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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the Summative Assessment of the West of England Sustainable Business Support Programme (WESBSP) led by the SETsquared partnership, funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

PROGRAMME CONTEXT

The ERDF funded West of England Sustainable Business Support Programme (formally known as the West of England Sustainable Technologies Scale Up Programme or WESTSP) was led by the University of Bath and delivered by the SETsquared partnership. The programme saw a suite of support interventions for business located within the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership geography which included:

- Specialised business growth support for scale up companies delivered via a series of workshops.
- Intensive business assistance focused upon fast tracking innovative products and services.
- Providing open innovation opportunities for scale ups to interact with large enterprises with a focus open supply chain opportunities.
- Providing access to scale-up networks to access Venture Capital (VC) and investor networks, and support to identify public co-funding opportunities.

This programme aimed to support West of England based businesses by:

- Bringing low carbon and sustainable products and services to market in a more efficient and effective manner.
- Implementing low carbon/more sustainable processes.

This Summative Assessment assesses the programme against its objectives and highlights any lessons learnt for future programmes. The Summative Assessment contains a desk review of market failures and the strategic context (Chapter 1), an assessment of feedback from 17 businesses via an online survey (Chapter 2), assessment of performance against ERDF targets and the programme's economic impact (Chapter 3), synthesised findings from eleven stakeholder interviews (Chapter 4) and lessons and recommendations (Chapter 5).

BUSINESS EXPERIENCE

All SMEs with completed project claims were invited to complete an online beneficiary survey. A response rate of 14% is good, demonstrating that SMEs still feel engaged in the programme and are keen to provide feedback. Headlines from the survey follow.

Businesses surveyed were positive about the programme:

- All participants were satisfied with the programme and would recommend the programme in some capacity.

- The support was well received. The knowledge and expertise of the delivery team, the application process and the administration of the programme were rated the most highly in terms of aspects of assistance.
- In terms of programme content, the workshops to develop and test business models were rated the most highly by participants.

SMEs increased their knowledge and capabilities:

- Participant's understanding of ways to integrate circular products and services innovation to decarbonise business models and grow/scale-up a business rapidly increased significantly following engagement with the support.
- The barriers that were most overcome because of programme participation were 'Access to external support and advice', 'Risk of failure' and 'Leadership and managerial skills gaps.'
- Most participants have gained clarity on their business value proposition, especially regarding ways to scale-up sustainably.
- 94% of survey respondents stated that their understanding of ways to decarbonise their business model was either excellent or good,

SMEs are implementing changes, bringing commercial benefits now and in the future:

- As a direct result of engaging in the programme, the majority of participants (94%) have, will or may implement sustainable policies or plans.
- A large proportion of respondents have or expect to secure new tenders due to having new sustainable/low carbon credentials through participation on the programme. Many firms felt commercial benefits of the programme were not applicable at this stage and were more likely to be realised in the future.
- Most participants (86%) aspire to achieve net zero following engagement in the programme.
- 78% of survey respondents feel the benefits would not have happened without the programme, would have taken longer to happen, or would have been smaller.

PROGRAMME RATIONALE AND RECRUITMENT

As part of the evaluation key stakeholders were interviewed with questions focused upon programme strengths, lessons learned and impact. In terms of rationale the key points from the consultation were as follows:

- The rationale of the WESBSP was clear to stakeholders and beneficiaries. The project saw sustainability as a key driver for economic growth through the interconnection of people, planet and prosperity. The current energy cost inflation has increased the financial rationale for businesses who previously may not have seen sustainability as important.
- The programme was well aligned with regional and national strategic policy goals to transition the UK economy to net zero and improve business productivity and growth.
- The programme was appropriately designed to demonstrate to SMEs how sustainability can help drive growth.

Stakeholders acknowledged that beneficiary recruitment to the programme was challenging with regular iterative changes made to the beneficiary recruitment process. Key points are:

- Multiple factors contributed to beneficiary recruitment difficulties. These included a difficult economic context, the ongoing impact of Covid 19, increased competition and SME concerns about bureaucratic demands.
- Recruitment of beneficiaries significantly improved following the redirection of the role of the innovation advisor as outreach lead and public facing figure.
- Businesses continue to value face-to-face interactions and long-standing organic relationships with programme representatives built upon positive previous experiences.

MANAGEMENT, DELIVERY AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Programme management was regarded as effective, flexible and reflective with only some minor weaknesses identified. The main stakeholder reflections were as follows:

- Personnel turnover and changing roles led to some inconsistencies in how project materials and documentation were kept up to date.
- Stakeholders indicated that the WESBSP was well-designed to achieve its objectives and outcomes, and felt it was well-received by beneficiaries.
- Clear efforts were made to provide a balance of generic high impact tools and more bespoke material and guidance that utilised the expertise and experience of the wider SETsquared networks. This is the product of ongoing iterative changes and improvements.
- An appetite does exist for shorter half day or two-hour sessions that can be more easily tailored around business commitments.
- Continual iterative changes were a key feature of this programme as the delivery team sought to encourage the maximum amount of business engagement.
- Ongoing programme challenges, such as the impact of COVID-19 were partially mitigated by the dynamic and reflective approach taken by the management team. Programme planning, delivery and processes were regularly refined and adapted to meet their target outputs.

Programme delivery was challenging within the context of COVID-19, recruitment challenges and low participant numbers. Despite this there were some significant achievements. The main stakeholder reflections were as follows:

- On reflection, some outputs targets were ambitious and hard to achieved in a two-year programme.
- Significant numbers of potential participants dropped out at the EOI stage.
- Elements of the programme started later in the programme delivery timeline because of recruitment delays, limiting potential impact.
- A later start for the carbon savings assessment element combined with increased demand from businesses to grow post-COVID-19 has led to a backlog of SMEs.
- The blended approach to masterclass delivery was a strength, however it created some uncertainty about participant numbers and challenges with SME retention and reaching output targets.
- Low session participant numbers made the sessions resource intensive to deliver but allowed for deeper discussion and peer interaction and dialogue.

Partnership working was regarded by stakeholders as a success and a key legacy of the programme. Cited strengths included:

- Access to universities and networks is a highly valued USP of the programme.
- The programme acted as a conduit to other programmes in the region.
- Quarterly meetings with partners to update on programme delivery and share knowledge.
- Taking time to listen to local authority partners and understand their focus and priorities.

STRENGTHS, BENEFITS, ADDED VALUE AND THE FUTURE

Innovation and its associated impacts can take longer than the timeline of the WESBSP limiting reported impact. However, the beneficiary survey data and the economic analysis show the impact of the programme and stakeholders identified added value in the following areas:

- Providing businesses with first time cross-sector and academic/research connections and the support needed to source public and private investment opportunities.
- Acting as a starting point for businesses who are earlier on their sustainable innovation journey by providing them with the technical and market knowledge to make changes.
- Diagnosing businesses needs and innovation challenges and providing bespoke recommendations. As well as ensuring businesses get signposted to ongoing sources of advice.
- Support and delivery staff with private sector experience ensured a commercial focus.

Unexpected benefits for project partners were also identified:

- Raising academics awareness of what SETsquared do. They have used it to broaden their reach, for example by using SETsquared in bids.
- Providing academia with a new and effective interface with private industry and enabling more open innovation.
- The holistic approach to business support has benefitted the wider innovation and sustainability ecosystem by making new connections and links between businesses, support programmes and facilities across the region.

PROGRAMME OUTCOMES AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

PROGRAMME OUTPUTS

After a slow start to the project due to external factors, as discussed in Chapter 4, there has been an acceleration in project activity and outputs which should be viewed as a success. The table below reports current outputs achieved against the ERDF targets at the time of evaluation.

In terms of progress:

- 122 enterprises have received support (79% of the C1 target (155)).
- 10 enterprises have cooperated with research entities (33% of the C26 target (15)).
- 4 enterprises have been supported to introduce new to the firm products (10% of the C29 target (40)).

There are projects set to complete between now and the end of June, meaning the programme is on track to finish within 15% of its targets.

There has been no claimed reduction in greenhouse gases for the C34 target. This is due to the late start of this strand of activity, meaning that recent, in-progress and planned interventions will not yield measurable benefits until after the evaluation and project close. As shown in the business survey, 15%

(3) of beneficiaries say they have reduced GHG emissions, and a further 50% (10) say they will achieve this in the future.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The project demonstrates high value for money and economic benefits even though outputs have not been fully achieved. This shows the impact of the activity which has been achieved and the potential for further impact in the future.

The WESBSP will create or safeguard an economic impact of 165 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) gross jobs (132 direct and 33 indirect) and 80 net FTE jobs (64 direct and 16 indirect). After converting to GVA and applying deadweight, displacement, and leakage to adjust to net the total economic impact of the West of England Sustainable Business Support Programme is £13.6million NPV GVA.

This would result in a cost benefit ratio (BCR) of 8.5:1 i.e., each £1.00 of public investment will generate £8.50, using the grant funding budget. This represents high value for money according to the DCLG Appraisal Guide which states the value for money categories as based on the size of the BCR.

CONCLUSION

The WESBSP had several key strengths. Stakeholders and beneficiaries agreed that the workshop materials were strong, and they valued the delivery team's expertise and experience. Both groups cited the relative ease of the application process and an effective administration and management process.

The programme was regarded as an excellent means for introducing businesses to the region's numerous academic assets helping participants to establish the foundation for longer-term research collaborations. Participating academic institutions also benefited from have a new and effective innovation interface with private industry. The workouts provided beneficiaries with the opportunity, space, materials, and support to focus upon strategy.

Although the potential impact of the programme has not yet been fully realised due to early delays in progress against targets, the programme does show high impacts and clear added value.

LESSONS

Reflecting on the strengths and value added of the programme and the challenges of trying to achieve output targets, the evaluation has identified series of lessons and considerations for the future. These are:

- Ongoing intelligence gathering is required to ensure that future programmes are shaped around a clear understanding of ongoing business need. This process would also help to differentiate the programme from the increased level of competition.
- Dedicated engagement leads are clear programme assets. Face-to-face multiple contact is regarded as the best forum for developing long term business and academic engagement. It helps to develop longer term more organic relationships that continually inform programme development and help to ensure impact.
- Further work is required to build business understanding that sustainability programmes are relevant to all businesses regardless of their sector, product, or stage of development. Increased emphasis upon the benefits it brings in terms of resilience, savings and competitiveness would support these efforts.

