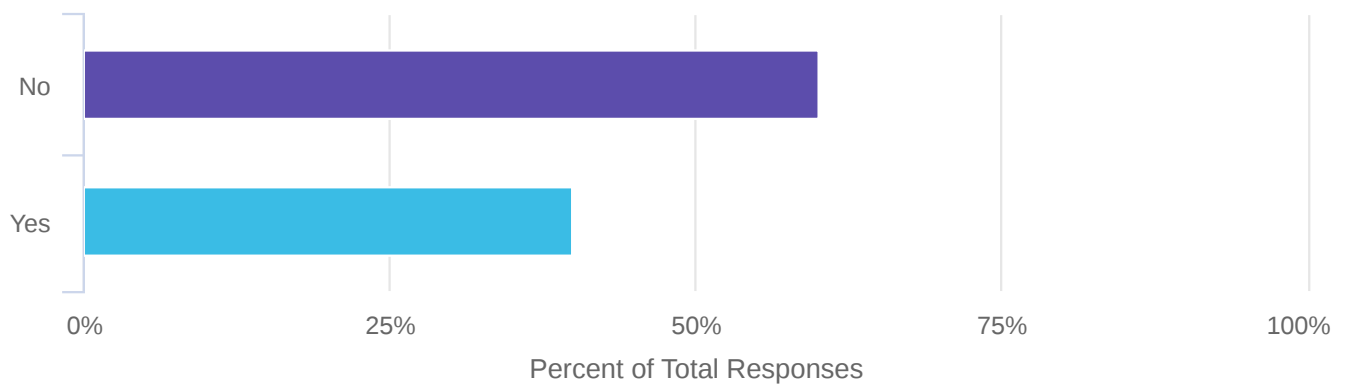
Has your brand/marketing proposition improved as a result of your participation?



80% of respondents have reported an improvement in brand / marketing position. This is very encouraging particularly as match funded consultancy in relation to marketing were approximately 35%. This suggests that of the remaining responses the post COVID support workshops have had a benefit - which focused on Strategy, Digital Value Proposition and Virtual Sales and Servicing has led to positive impacts, and at no additional charge for the beneficiaries.

New markets

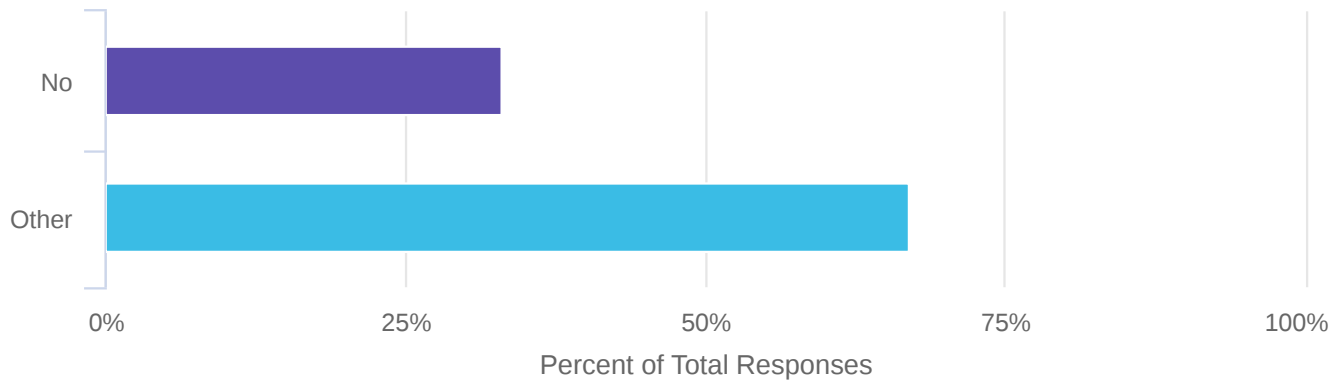
Has your business managed to move into any new markets (geographically or sectorally) as a result of your participation?



Whilst this was not a specific output for the project, it is encouraging the 40% of respondents attributed the programme to their ability to enter new markets.