- The larger regional geography of the programme was welcomed by stakeholders and beneficiaries. There is a clear appetite for multi-agency programmes that are not restricted by small administrative boundaries.
- There is an appetite amongst businesses for support resources that can be accessed away from times that clash with acute operational pressures. Businesses are most interested in mentoring and ongoing support led by their strategic focus priorities.
- A smaller number of targeted outputs would allow the management, marketing, and delivery teams to focus upon increasing the quality and appropriateness of participants. It would also provide time to fully engage with their stage of development and requirements and to deepen and enrich the support offered.
- Businesses highly value the innovation support and access to academic networks provided by the programme. Continued efforts to deepen link between the business community and the region's numerous academic assets would be welcomed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evaluation findings Kada propose the following recommendations for consideration for programme delivery, programme design, and policy makers, in keeping with ERDF Summative Assessment guidelines:

Programme Delivery:

- Maintain, where possible, a consistent contact for businesses throughout the programme life cycle. If this is not possible ensure a rigorous handover process is in place to ensure consistency and no loss of institutional expertise/experience.
- A more streamlined administration process post-ERDF will enable greater focus upon networking opportunities and developing relationships with local businesses.
- Ensure rigorous scrutiny of third parties' ability to meet delivery timescales building in some scope for clawback if KPIs are not achieved within pre-agreed timescales.

Programme Design:

- Providing a menu of different opportunities would allow participants to shape their support programme. A bank of grouped online resources would allow them to choose the material that is aligned with their stage of development and/or sector. This would free up time and capacity for the mentoring/peer discussions that the participants value most.
- Undertake a business mapping exercise deepening understanding of regional need and requirements. Shaping future programmes around this intelligence would help to differentiate the programme from the increased level of competition.
- Develop a multiagency approach to business engagement, using best practice (such as the use of locally based engagement leads) to shape the engagement process.
- Develop an engagement strategy for larger businesses focused upon highlighting how the R&D capacity and skills of the participant SMEs/academic institution are a clear programme asset. The post-ERDF environment creates opportunity to widen the scope of the programme to encompass university specialisms and large commercial partners in sectors such as nuclear energy and the hydrogen economy.

Policy makers:

- A faster approval process and longer timeframe would increase the quality of the participant recruitment and engagement process.
- Expanding the eligibility criteria for which businesses can be recruited would have increased the programme's impact. Enquiries were received from businesses which were not within the programme's scope, showing that as it stands, not all market failures are being addressed.
- Provide continued incentives for business engagement in sustainability/net zero focused initiatives. For instance, government guarantees could be provided to facilitate and increase access to low-cost capital investment loans.

1 INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT CONTEXT

This chapter introduces the aims, objectives, and activities of the West of England Sustainable Business Support Programme. It discusses the programme's strong rationale and the sub-regional and national strategic context.

1.1 PROJECT SUMMARY

The ERDF funded West of England Sustainable Business Support Programme (WESBSP) (formally known as the West of England Sustainable Technologies Scale Up Programme) was led by the University of Bath and delivered by the SETsquared partnership. SETsquared is an economic innovation partnership between the Universities of Bath, Bristol, Cardiff, Exeter, Southampton, and Surrey. The programme saw a suite of support interventions for businesses located within the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership geography.

Interventions included:

- I. Specialised business growth support for scale up companies delivered via a series of workshops.
- II. Intensive business assistance, focused upon fast tracking innovative products and services.
- III. Providing open innovation opportunities for scale ups to interact with large enterprises. with a specific focus on open supply chain opportunities.
- IV. Providing scale up access to Venture Capital (VC) and investor networks, and support to identify public co-funding opportunities.

This programme aimed to support West of England based businesses to bring low carbon/sustainable products and services to market in a more efficient and effective manner and implement low carbon/more sustainable processes.

The programme built upon the experience, expertise and networks built up through the University of Bath's previous ERDF funded Sustainable Technologies Business Acceleration Hub (STBAH), Digital Business Acceleration and Advanced Engineering Acceleration Hubs.

The Sustainable Business Support programme began on the 1st of July 2020 with the delivery of activity commencing 9th June 2021. It is due to run through to the 30th June 2023. The programme involved two strands:

- I. 17 workshops and 8 masterclasses on a variety of topics that provided 12 hours of SME contact time focused upon innovation led scale up through business model development.
- II. 12 hours of business assistance via an Innovation Advisor, Entrepreneur-in-Residence, and specialist consultants. This was delivered via 1:1 support, seminars, and online resources focused upon fast tracking innovation led scale up.

1.2 RATIONALE AND MARKET FAILURES

Four market failures are being addressed by the WESBSP:

- I. Research and development spending across the West of England is below the UK Government's target of 2.4% of GDP by 2027. This is a result of lack of knowledge amongst businesses of what support is available (imperfect information) and a lack of finance.
- II. Supply and demand weaknesses for low carbon solutions because of the early stage of technologies and limited business awareness of sustainable solutions, processes, and products.
- III. Limited collaboration between the public, private, voluntary, and academic sectors with regard to clean energy solutions.
- IV. Limited commercial understanding of the long-term rewards that could be gained from green technologies and low carbon innovation.

Previous research undertaken by WECA for the West of England Local Industrial Strategy Evidence Base. Found that without decisive co-ordinated action the region will fall behind other areas in the race to become a leading hub for clean technologies.

The programme's stated rationale was to provide a focal point for business support, networks, facilities, and research support required to develop this ecosystem. Through collaboration, business modelling and facilitating knowledge transfer the WESBSP hoped to catalyse green innovation, improve productivity rates, create jobs, and increase GVA.

1.3 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

LOCAL CONTEXT

The West of England Strategic Economic Plan 2015-2030 outlines creating a low carbon resource efficient resilient economy as one of its five main strategic objectives¹. It highlights the low carbon sector as a regional sector specialism providing 5,900 jobs across the region and £333m in GVA. It calls for continued investment within the sector to ensure that it remains globally competitive. It states that public money should be used to leverage private innovation investment supported by the effective utilisation of local academic assets. The Economic Plan also cites the commercialisation of research and development as a key focus.

The 2022 West of England Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action Plan outlines the regional plan for helping to tackle the climate crisis. As part of the target to become net zero by 2030, the West of England Combined Authority have developed a strategy for low carbon business². As part of this strategy a key action is to provide information, advice, and guidance on how to decarbonise operations.

UK GOVERNMENT

In 2019, the UK Government responded to the Paris Agreement by updating the Climate Change Act (2008) which committed the UK Government by law to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. This commitment had been preceded by their 2017 Clean Growth Strategy which details how the government intends to decarbonise all key economic sectors throughout the 2020s. It highlights how

¹ West of England LEP (2015). 'West of England Strategic Economic Plan 2015-2030'. [Available here](#).

² West of England Combined Authority (2022). 'West of England Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action Plan 2022'. [Available here](#).

25% of UK carbon emissions and over 50% of electricity demand comes from business and industry³. Analysis that shows that up to £6 billion could be saved from the introduction of cost-effective energy efficient technologies. The stated ambition was to improve energy efficiency within UK industry by 20% by 2030. The strategy also highlights the importance of the clean energy sector stating that it employs 144,000 people across the UK, generating over £20.3 billion in annual turnover.

The 2021 COP26 Conference concluded with almost 200 countries, including the UK, signing the Glasgow Climate Pact that committed signatories to the actions required to limit the rise in global temperatures to 1.5C.

The UK Government has identified enhancing productivity through increased innovation as a key national strategic aim. The 2021 Innovation Strategy highlights how a focus upon innovation can create jobs, increase growth, and deliver prosperity across the country⁴. Pillar Three of this strategy affirms the Government's commitment to ensuring that research, development, and innovation serves the needs of business. Pillar Four commits the Government to stimulating innovation to tackle the major challenges faced by the UK and increasing capability in key technologies including the green sector.

1.4 EVALUATION SCOPE AND STUDY OBJECTIVES

This summative assessment assesses the programme against its objectives and highlights any lessons learnt for future programmes. The scope and aims of the evaluation were to:

- Assess the rationale for the project and whether it remains valid and fits with ERDF priorities and those of relevant local, regional, and national strategies.
- Assess the effectiveness of programme delivery including the support offered as well as programme management and administration.
- Review the appetite to invest in businesses given recent economic shocks.
- Conduct a quantitative impact evaluation of the performance including: a review of contracted expenditure and outputs, and wider employment and GVA gross and net impacts.
- Undertake a value for money assessment.
- Identify lessons learnt and provide recommendations to improve operational delivery, beneficiary experience and project outcomes.

Following the inception meeting a desk review of market failures and the strategic context was undertaken in February 2023 (Chapter 1). 17 businesses completed an online questionnaire; feedback is analysed in Chapter 2. Performance against ERDF targets and economic impacts are also considered in Chapter 3. Eleven stakeholders were interviewed and are listed in Annex One. Discussions covered programme strengths and weaknesses, challenges, and lessons. These findings have been synthesised in Chapter 4.

³ BEIS (2017). 'Clean Growth Strategy'. [Available here](#).

⁴ BEIS (2021). 'UK Innovation Strategy'. [Available here](#).

2 BUSINESS SURVEY

This chapter contains the results of a survey of business participants, who are positive about WESBSP and the benefits it has created.

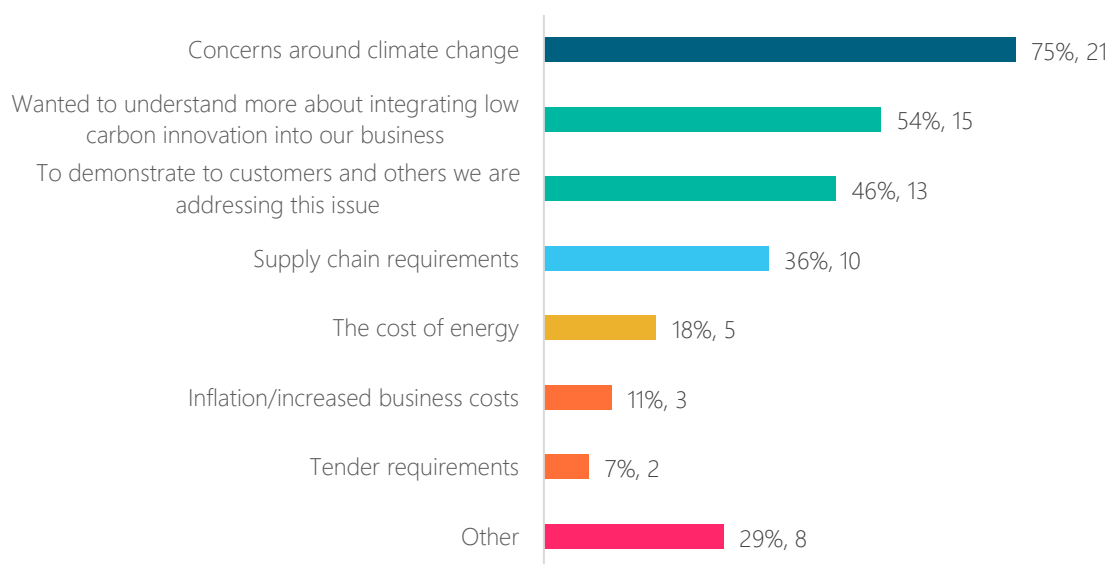
All SMEs with completed project claims were invited to complete an online beneficiary survey. A response rate of 14% is good, demonstrating that SMEs still feel engaged in the programme and are keen to provide feedback. It is important to note that response rates differ between questions.

This feedback has been analysed and presented as follows.

2.1 MOTIVATIONS AND SUPPORT RECEIVED

The primary motivation for businesses engaging with the West of England Sustainable Business Support programme was concerns around climate change and the emerging climate crisis, as cited by 75% (21) of firms. Other key motivations for participation included the need to understand more about integrating low carbon innovation into their businesses (cited by 54% of respondents, 15 businesses) and to demonstrate to business customers that these sustainability issues were being addressed (46%, 13 citations). Companies that cited 'Other' quoted that they were motivated by finding other businesses/contacts with whom sustainable partnerships can be formed, improving knowledge around sustainable business models and business development as well as learning how to best serve customers with sustainability needs.

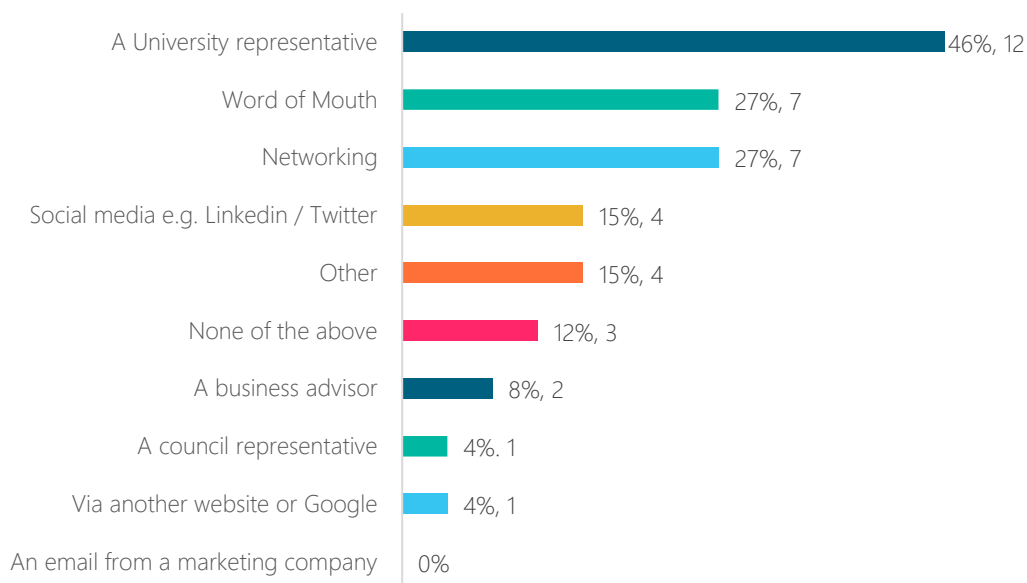
Motivations for Participation



Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=28)

Most firms found out about the programme via a university representative (46%, 8 citations). 27% of businesses found out about it through word of mouth or through networking (seven citations each). 15% (4) heard about it via social media and other means (respectively). Of the others three heard via the engagement officer and one from a start-up incubator.

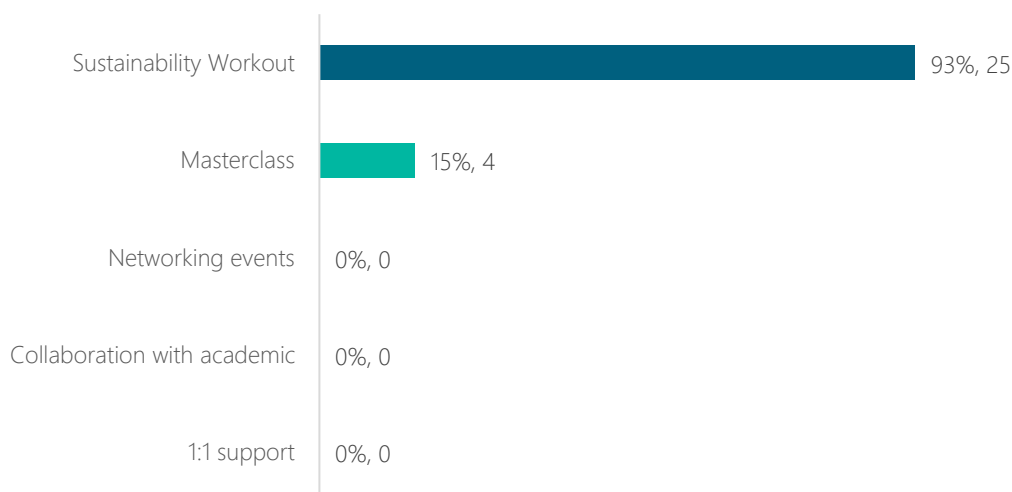
How did you find out about the support?



Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=26)

Firms engaged in different strands of support within the Sustainable Business Support Programme including the Sustainability Workouts and Masterclass sessions, as well as networking events, collaboration with academics and 1:1 support. Of the businesses who completed the survey, 93% (25) of respondents took part in the Sustainability Workout and 15% (4) took part in the masterclasses. It is important to note that two respondents took part in the masterclasses also took part in the workouts.

What support strand did you participate in?



Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=27)

2.2 MASTERCLASS FEEDBACK

Of the respondents who took part in the masterclasses one took part in the impact workshop, one in the impact leadership workshop, two in the powerful grant response workshop, one in the tender ready workshop, and two in the social value workshop.

As two survey respondents only took part in the masterclasses it is possible to directly attribute their responses solely to those sessions.

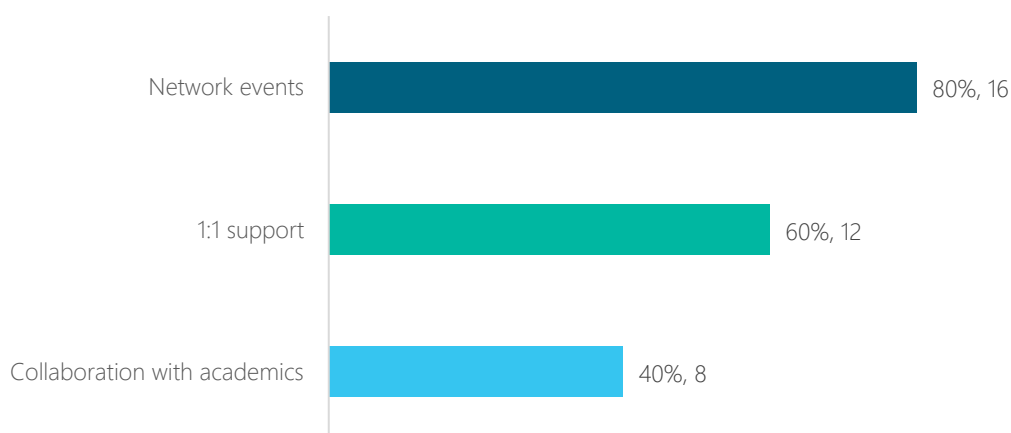
One of these respondents attended the impact, powerful grant response, tender ready and social value workshops. They rated the appropriateness of the pace and intensity as 'Very Appropriate', stating that they were 'Very Satisfied' with the quality of support. They rated the support they received on developing and testing business models, sustainability, scale up, innovation and the access they received to wider networks all as 'Excellent'. They cited one job created and three safeguarded as a potential future direct consequence of the support provided, stating that they would be 'Extremely Likely' to recommend the programme to others.

Another respondent attended the impact leadership, powerful grant response and social value masterclasses. They stated that they were 'Very Satisfied' with the quality of support they received, stating that they would be 'Very Likely' to recommend it to others. They stated that they believed that the support they received would help them to increase turnover, create and safeguard jobs and secure new work in future. They cited clarification of their value proposition, improved business planning and better understanding of their carbon footprint as key additionality from the programme stating that without the programme it would have occurred later and by a smaller amount.

2.3 POST PROGRAMME ENGAGEMENT

Survey respondents did engage in the following as a direct result of the programme, following their participation in the programme. 80% of respondents have attended networking events (16 citations), 60% have engaged in 1:1 support (12 citations) and 40% (8) have collaborated with academics.

As a result of your participation in the programme,
did you engage in any of the following?

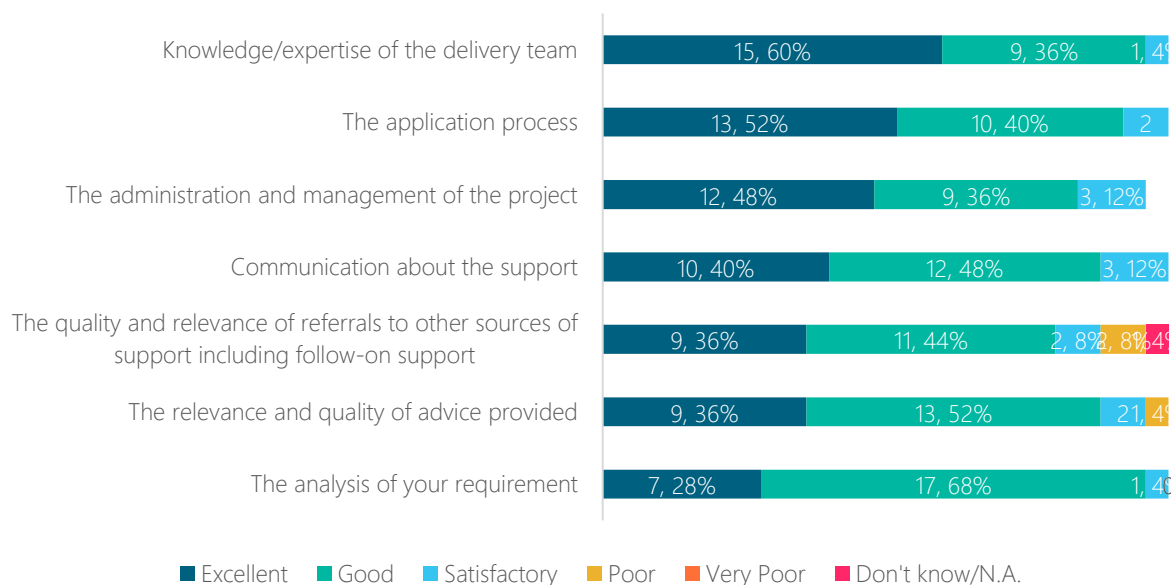


Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=20)

2.4 PROGRAMME DELIVERY

Businesses that took part in the Sustainable Business Support Programme were asked to rate different elements of the programme. All aspects of assistance were rated highly. The best received were the 'Knowledge/expertise of the delivery team' and 'The application process' with 60% and 52% of respondents rating these as 'Excellent' respectively. 'The administration of the programme' was also highly rated as 49% of respondents (12 citations) rated it as 'Excellent' and 36% (9 citations) as 'Good'. No respondents rated any aspects of assistance as 'Very poor'.