New products or services - confidence

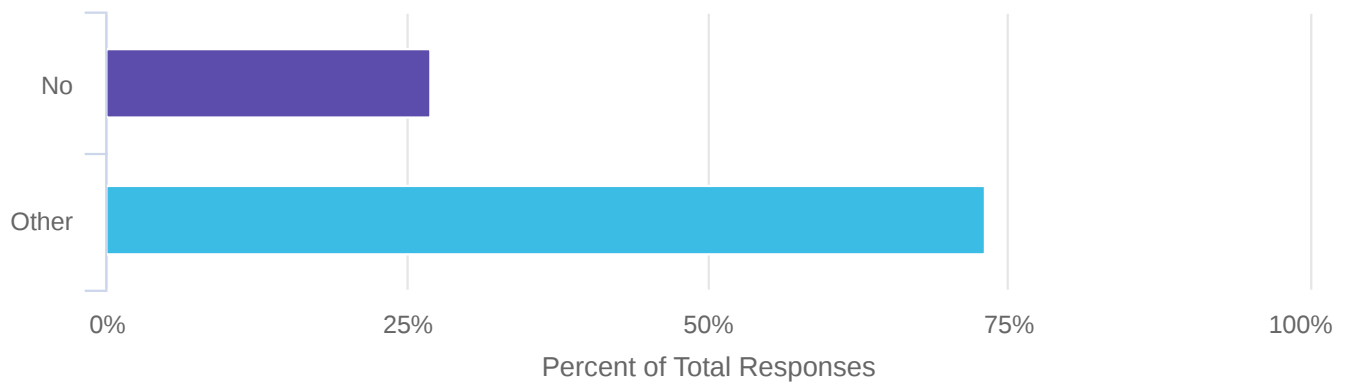
Do you expect to create or introduce new products or services in to your portfolio in the next 2 years?



Encouragingly 67% of respondents plan to introduce new products or services in the next 2 years and whilst this is a positive result, is slightly lower than the actual that have introduced new products or services already. This suggests that there some has been some immediacy to act after their participation - in some cases due to a pressing need to change their core offer post COVID.

New products or services - actual

Have you created or introduced new products or services into your portfolio?

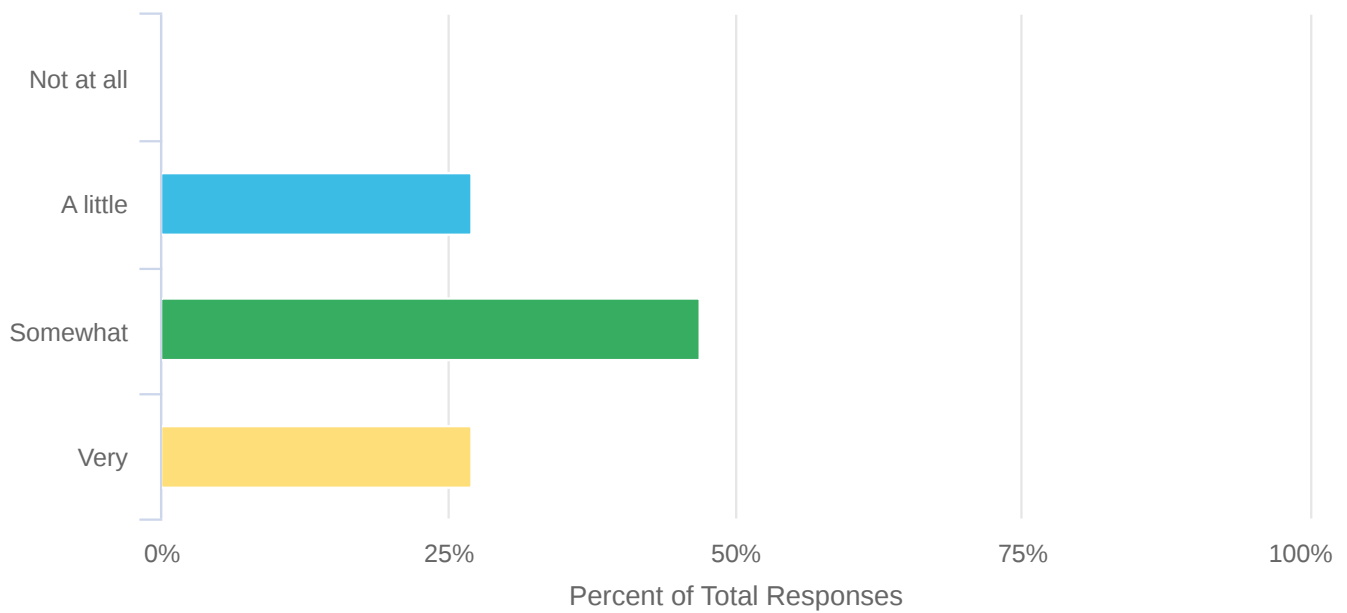


A high 73% of respondents have indicated that they have introduced new products or services, of these affirmative responses, the range of answers were from 1-6 new products introduced.