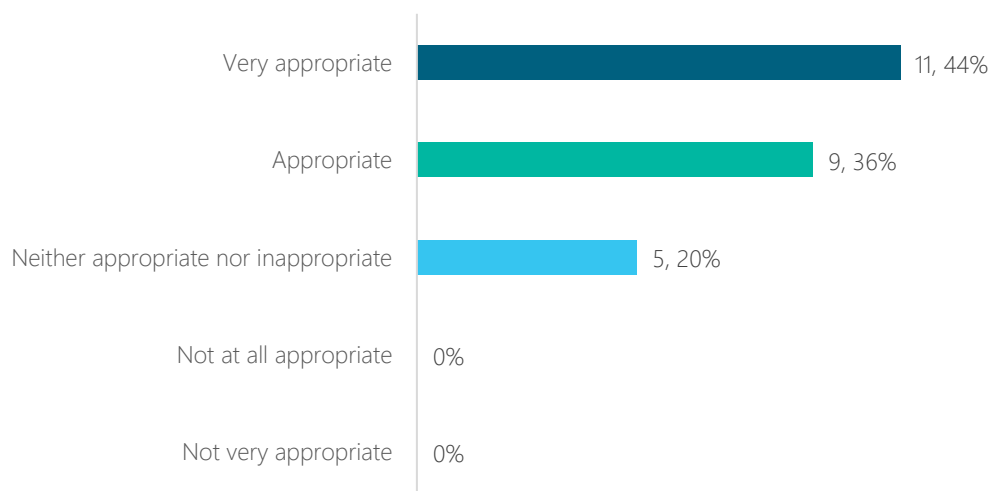
Rating Aspects of Assistance



Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=16)

The pace and intensity of the programme was considered appropriate with 44% (11) beneficiaries rating it as 'Very appropriate' and 36% (9) beneficiaries rating it as 'Appropriate'. The remaining five beneficiaries (20%) of respondents cited that the programme pace and intensity was 'Neither appropriate nor inappropriate'; No respondents had a negative view upon the pace and intensity.

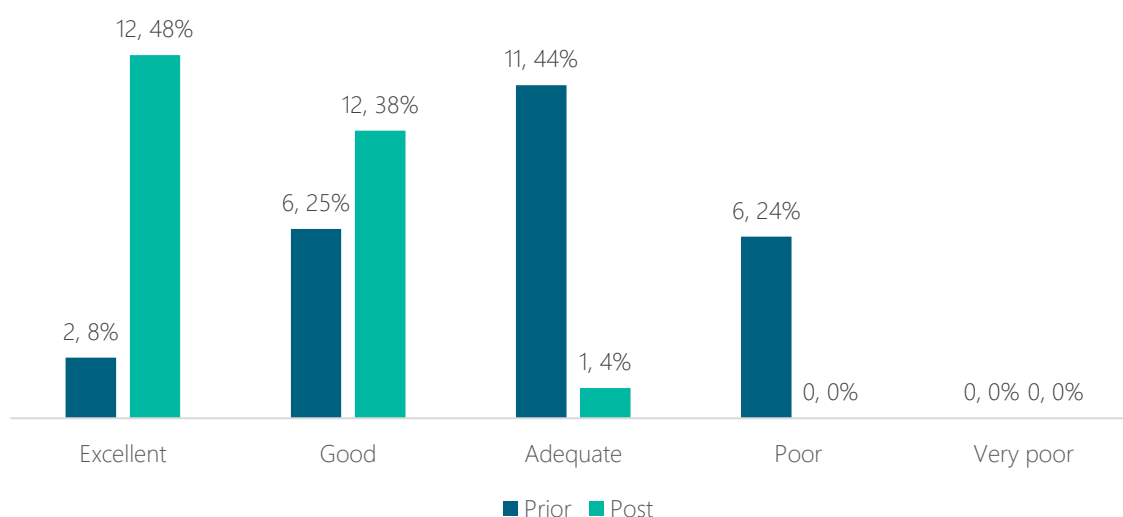
How appropriate do you feel the pace and intensity of the programme was?



Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=16)

Respondent's understanding of ways to integrate circular products and services innovation to decarbonise business models saw a very significant improvement, with 33% (8) of respondents rating their understanding of this as either 'Excellent' or 'Good' prior to the programme, however 96% (24) of respondents rated their understanding as 'Excellent' or 'Good' after the programme.

Prior and post programme understanding of ways to integrate circular products/services innovation to decarbonise your business model

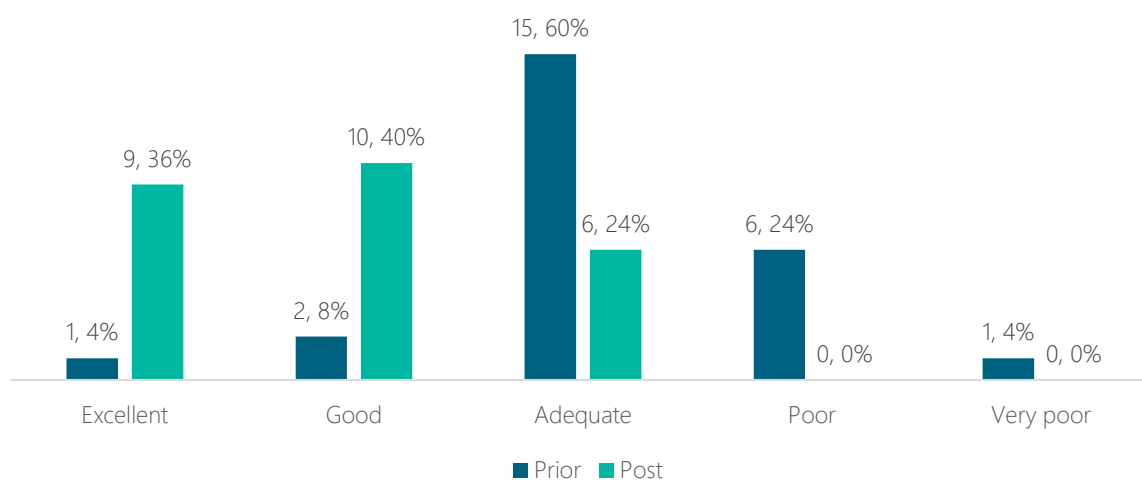


Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=25)

Similarly, respondent's understanding of products/services innovation that have to potential to grow and scale-up a business rapidly saw significant improvement as a result of the programme. Prior to engagement with the support, 88% (22) of respondents rated their understanding as either 'Adequate',

'Poor' or 'Very poor'. Following participation on the programme, understanding of integration products/services to decarbonise a business model was rated either 'Excellent' or 'Good' by 76% of businesses (19).

Prior and post understanding of products/services innovation that have the potential to grow and scale-up a business rapidly



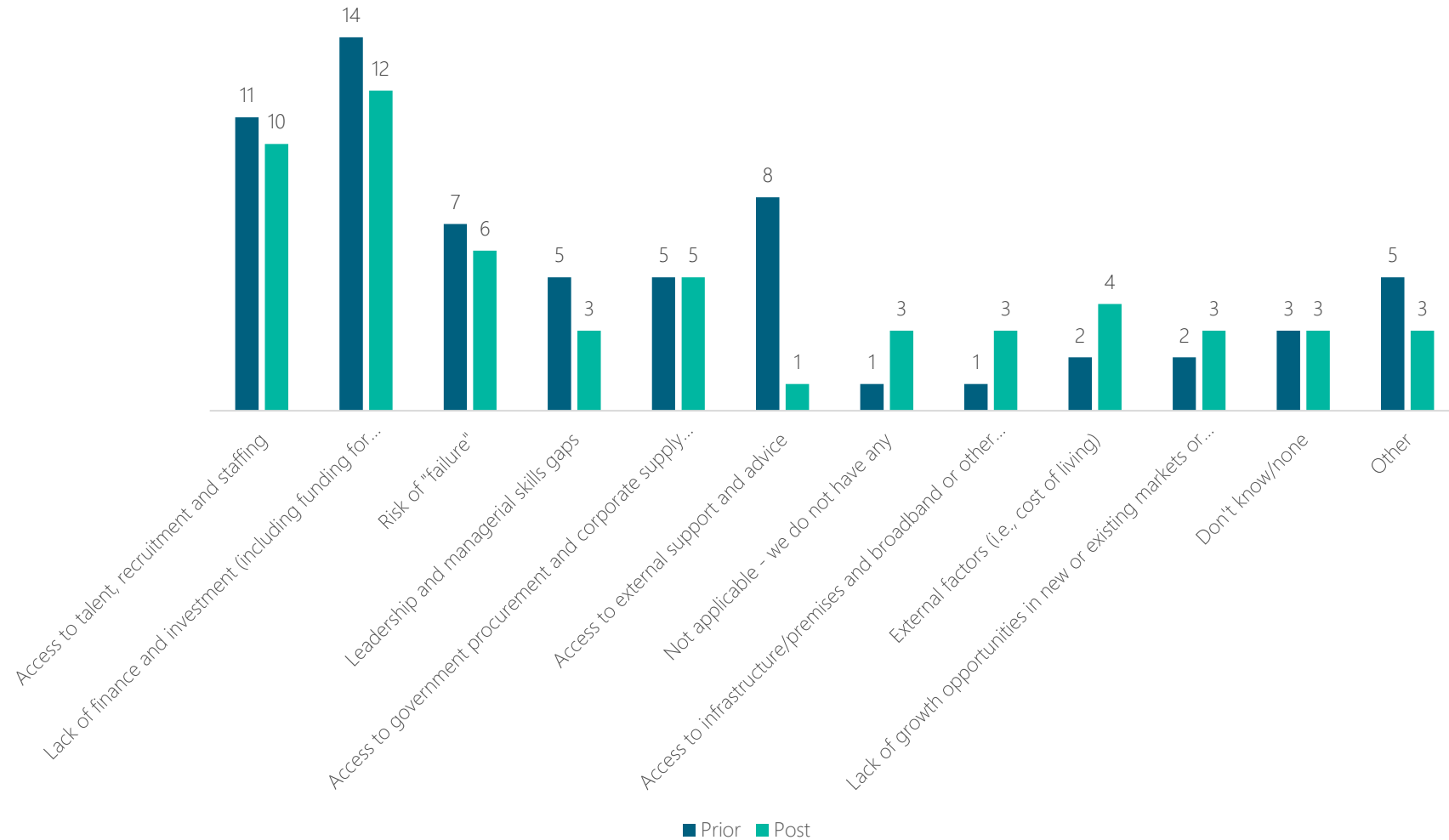
Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=16)

The most significant growth barriers for participants prior to their involvement in the Sustainable Business Support Programme were 'Access to talent, recruitment and staffing' and 'Lack of finance and investment'. Post programme, both of these remained the most cited barrier by respondents.

The barriers that saw the most significant drop in citations following the WESBSP support were 'Access to external support and advice (seven fewer citations)', 'Leadership and managerial skills gaps' and 'Lack of finance and investment' (two fewer citations respectively)..

Respondents who cited 'Other' barriers outlined issues around cash constraints and reputation building.

Growth Barriers

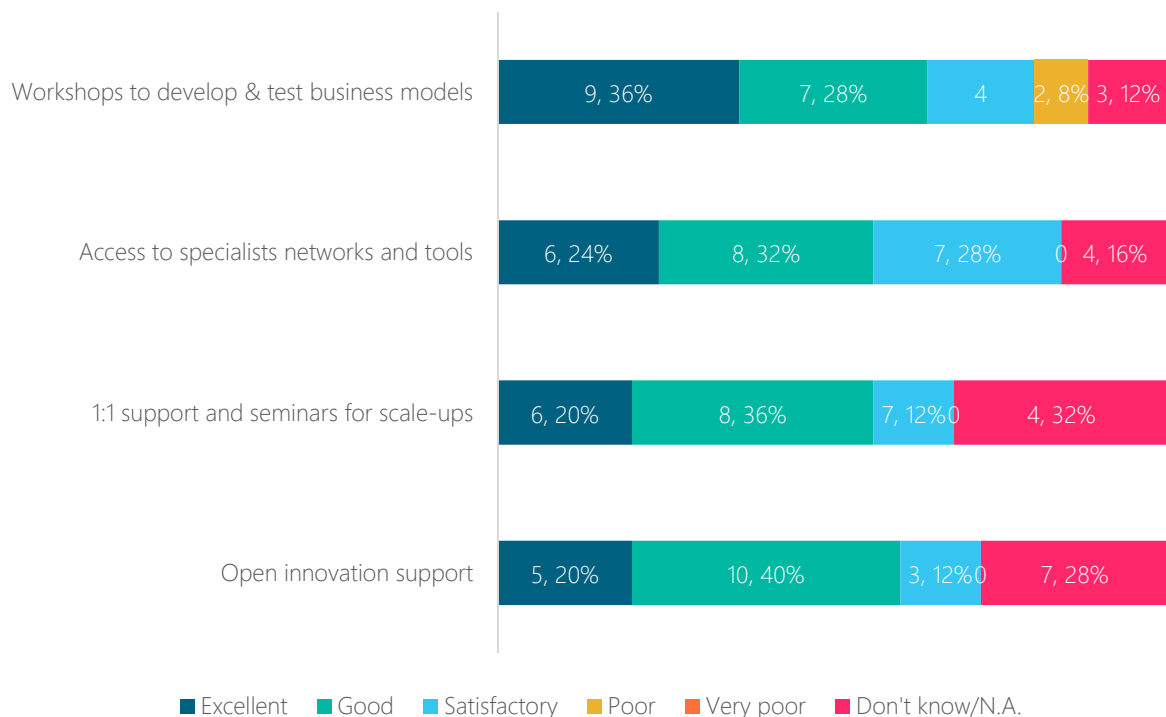


Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (Prior, n=16/Post, n=23)

Participants rated the support received highly. The most positive feedback was in relation to the 'Workshops to develop & test business models' with 36% of respondents (9 citations) rating it as 'Excellent' and 28% (7 citations) rating it as 'Good'. 24% (6) of respondents rated the 'Access to specialist networks and tools' as 'Excellent' and 32% (8) rates it as 'Good'.

The large proportion of businesses responded 'Don't know/Not applicable' is a result of all the businesses responding to the survey having only participated in the Sustainability Workout. Only a proportion of respondents will have engaged in the support as follow on work from the initial engagement in the Sustainability Workout.

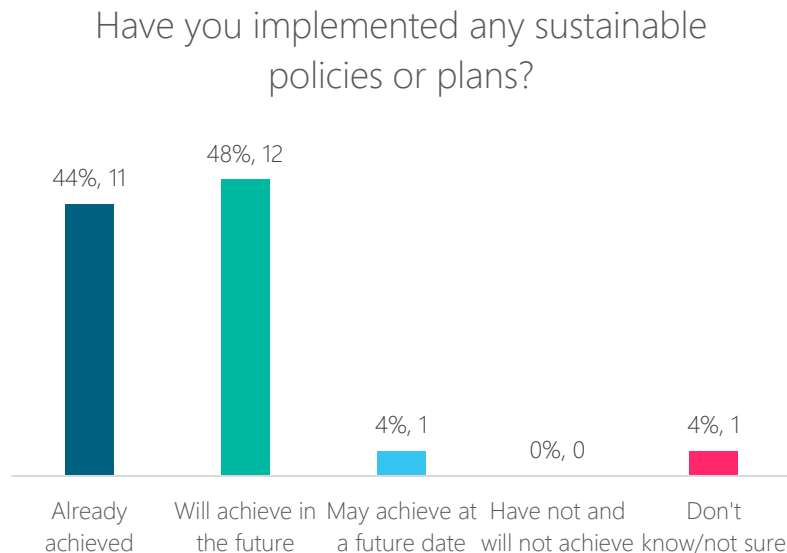
Ratings of Support Received



Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=25)

2.5 PROGRAMME IMPACT

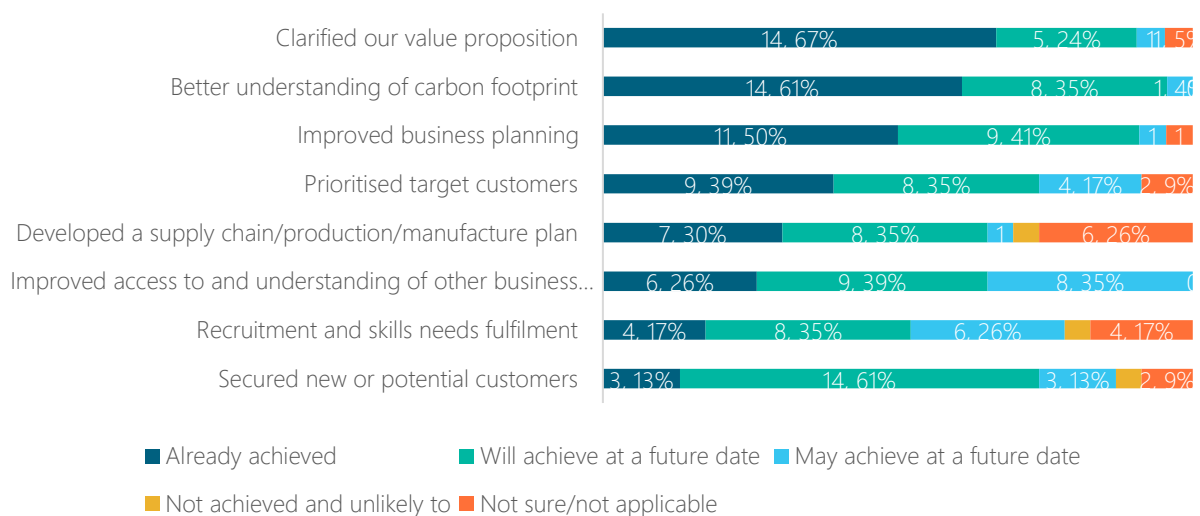
Since engaging with the programme, 92% (23) of respondents stated that they have already or will achieve sustainability policies or plans. The remaining 2 respondents cited 'May achieve at a future date' and 'Don't know/not sure' respectively.



Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=25)

'Clarification of business' value proposition' was achieved by 67% of participants (14 citations). A further 24% (5) believe they will achieve it at a future date. 61% of respondents have achieved a better understanding of their carbon footprint (8 citations) and 50% have already improved business planning (11 citations) because of engaging with the programme. The lowest impact was made upon improving access and understanding of other business support provision, recruitment and skills needs fulfilment and securing new customers. Please note that there are different sample sizes for the different outcomes

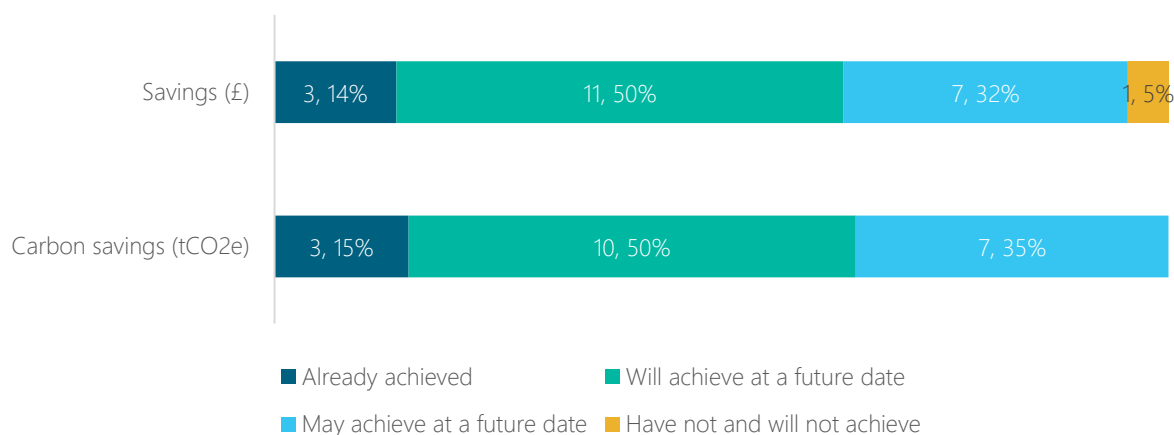
Programme Outcomes Achieved



Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=23, 22 and 21)

64% of survey respondents (20 citations) have or expect to make financial savings because of engaging with the programme and 32% (7) may achieve this at a future date. Similarly, 65% have or expect to identify carbon savings (13 citations) and the remaining 35% (7) may do so in the future. No respondents cited that they have not or will not achieve carbon savings.

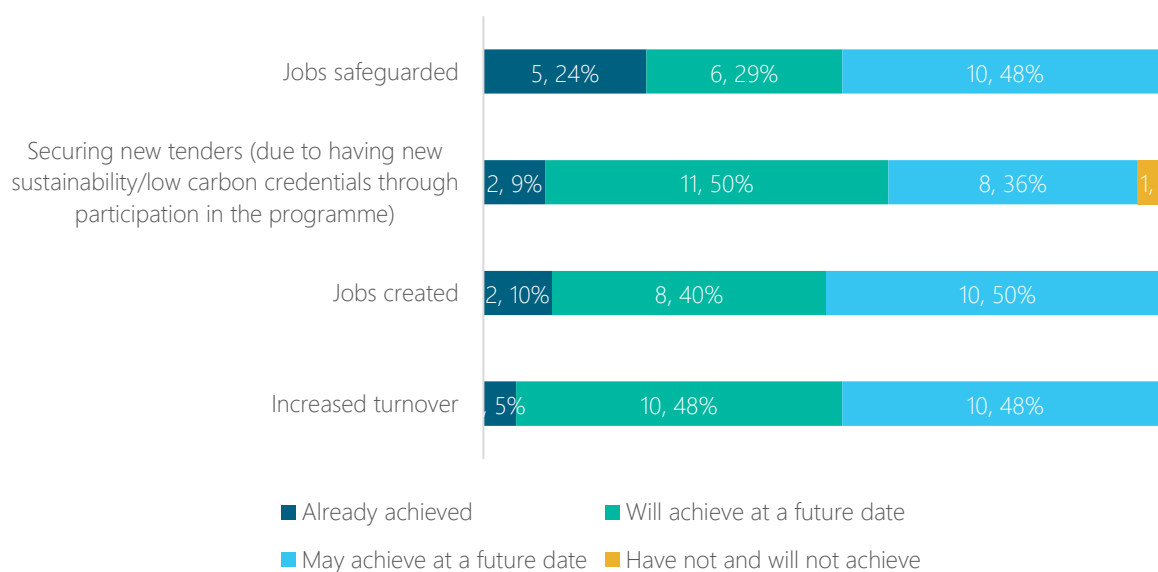
Savings Promoted as a result of the programme



Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=22 and 20)

Five respondents have cited jobs created (24%) because of the programme with a further six (29%) stating that they expect to do so in the future. The remaining 10 (48%) stated that they may achieve this in the future. Two companies cited that it has secured new tenders because of engaging with the programme (7%) and 11 will achieve this in the future (50%). Two companies have already created jobs (10%) and 18 will or may achieve this at a future date (90%). One company cited that they have already increased their turnover because of programme participation (5%), 20 (95%) will or may do so in the future. The responses suggest most of the programme's commercial impact is forecast for the future.