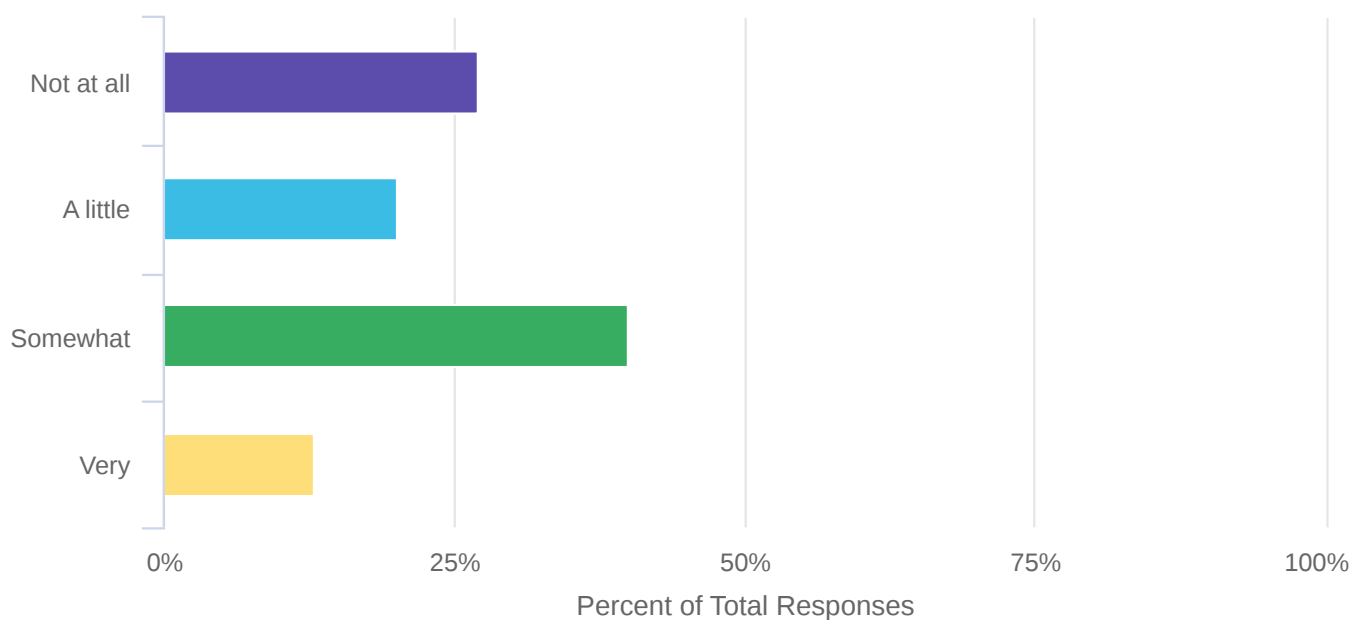
The business environment - future focus

To what extent are the following external factors affecting your business currently.