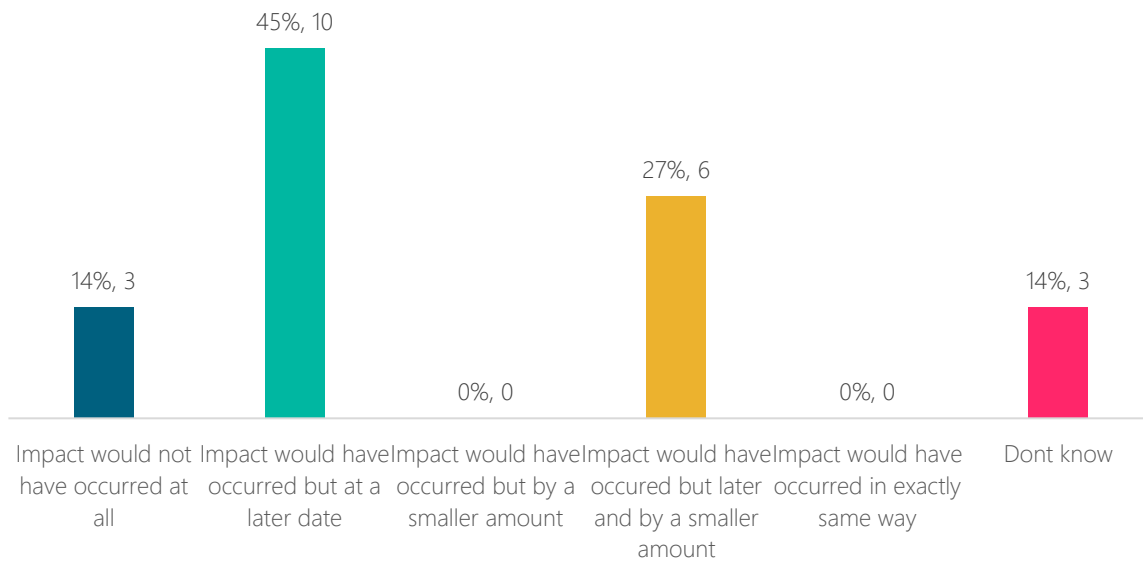
Supply Chain Opportunities and Commercial Impact



Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=21,20,22,21)

Looking at additionality, no participants cited 'deadweight' i.e., the benefits would have occurred in the same way without the programme. Three claimed pure additionality (14%), i.e., the benefits would not have occurred at all without the support. Of the remaining firms, ten (45%) stated that the benefits would have occurred but at a later date, none said the benefits would have occurred but by a smaller amount and six (27%) stated that the benefits would have occurred but later and by a smaller amount. 3 respondents (14%) did not know.

Additionality

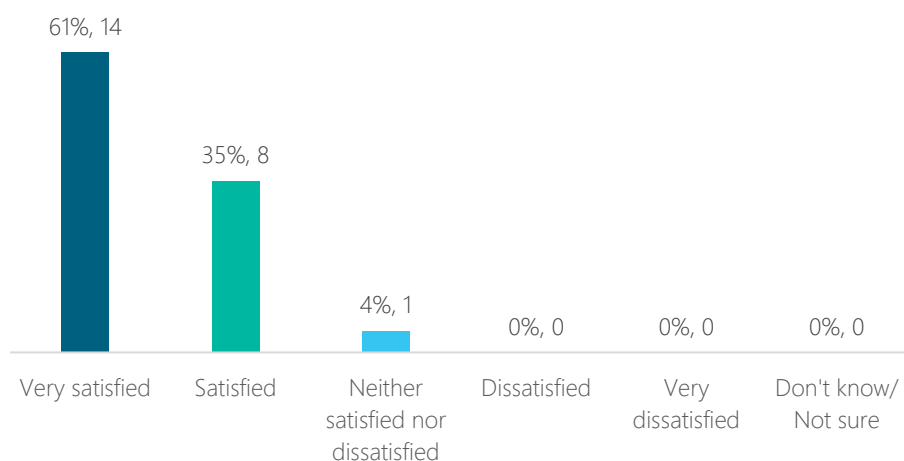


Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=22)

2.6 PROGRAMME ASSESSMENT

90% of respondents rated their overall satisfaction with the programme as 'Very satisfied' or 'Satisfied' (21 citations in total). None of the businesses were dissatisfied at all with the programme overall.

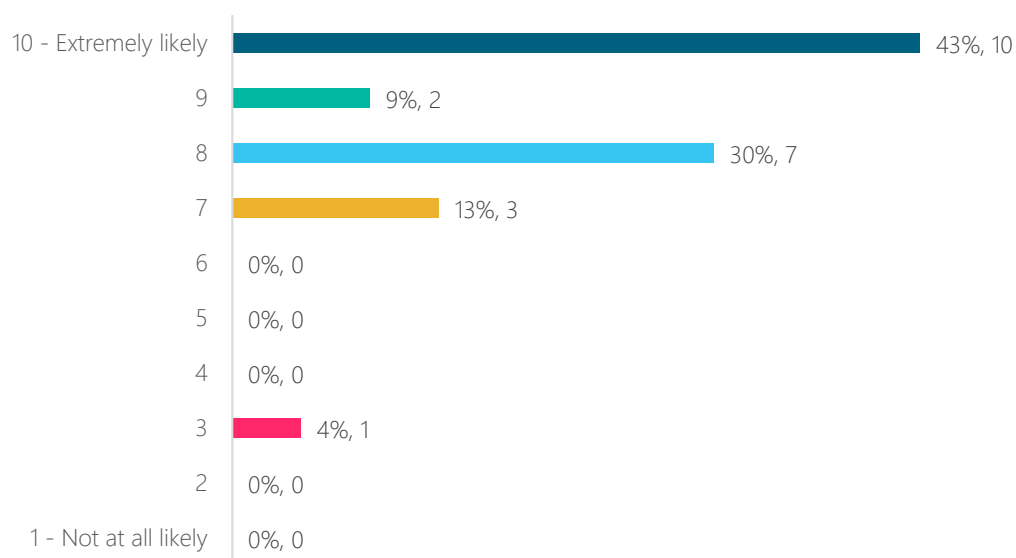
Overall Satisfaction



Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=23)

Most respondents indicated that they would be likely to recommend the Sustainable Business Support Programme to others. 82% (19) of respondents cited that they were 'Extremely Likely' or 'Very likely' to recommend the programme. Just one respondent indicated they wouldn't recommend the programme.

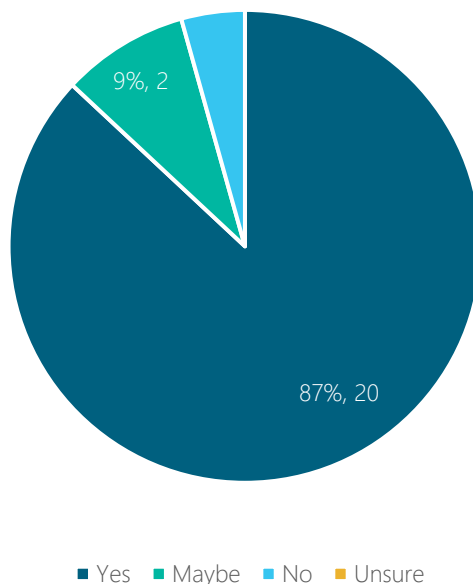
Likelihood of recommending the programme



Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=23)

87% of respondents aspire to achieve net zero. These businesses highlighted the importance and commitment to the climate crisis, some stating that it is 'imperative', 'an obligation' and 'important for business'. The remaining 9% (2) of respondents cited 'Maybe' when asked if their business aspires to achieve net zero. Only one respondents stated that they weren't committed to achieving net zero.

Net Zero Aspirations



Source: Kada Business Survey, April 2023 (n=23)

3 PROJECT PERFORMANCE

This chapter reviews performance against the contracted spend and output targets. Economic impact of the WESBSP is presented, which shows high value for money.

3.1 CONTRACTED SPEND

Spending is forecast to reach close to 90% of the contracted target by project close. The ERDF spend at the time of evaluation is £650,187, with an intervention rate of 49.6%.

Expenditure	Amount in most recent Funding Agreement	Total achieved to date	Total forecast at close	Forecast proportion achieved at close (%)
Total Project Expenditure	£1,595,495	£1,310,860	£1,394,046.00	87%

Source: University of Bath Monitoring Data

3.2 CONTRACTED OUTPUTS

After a slow start to the project due to external factors, as discussed in Chapter 4, there has been an acceleration in project activity and outputs which should be viewed as a success. The table below reports current outputs achieved against the ERDF targets at the time of evaluation.

In terms of progress:

- 122 enterprises have received support (79% of the C1 target (155)).
- 10 enterprises have cooperated with research entities (33% of the C26 target (15)).
- 4 enterprises have been supported to introduce new to the firm products (10% of the C29 target (40)).

There are projects set to complete between now and the end of June, meaning the programme is on track to finish within 15% of its targets.

There has been no claimed reduction in greenhouse gases for the C34 target. This is due to the late start of this strand of activity, meaning that recent, in-progress and planned interventions will not yield measurable benefits until after the evaluation and project close. As shown in the business survey, 15% (3) of beneficiaries say they have reduced GHG emissions, and a further 50% (10) say they will achieve this in the future.

Output	Target in most recent Funding Agreement	Total achieved to date	Proportion achieved to date (%)
(C1) No. of enterprises receiving support	155	122	79%
(C26) Number of enterprises cooperating with research entities	15	10	66%
(C29) Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	40	32	80%
(C34) Estimated GHG reductions	10	0	0%

Source: University of Bath Monitoring Data

3.3 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This section of the report addresses the economic impact of the WESBSP and its value for money. Economic impact, expressed as Gross Value Added (GVA), has been calculated based on SME survey data collected and current output claims. This is derived from employment impacts reported by companies, which are jobs created and safeguarded to date and in the future. In this model we have based employment impacts on the average number of jobs created and safeguarded by SMEs across similar interventions. GVA impacts are assessed over 3 years and expressed as Net Present Value (NPV). The approach to the model is outlined below.

APPROACH TO ECONOMIC IMPACT MODEL

A comprehensive assessment of the economic impact of the project was undertaken comprising of:

- Direct Employment: Employment impacts and resultant GVA.
- Indirect Employment Effect: The effect on suppliers and resultant productivity / GVA.

The Treasury's Green Book offers guidelines in assessing the true impact of investments. In line with these, steps were taken to assess gross and net employment impacts, GVA and net present value.

- Based on similar interventions, on average 3 jobs per company are estimated to be created/safeguarded. Based on survey responses for the WESBSP, 36% of respondents have already achieved jobs created/safeguarded and 72% expect to do so in the future. These figures have been extrapolated and applied to a proportion of the C1 output total (the number of enterprises receiving support) and, in line with the guidance, the estimated increase has been reduced by 30% to adjust for Optimum Bias (the "demonstrated, systematic, tendency... to be *overly optimistic*" when forecasting future benefits⁵). Additionally, a two-year build-up of future

⁵ Supplementary Green Book Guidance: Optimism Bias, 2013, HM Treasury

jobs created/safeguarded has been assumed i.e., future jobs created/safeguarded have been introduced in year three in the model.

The gross to net adjustments applied to jobs are as follows:

- Deadweight was calculated using data collected in the beneficiary survey. SMEs were asked the extent to which benefits would have occurred without the project, to inform additionality of the jobs modelled. 17% of companies said benefits would not have arisen without the support from the WESBSP, with 50% saying benefits would have occurred but at a later date. No companies cited that the benefits would have occurred by a smaller amount only. 33% of companies said benefits would have occurred by a smaller amount at a later date. Therefore, deadweight was assumed at 33.3%.
- Displacement was 19.5% at local level and leakage was assumed low at 10% as beneficiaries must operate in the target geography in order to be eligible for support.
- An average composite UK employment multiplier was used at 1.25 to calculate the indirect employment effects (from ONS).
- The persistence of the benefits i.e., how many years the benefits are expected to persist and the period over which benefits will accrue until they reach their full potential. In this instance, a modest three-year time frame was chosen.
- A decay of 10% per annum has been used i.e., the proportion of annual benefits expected to be lost from one year to the next due to economic changes, other investment decisions etc.
- Calculation of the Net Present Value (NPV)⁶ of the GVA benefit stream over a three-year persistence was discounting back and utilised an appropriate rate. The Green Book guidance has been followed which recommends discounting by 3.5% in order to determine NPV.
- A cost benefit ratio calculated by Net Present Cost (NPC) against NPV i.e., the amount each £1 of investment generates.
- Kada estimates for GVA per FTE have used ONS (Office of National Statistics).

The estimates of the economic impact and value for money are based on what has been achieved from the monitoring data and survey responses on job creation to date/in the future and businesses supported.

HEADLINE ECONOMIC IMPACT

The following table shows that the West of England Sustainable Business Support Programme will create or safeguard an economic impact of 165 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) gross jobs (132 direct and 33 indirect) and 80 net FTE jobs (64 direct and 16 indirect). After converting to GVA and applying deadweight, displacement, and leakage (as explained in the approach above) the ***total economic impact of the West of England Sustainable Business Support Programme is £13.6million NPV GVA.***

Economic Impacts

	Gross Jobs	Net Jobs	GVA	NPV over 3 years
Total	165	80	£5,193,213	£13,635,865

⁶ Net present value is a calculation that compares the amount invested today to the present value of the future cash receipts from the investment. In other words, the amount invested is compared to the future cash amounts after they are discounted by a specified rate of return.

Direct Jobs	132	64	£4,154,570	£10,908,692
Indirect	33	16	£1,038,643	£2,727,173

Source: Kada Research (2023)

3.4 VALUE FOR MONEY

The estimated *NPV of £13.6m would result in a cost benefit ratio (BCR) of 8.5:1* i.e., each £1.00 of public investment will generate £8.50, using the grant funding budget. *This represents high value for money* according to the DCLG Appraisal Guide⁷ which states the value for money categories as based on the size of the BCR.

The total project cost per business assisted is £13,078 per business and the cost per net job generated is £6,499. The cost per business assisted at £13,078 is below the expected cost for this kind of activity. Adjusted for inflation, this ranges from £21,300 in the lower quartile to £48,700 (median) and £119,100 (mean)⁸. The cost per net job created of £13,078 is below what is expected for this kind of activity. Adjusted for inflation, this varies from £14,700 (lower quartile) to £32,900 (median) and £90,900 (mean)⁹.

The WESBSP demonstrates high value for money given the return on the investment (BCR), cost per business supported and cost per job created figures. This suggests that if it should continue to be developed as a long-term investment, the programme will significantly help to grow the local economy in the West of England.

⁷ Department for Communities and Local Government [Appraisal Guide](#), December 2016, p 2.56

⁸ England ERDF Programme 2014-2020: Output Unit Costs and Definitions, A Final Report by Regeneris Consulting, 2013, pp12 (Adjusted for Inflation, Bank of England)

⁹ Op. Cit.p.10.

4 DELIVERY AND MANAGEMENT

This chapter reviews the implementation of the programme. Interviews with stakeholders, partners and mentors have informed the review of programme delivery, its clear strengths, and external challenges. The chapter ends with a series of lessons learned.

4.1 RATIONALE AND CONTEXT

The rationale of the WESBSP was clear to stakeholders and viewed as valid, and important. The rising energy costs in the UK over the last two years has made it even more important for businesses to be more energy efficient and/or grow turnover. Namely, this was the need to support SMEs across the West of England to be more sustainable by providing them with the tools required to integrate sustainability into their business processes. The success of the previous Sustainable Business Technology Acceleration Hub programme (by SETSquared and University of Bath) evidenced the need for the WESBSP.

The programme was well aligned with regional and national strategic policy goals to transition the UK economy to net zero and improve business productivity and growth. It is felt businesses often understood the importance of sustainability, but they did not always understand how this could be part of their business growth. The programme was appropriately designed to demonstrate to SMEs how sustainability can help drive growth.

Some differences of opinion existed in terms of the rationale of the programme with occasional references made to economic sustainability being the programme focus rather than environmental sustainability. This difference in definition could be reflective of the twin track approach of the programme, using sustainability to harness business growth.

4.2 SME RECRUITMENT AND APPLICATION PROCESS

The WESBSP delivery team included a marketing employee to start raising awareness of the programme. A comprehensive marketing strategy was established to generate leads and build networks. This strategy incorporated weekly meetings, a PR campaign, a multichannel comms programme, website, and social media content. The advisors and university partners also used their own personal networks to spread programme awareness.

Attracting SMEs to the WESBSP was initially challenging, with multiple factors contributing to this:

- The ongoing impact of COVID-19 and supply chain issues has shifted SME's short-term priorities towards survival rather than longer-term strategy, with numerous SME contacts reporting this when contacted. This made it difficult for SMEs to commit to two days away from operational roles to attend the workshops.
- The emphasis upon scale-up was seen as a potential barrier to start-up firms who were not at this stage of commercial development, or those businesses who did not have growth ambition.
- The programme faced competition from a range of similar programmes across the region. The region is a recognised hotspot for sustainable businesses, which means as well as demand for sustainable support programmes there is also an increased number of support programmes. SMEs were not always able to see how the WESBSP provided clear differentiated offering.

- Although the application portal was seen as an effective administration tool with a significant number of EOIs received, there was a high dropout rate. Completing paperwork was a key reason, as was the fact sessions were free and online, making it easy for companies to sign up and not attend. The nature of the programme was also seen as a contributing factor to participant dropout or non-attendance at sessions.

Stakeholders stated that recruitment of SMEs to the WESBSP significantly improved following the hiring of an outreach lead who became its public face. The lead was instrumental in getting out to liaise with businesses in person and enrolling them on the programme. In this role they were able to effectively utilise their own networks and those of the universities to spread programme awareness.

There was a shared understanding among all stakeholders that one-to-one face-to-face interactions (where possible) were a much more effective recruitment method. The management and marketing team also expressed a clear desire to account manage SMEs. Working with them to measure programme impact and to develop further understanding of business need.

4.3 PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY

Project management has been smooth and successful including customer facing communications. Project management strengths are reflective of the programme delivery strengths summarised below. Only one minor weakness in the project management has been identified, revolving around some clunkiness in back-office administration, where changing roles led to some inconsistencies in how project materials and documentation were kept up to date.

DELIVERY STRENGTHS

Stakeholders indicated that the WESBSP was well-designed to achieve its objectives and outcomes, and felt it was well-received by beneficiaries. Clear efforts were made to provide a balance of generic high impact tools and more bespoke material and guidance that utilised the expertise and experience of the wider SETsquared networks.

A clear appetite exists for a blended delivery approach between face-to-face and online provision. Face-to-face provision was acknowledged as a better means of developing peer relationships and networks and a better forum for encouraging dialogues and shared learning. Online provision was seen as a better method for increasing participation with businesses not having to commit to travel and the other difficulties associated with having to be in another location.

The delivery team were positive about the masterclass format reflecting that ongoing iterative changes to the curriculum and delivery method continued to ensure maximum impact. Even so, an appetite does exist for shorter half day or two-hour sessions that can be more easily tailored around business commitments.

The ability and willingness to make iterative changes to masterclass content and delivery were viewed positively by stakeholders, as was positive adaptability of the programme delivery in general. This included:

- Continual iterative changes as a key feature of this programme. The delivery team sought to encourage the maximum amount of business engagement. It was acknowledged that this process was challenging but that this was indicative of a dynamic sector that is continually developing new ideas and thinking about how to commercialise their products.

- Ongoing programme challenges, such as the impact of COVID-19 were partially mitigated by the dynamic and reflective approach taken by the management team. Programme planning, delivery and processes were regularly refined and adapted to meet their target outputs. Examples of this include moving the sessions online, spreading the geography of the programme, marketing it to a wider range of companies, and utilising university contacts to reach out to potential participants and build collaborative networks. A lot of success has been achieved against output targets for academic collaboration.

DELIVERY CHALLENGES

The programme timescale was a significant challenge, especially with the need to adapt to COVID-19 and manage staff changes during the delivery period:

- On reflection, some outputs targets were ambitious and hard to achieve in a two-year programme, especially a proportion of businesses not progressing past EOI stage. For example, developing new to the firm products in less than two years is especially challenging.
- Offering free support online made it easy for companies to sign-up and not attend. Th
- Elements of the programme focussing on technical or scientific aspects of sustainability, which started later in the programme delivery timeline because of recruitment delays, further limiting what could be achieved here.
- A later start for carbon assessment and energy audit elements, combined with increased demand from businesses wanting to reduce energy bills and grow post-COVID-19, has led to a backlog of SMEs from a mix of geographies and industries who cannot all be helped at once.