Cost inflation

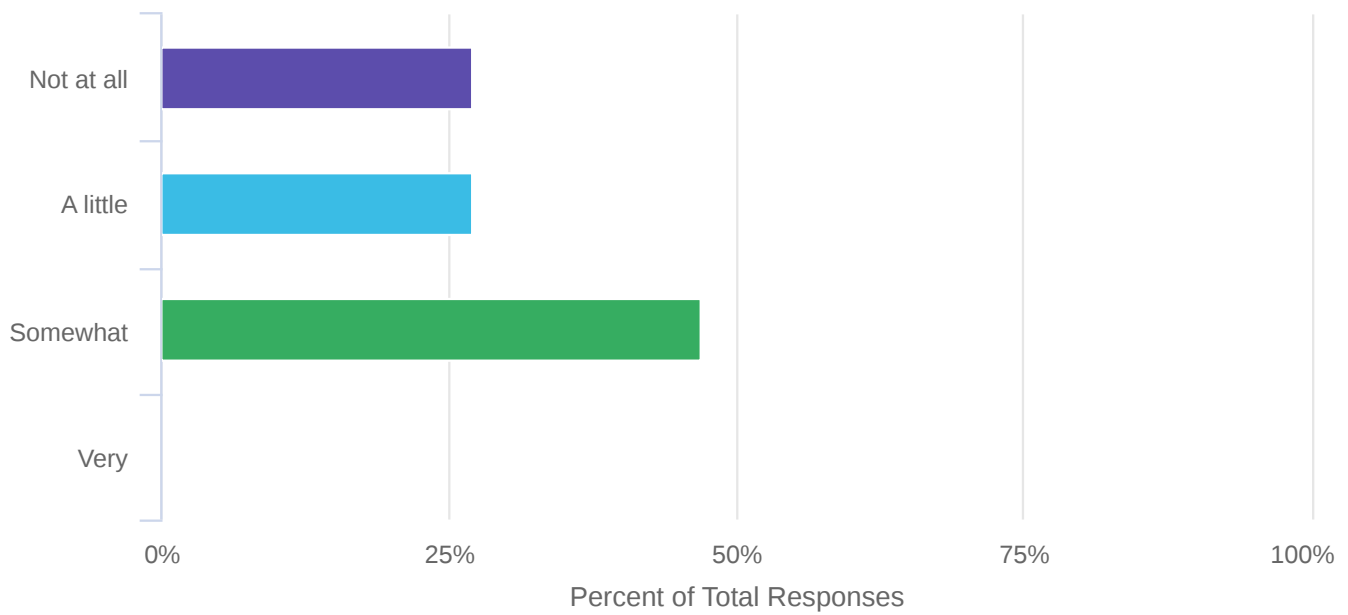
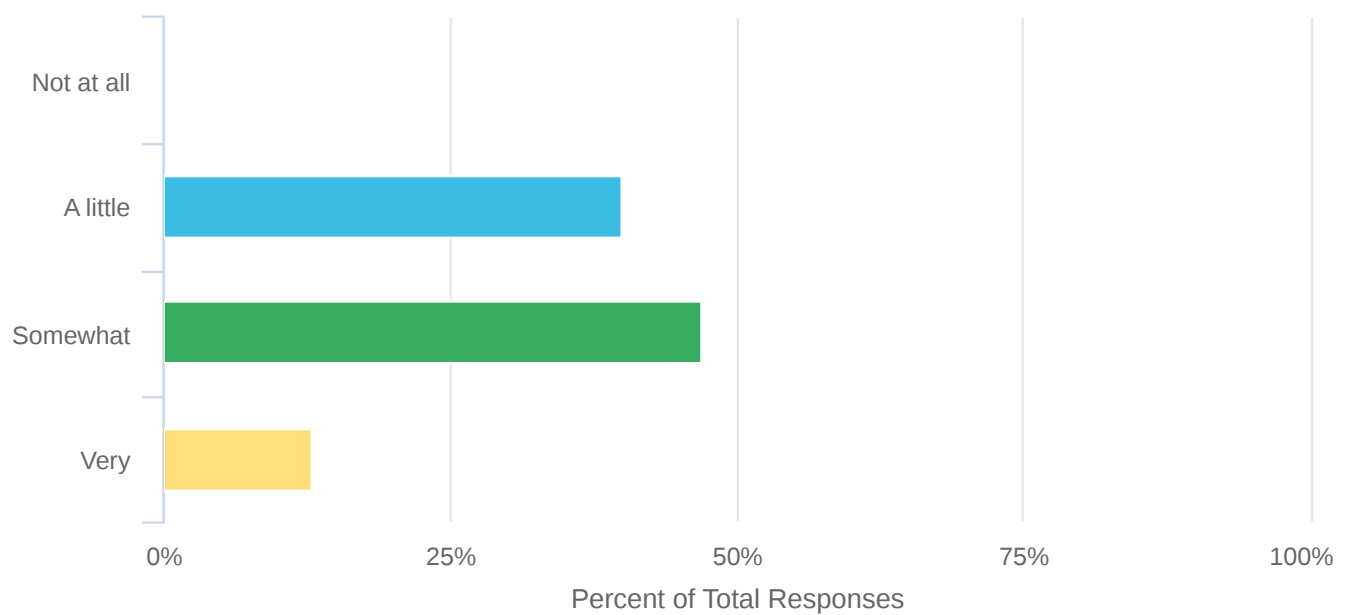