The blended approach to masterclass delivery was a strength, however it created some challenges surrounding retaining SMEs and completing engagements through to being able to claim an output. This led to uncertainty about how many attendees there would be in each workout:

- Looking at multi-day or half-day workouts where some delivery is face-to-face and some online, there are businesses who could not make them all or who have dropped in and out. This may suit the SMEs in question; however, it is problematic in terms of reaching output targets.
- A recent example is a workout which ran well was only attended by four SMEs, whilst there were four delivery team members covering different topics. This was below the optimum number of attendees and was resource intensive and potentially seen as unbalanced by SMEs.
- Switching to online-only delivery during the period of COVID-19 restrictions suited some businesses better than others, and those who prefer to face-to-face had a tendency to drift away.

4.4 PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Stakeholders and partners indicate that WESBSP's approach to partnership working has been a success, and is a strength of the programme. Particular areas of success are:

- Access to universities and networks is a USP of the programme, building on academic links and resulting from the hard work undertaken to promote the programme across universities and build collaborative networks.
- Acting as a conduit to other programmes in the region and signposting businesses to these where appropriate, and where these are a better fit for the business than WESBSP.

- Working with LEPs to promote SETsquared through LEP networks.
- Sponsoring external networking events to build awareness.
- Quarterly meetings with partners to update on programme delivery and share knowledge.
- Taking time to listen to local authority partners and understand their focus and priorities.

The partnerships created are a positive legacy of the project, although funding will be required to build on this further and maximise the benefits of partnership working going forward.

4.5 LESSONS AND THE FUTURE

Reflecting on the strengths and value added of the programme and the challenges of trying to achieve output targets, stakeholders have informed a range of lessons and considerations for the future.

Marketing, promotion, and SME recruitment:

- The delivery team reflected that ongoing work is required to ensure that the programme is shaped around a clear understanding of ongoing business needs. Mapping regional demand and need would be an excellent means of doing this. This process would also help to differentiate the programme from the increased level of competition.
- Continued work is required to ensure that sustainability focused programmes are marketed more strategically and holistically, with a marketing material having a broad focus to help business recruitment. Clearly outlining how sustainability applies to all businesses and supports resilience and competitiveness should be a central element of this work.
- Dedicated engagement leads are clear programme assets. Face-to-face contact is still seen as the best forum for developing long term business and academic engagement. It helps to develop longer term more organic relationships that continually inform programme development and help to ensure impact.
- Research to provide an up-to-date profile of businesses across the West of England and their needs will enable more targeted marketing. For example, identifying high growth potential businesses means growth-focussed elements of the programme can be promoted directly to them.
- Developing strategic links with associated programmes across the region could be a way of creating a pipeline of participant businesses.

Retaining and deepening SME engagement:

- Providing a menu of different support options would allow participants to shape their support programme. For instance, there is an appetite for resources that can be accessed away from times that clash with acute operational pressures. Similarly, some growth-focussed businesses may value an intense period of activity which results in creating a clear strategic action plan for them to implement, whilst others may want to work more deeply on carbon reduction with dedicated masterclasses.
- A continued long-term engagement and feedback process would allow for a better understanding of programme impact, provide more information for iterative programme improvement, and provide a wider range of opportunities to add value.
- Continued long-term engagement can also help support a business until a product is developed, working through multiple iterations as they progress TRL stages.

Post-ERDF programming:

- The post ERDF climate provides a good opportunity to reduce the administrative requirements for beneficiaries and allows the programme to focus on a wider geography and companies not eligible for ERDF programmes, such as large companies or specific sectors.
- Moving away from ERDF requirements could allow for smaller number of targeted outputs, less narrow outputs, or a longer timeframe would allow the management, marketing, and delivery teams to focus upon increasing the quality and appropriateness of participants. It would also provide time to fully engage with their stage of development and requirements and to develop the offering accordingly.
- A faster approval process and longer timeframe would increase the quality of the participant recruitment and engagement process.

Filling gaps:

- A wider geographical scope would allow engagement with out-of-region upstream and downstream supply chains in the region's key industries.
- Large companies are generally larger emitters and require dedicated decarbonisation support.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This section brings together the WESBSP strengths, the lessons learned from the evaluation and recommendations for consideration.

5.1 STRENGTHS

The evaluation found the following key strengths of the programme:

- Stakeholders and beneficiaries felt the workshop materials were strong. They particularly valued the knowledge and expertise of the delivery team and the opportunity to test out and develop their business ideas.
- The administration and management of the process and the ease of the application process was identified as a strength of the programme by survey respondents.
- The programme was regarded as an excellent means for introducing businesses to the region's numerous academic assets. It helped participants to establish academic links with clear potential for longer-term research collaborations including Knowledge Transfer Partnerships.
- It also provided academia with a new and effective interface with private industry helping to stimulate more collaborative open innovation. The engagement lead played a clear role in facilitating these partnerships.
- 93% of survey respondents stated that they were very satisfied/satisfied with the programme with the same number stating that they were very likely/highly likely to recommend the programme to other businesses.

5.2 IMPACT AND ADDED VALUE

Innovation and its associated impacts can take longer than the timeline of the WESBSP limiting reported impact. Although the potential impact of the programme has not yet been fully realised due to early delays in progress against targets, the programme does show high impacts and clear added value.

Key successes for businesses are:

- The workouts provided beneficiaries with the opportunity, space, materials, and support to focus upon strategy.
- 44% of survey respondents stated that they have already implemented changes following their participation with a further 44% stating that they plan to implement changes in future.
- 94% of survey respondents stated that their understanding of ways to decarbonise their business model was either excellent or good after attending the workshops (compared to 44% prior to the programme)
- 69% of survey respondents stated that their understanding of how product/service innovation would support their business growth was either excellent or good after attending the workshops (compared to 6% prior to the programme).
- 78% of survey respondents feel the benefits would not have happened without the programme, would have taken longer to happen, or would have been smaller.

Furthermore, the programme has generated added value by creating a foundation for more businesses to grow in the future by:

- Providing businesses with cross-sector connections and support need to source public and private investment opportunities as they progress towards commercialisation of new products.
- Supporting businesses to engage with academics and develop longer-term research collaborations including Knowledge Transfer Partnerships. Outcomes have been seen from businesses who are now engaged with the University who were not before the WESBSP.
- Acting as a starting point for businesses who are earlier on their sustainable innovation journey by providing them with the technical and market knowledge to make changes.
- Diagnosing business needs and their innovation challenges to make bespoke recommendations which support each business' mission and values. As well as ensuring businesses get signposted to the most appropriate masterclass or external programme, the advice also provides information which businesses can use beyond the life of WESBSP. This helps embed resilience in beneficiaries.
- Business support staff have experience in the private sector and know the importance of being business-led to fully respond to what businesses want.

Added value, in the form of unexpected benefits for project partners have also been identified:

- Academics are more aware of what SETsquared do, and have used it to broaden their academic reach, for example by using SETsquared in bids.
- Proving academia with a new and effective interface with private industry and enabling more open innovation.
- The holistic approach to business support has benefitted the wider innovation and sustainability ecosystem by making new connections and links between businesses, support programmes and facilities across the region.

5.3 LESSONS LEARNT

Building on reflections from stakeholders and beneficiaries the evaluation identified the following lessons:

- Ongoing business intelligence gathering can ensure that future programmes are shaped around a clear understanding of ongoing business need. This process would also help to differentiate the programme from the increased level of competition.
- Dedicated engagement leads are clear programme assets. Face-to-face multiple contact is regarded as the best forum for developing long term business and academic engagement. It helps to develop longer term more organic relationships that continually inform programme development and help to ensure impact.
- Businesses do not always recognise that a sustainability programme is relevant to all businesses regardless of sector, product, or maturity. Increased emphasis upon the benefits it brings in terms of resilience, savings and competitiveness would support these efforts.
- The larger regional geography of the programme was welcomed by stakeholders and beneficiaries. There is a clear appetite for multi-agency programmes that are not restricted by small administrative boundaries.

- There is an appetite for resources that can be accessed away from times that clash with acute operational pressures. Businesses are most interested in mentoring and ongoing support led by their strategic focus priorities.
- A smaller number of targeted outputs would allow the management, marketing, and delivery teams to focus recruiting fewer and more appropriate participants. It would also provide time to deepen and enrich the support offered.
- Businesses highly value the innovation support and access to academic networks provided by the programme. Continued efforts to deepen connections between the business community and the region's numerous academic assets would be welcomed.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evaluation findings Kada propose the following recommendations for consideration for programme delivery, programme design, and policy makers, in keeping with ERDF Summative Assessment guidelines:

Programme Delivery

- Maintain, where possible, a consistent contact for businesses throughout the programme life cycle. If this is not possible ensure a rigorous handover process is in place to ensure consistency and no loss of institutional expertise/experience.
- A more streamlined administration process post-ERDF will enable greater focus upon networking opportunities and developing relationships with local businesses.
- Ensure rigorous scrutiny of third parties' ability to meet delivery timescales building in some scope for clawback if KPIs are not achieved within pre-agreed timescales.

Programme Design

- Providing a menu of different opportunities would allow participants to shape their support programme. A bank of grouped online resources would allow them to choose the material that is aligned with their stage of development and/or sector. This would free up time and capacity for the mentoring/peer discussions that the participants value most.
- Undertake a business mapping exercise deepening understanding of regional need and requirements. Shaping future programmes around this intelligence would help to differentiate the programme from the increased level of competition.
- Develop a multiagency approach to business engagement, using best practice (such as the use of locally based engagement leads) to shape the engagement process.
- Develop an engagement strategy for larger businesses focused upon highlighting how the R&D capacity and skills of the participant SMEs/academic institution are a clear programme asset. The post-ERDF environment creates opportunity to widen the scope of the programme to encompass university specialisms and large commercial partners in sectors such as nuclear energy and the hydrogen economy.

Policy Makers

- A faster approval process and longer timeframe would increase the quality of the participant recruitment and engagement process.

- Expanding the eligibility criteria for which businesses can be recruited would have increased the programme's impact. Enquiries were received from businesses which were not within the programme's scope, showing that as it stands, not all market failures are being addressed.
- Provide continued incentives for business engagement in sustainability/net zero focused initiatives. For instance, government guarantees could be provided to facilitate and increase access to low-cost capital investment loans.

ANNEX ONE: STAKEHOLDERS AND DELIVERY PARTNERS

Name	Position
Hannah Dennis	Project Manager
Andrea Kelly	Programme Manager (former)
Billy Allen	Programme Manager (current)
Laurent Perge	Innovation Advisor and Business Support
Jayne Fishwick	Marketing
Ale Sanchez Monsalve	Business Development Specialist
Peter Keevill	Entrepreneur-in-residence
Katherine Bourke	Trainer – delivery and mentor
Emma Burlow	Trainer – delivery and mentor
Manor Singh	South Gloucestershire Council Representative
Robin McDowell	Bristol Council Representative



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