Supply chain issues



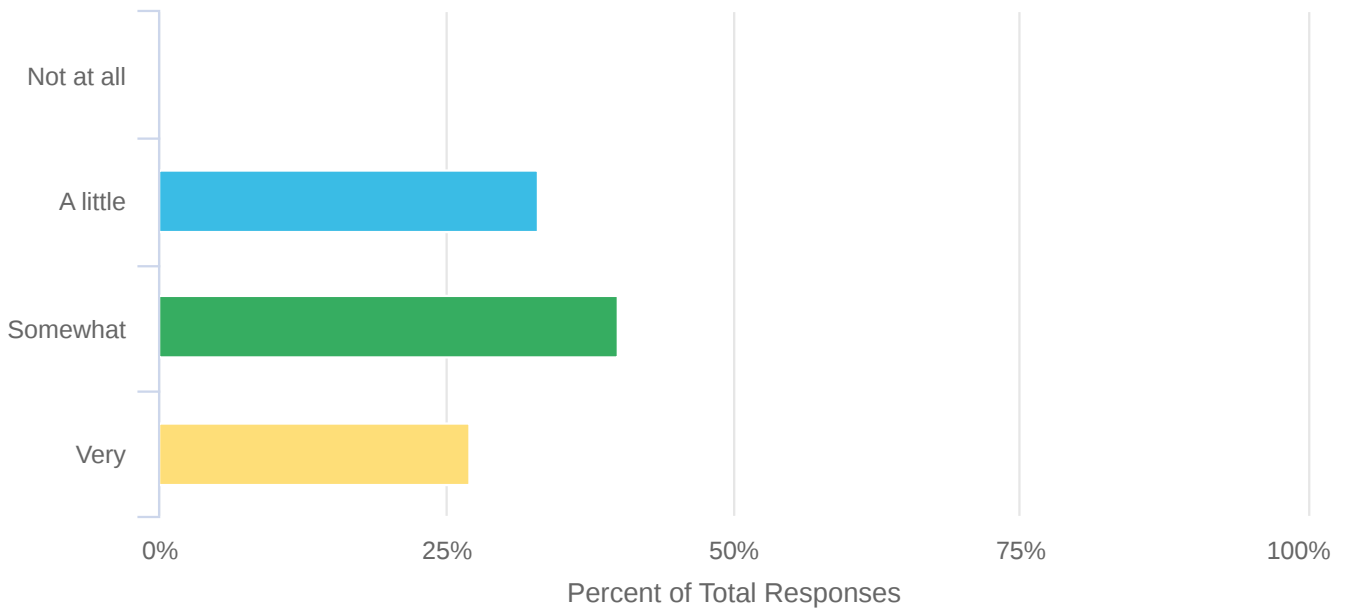
The business environment (cont'd)

To what extent are the following external factors affecting your business currently

Brexit**Impacts remaining from COVID**

The business environment (cont'd)

To what extent are the following external factors affecting your business currently

People (recruitment or skills challenges)

These findings suggest that businesses are continuing to be affected by macro factors within their business environment. Whilst these are arguably beyond the control of the business, and in some cases out of scope for the project delivery as delivered in its earlier stages, it may be desirable for future programmes to include initiatives and content that may increase capability to respond to these factors, agnostic of the sector.

5.5 FEEDBACK

Beneficiary narrative feedback

What was the most beneficial aspect of the programme?

Verbatim:

- People profiling
- Grant funding and fantastic training
- Final project implementation
- Business advice, cash-flow, profit margins, financial projection and planning
- Always having someone to ask for advice
- Waking me up to the fact that I needed to run the business better
- Brexit support
- It was easily executed without too much paperwork. The deadlines were met which meant the programme was efficiently completed in a timely manner
- New learnings and peer to peer support
- Learning new skills
- We were a little shell-shocked when the pandemic first hit. Our business relied on face to face meetings for selling and servicing our clients. We're really grateful for the workshops to help us start to plan how we could transition. I must admit I was unsure if it would work as it was such a massive shift for us but happy to say much of what we changed has remained part of how we work today - thanks for being there, allowing us to breathe and overcome the panic. You were right - we got this!
- The funding. We probably wouldn't have been able to afford the help without it
- During covid we were bombarded with lots of offers of free training. The training from Propel (Mike and Craig) was by far the best
- We had talked about getting help with our marketing for a while but hadn't been convinced we could afford it and whether it would pay off. The help with funding towards it convinced us take the plunge and I'm glad we did - it's paid for itself many times over



BENEFICIARY
FEEDBACK

5.5 FEEDBACK

Beneficiary narrative feedback

What was the most beneficial aspect of the programme? (/continued)

Verbatim:

- The leading teams workshops for remote workers was a blessing. Our employee engagement surveys have actually gone up since lockdown thanks to what we put in place
- Understanding what makes our people tick
- Moving to virtual after lockdown
- Love the profiles we did. Our team still call out certain behaviours from what we learned
- Great to have someone in your corner. From our first meeting Sandra was lovely and nothing was too much trouble
- Thanks for helping get the paperwork completed. I was putting it off so the guidance was very welcome.

What was the least beneficial aspect of the programme?

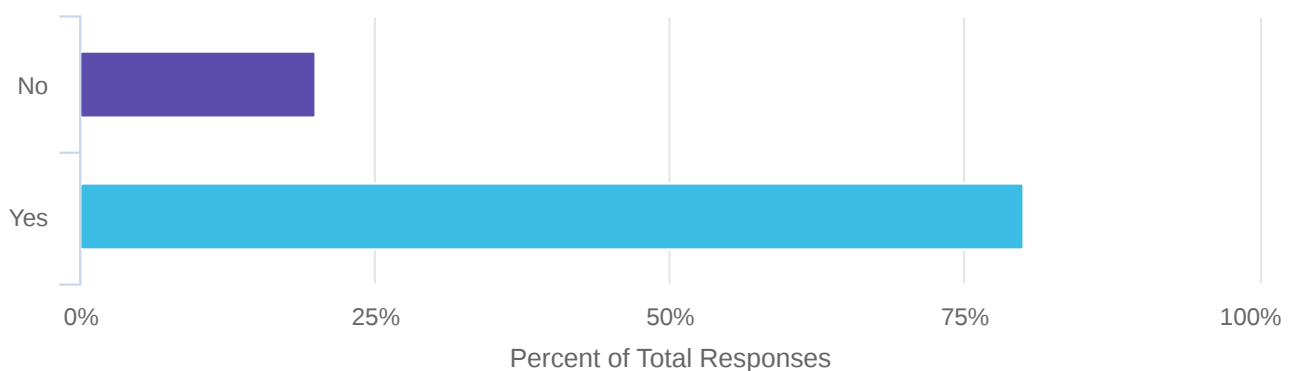
Verbatim:

- The amount of paperwork required and the length of time from start to finish.
- Can't really say - was beneficial all round - maybe not using all of the tools I was shown but it did shake us up and that effect remains. I attended a "master class" series of meetings which I disliked. Some real idiots on this - hogging the time and showing off
- Nothing
- Paperwork
- I found the paperwork confusing at first.
- Claiming the grant was a bit bureaucratic.
- We couldn't claim the funding till our consultant had done their part of the forms. Not your fault but they were last so minute which created some last minute stress for us to meet the deadline
- The timing was unfortunate because just as we finished was when the entire country went into lockdown and we lost momentum
- As a new business would have preferred the funding to be for 100% rather than 50. We appreciated the help but it was still a struggle to raise the cash
- I found the paperwork quite confusing - especially since I've never used excel before. Paper would have been easier
- Not sure
- N/A.

What would be your desired next steps (from the Lancashire business support community or similar)?

Verbatim:

- Additional / new funding
- Additional growth support with financial incentives to help
- Mentor to access for advice occasionally
- To assist with the expansion of the business
- No more structured support - happy as we are. Maybe a catch up with a mentor every 6-12 months
- Assistance with survival and recovery post covid
- Notification of future opportunities
- I think we're ok for now but good to know what is out there if ever we need it
- Not sure
- None

Would you like us to pass your details to Boost (Lancashire's Business Growth Hub) to be kept up to date with funding, support and initiatives to help you continue your business growth?

5.6 NPS

NPS and Evaluation overall

In answer to the question "On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being low, 10 being high) how likely are you to recommend participation in Propel2Grow to a business / enterprise that is known to you." the Net Promoter Score, (calculated by subtracting the percentage of Detractors from the percentage of Promoters) was found to be **+60%.**

Promoters.	(63%)
Passives	(33%)
Detractors	(3%)
NPS Score	+60



The **range** of responses was from 1 to 10.

The **mean** score was 8.1

The **mode** was 10.

Taking into account results against desired beneficiary impacts, number of completers and findings from the impact survey our evaluator's overall rating of effectiveness was VERY GOOD.

Understanding NPS : Net Promoter Scores range from -100 to +100, and what is considered 'good,' 'bad,' or 'neutral' can vary greatly across industries. Some count a positive score (i.e. any score over 0) as good, since it shows some customer loyalty and customer satisfaction.

That said, if an NPS survey is conducted by independent researchers—using strict, scientific sampling methods—a score of 60 or higher is generally a very good NPS - in any industry.

NPS Score

+60%

Effectiveness Rating
VERY GOOD

✓✓✓✓

5.7 SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE

In summary against the first four parameters for evaluation of the five key requirements, as set out in national programme guidance. (Cost effectiveness is covered separately in Section 6: Value for Money).

1) Relevance and consistency:

The programme has clearly met the objective of supporting businesses to deliver growth - evidenced by the far exceeded additional GVA achieved.

SMEs in Lancashire remain the primary source of employment so it stands to reason that these businesses will continue to need to be supported if the aims of the Lancashire LEP are to be achieved.

Since the programme's inception there have been some major factors within the business environment - Brexit, Inflation, Impacts from COVID, Supply chain problems and People skills shortages. Whilst this programme has sought to assist where required there remains a major need in these areas from the beneficiary feedback surveys.

2) Progress against contractual targets:

The programme appeared to be tracking broadly in line with targets up until the disruption as a result of the first (and subsequent) lockdowns. Had these not occurred, prior performance suggests it is likely that the number of businesses assisted would have been on target. Notwithstanding the end result is within tolerance and can be viewed as a success when looked at in context of the turbulent few years. The resulting (jobs and new products) are likely to be achieved once sufficient time has been allowed to meet the definition of the output (in the case of C8) and new products appear to be higher than was expected for this stage in the project and likely to increase to be in line with targets once time is allowed for interventions to be embedded. All things considered this is a strong performance when the affects of the pandemic are taken into account.

3) Experience of delivering and managing the project:

As previously summarised in section 4:

This project has been well managed by an experienced, dedicated and compliant team.

Management processes have been found to be robust and immediate corrective actions have been put in place if and when required. The project has been delivered to a high standard and all reasonable efforts to engage the correct beneficiaries have been adopted and adhered to.

4) Economic and societal impacts attributable to the project:

The programme has contributed to significant additional GVA for Lancashire and the support given to businesses (whilst not measured) is likely to safeguarded a high number of otherwise at-risks jobs. There is no formal output evidence in relation to ESG initiatives however a number of consultancy projects have focused in this area (specifically in relation to CSR policies and environmental improvements. However (from interviews with the project manager) this has not been the primary focus for the vast majority of businesses that have taken part.

6. VALUE FOR MONEY

6.1 Introduction

This section sets out an assessment of the value for money of Propel2Grow. It comprises an analysis of economy, effectiveness and efficiency.

6.2 Economy

It is apparent that budgets have been well managed and controlled during the delivery of the project. The projection is that the project will come in exactly on budget.

Overheads have been reduced versus the original GFA and these savings have been reallocated into activities which directly benefit the beneficiary (professional fees for services in support of beneficiaries and third party private consultancy support for beneficiaries).

Additionally the project was able to be extended for a further 3 months into 2022 by utilising the savings made against overheads.

Budget vs actual spend

Activity	Budget £	Actual Spend* £	Comments
Salaries	1,339,867	1,329,165	Savings versus the original grant funding agreement for all 'overhead' budget lines have been diverted to beneficiary delivery (<i>consultancy and professional fees</i>). This has been agreed at various stages by the Project and the Managing Authority by means of Project Change Controls. This is highly commendable - the effective control of costs has directly benefitted beneficiaries without impacting on overall budget or creating an underspend.
Flat Rate (indirect costs)	200,980	199,376	
Office Rent	25,544	25,544	
Other Office Costs	17,471	17,471	
Marketing	12,350	12,350	Actual spend is to the end of the 'Activity End Date' (Q1 2022). The variance to budget is expected to be spent by the 'Financial End Date' (Q2 2022). Therefore the project expenditure is projected to be in line with budget forecast.
Other revenue (<i>inc. travel</i>)	66,288	45,306	
Professional fees (<i>for services in support of beneficiaries</i>)	402,851	402,851	Services in support of beneficiaries
Consultancy support (<i>reimbursement to beneficiaries</i>)	2,146,056	2,146,056	Services in support of beneficiaries
Overall	4,211,407	4,178,119	

6.3 Effectiveness

Whilst the number of beneficiaries assisted is lower than the original target, it would appear that the primary resulting indicators of success (C8 and C29) are broadly above the glide-path per beneficiary. At the time of this evaluation these have not yet been achieved for the project lifetime target however it is to be expected that this would be the case as there is an inevitable time lag between the intervention and being able to realise the full impact (12 months in the case of the C8 indicator).

The private match element by Vedas is significant and has ensured that 'free to beneficiary' services (particularly since the pandemic response) have been extensive. Third party consultancy is private matched by the beneficiary and has helped maintain a cost-effectiveness focus for all bought-in services.

6.4 Efficiency

The table below sets out an interim assessment of the efficiency of the Programme as of end of Q1 2022.

No. of supported enterprises	562
Jobs created to date in supported enterprises	683
New products to date in supported enterprises for every £ of support	330
Additional GVA	£41,647,948
£ of public investment (budget) per enterprise	£3,747
£ of public investment (budget) per job	£3,083
£ of public investment (budget) per product	£6,381
Additional GVA per £ of public investment (budget)	£19.78

6.5 Overall VFM Rating

Taking into account all demonstrable activities that have taken place to date, evidence that has been obtained, and considering that all activities have been **private matched by Vedas or the beneficiary at a rate of 50%** our VFM rating is **SIGNIFICANT**.



7. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- Whilst the transition to e-forms and electronic signatures has benefited both the project and the beneficiaries, there remains an opportunity to simplify further the burden of administration.
- We would recommend that future programmes are able to make better use of document management systems supported by front end web forms in order to reduce duplication, present information and evidence in a user-friendly way, and receive instant validation that applications and claims are both eligible and correctly completed. Electronic signatures should be retained to reduce the burden for both beneficiaries and project personnel and assist in the document retention requirements of public funding.
- The primary reason that beneficiaries have enrolled in the Propel2Grow programme are for assistance with marketing and for assistance in improving performance through people. Future projects should continue to offer support in these areas.
- The project has provided only limited support in areas of ESG. Whilst this has been driven by beneficiary need, any future support may wish to include specific social value measures as a requirement to accessing funding should this remain a national focus.
- There remains a need to support SME businesses to grow however learnings from this project have demonstrated that in order to be best placed to grow, specific support should be designed to be nimble enough to address the immediate and contemporary concerns of businesses. Specifically a majority of businesses in the beneficiary survey have indicated that they are currently being impacted by Cost inflation, Brexit, Supply chain concerns, People concerns and residual impacts from COVID.
- Greater use of video case studies - on a dedicated YouTube or Vimeo channel would be recommended to enhance the marketing push to enrol businesses - creating an enhanced brand awareness for the project and additional exposure for the businesses themselves.
- Opportunities exist to make additional use of the Propel2Grow website as a portal to not just attract new participants but engage current participants.
- Peer to peer support and networking has been valued by beneficiaries and these should be considered in any new project design as a means of offering cost effective and valuable support.
- Business continuity should be considered in any future project design - delivery should be able to be flexible in its delivery, whether in person or digitally.

- The emphasis on people - through the use of people profiling and diagnostics as a pre-cursor to support, appears to have been positively received by beneficiaries and should be retained as a means of improving leadership, employee engagement and to build better business relationships both internally and externally. Larger businesses have long used these methodologies to improve performance but smaller businesses may not have an awareness of the benefits, be deterred by the cost or lack understanding of the anticipated return on investment that these initiatives often provide.
- The use of single point of contact Account Managers appears sensible and valued by beneficiaries. This trusted partner approach is likely to present opportunities for multiple interventions over the life of a project and output targets should not deter projects from adopting this approach particularly where growth, jobs and product development is likely to be positively impacted.
- Greater consideration should be made to how multiple projects hand-off to one another. The funded landscape can be confusing for both beneficiaries and deliverers. There is a reported perception that beneficiaries can only access one type of support and pressure to achieve outputs may influence projects from recommending the most appropriate route of support where this may be delivered elsewhere. All projects would benefit from an awareness of alternative support and where their own support offer fits within a business's typical growth journey. Projects should be performance managed to recommend a seamless journey of provision rather than simply achieving a C1 output.
- This project covers 2 investment priorities. Reporting of certain expenditure (particularly for project overheads) has necessitated the apportionment across these priorities. There is an opportunity to look at the design of the reporting / MI requirement to avoid duplication whilst still providing the required information. Current reporting is perceived as cumbersome. Similar data is presented in multiple forms and again electronically through eClaims. As well as being inefficient this presents a greater opportunity for error.
- The project responded positively to the challenges posed by the pandemic and created a specific support offer for businesses to recover and sustain their recovery. Beneficiary feedback suggests this was highly valued by businesses.
- It may be desire-able (subject to rules of public procurement) to introduce an element of risk / reward pricing for third party consultants linked to the agreed tangible outcomes.
- A distinct offer for new and early life businesses that could be delivered by the project's internal team may have been beneficial in improving the take-up of the offer for new businesses and greater progress towards the C5 output. This could also potentially remove the cost barrier to participation for these specific businesses whilst embedding best practices within the business from an early stage.

