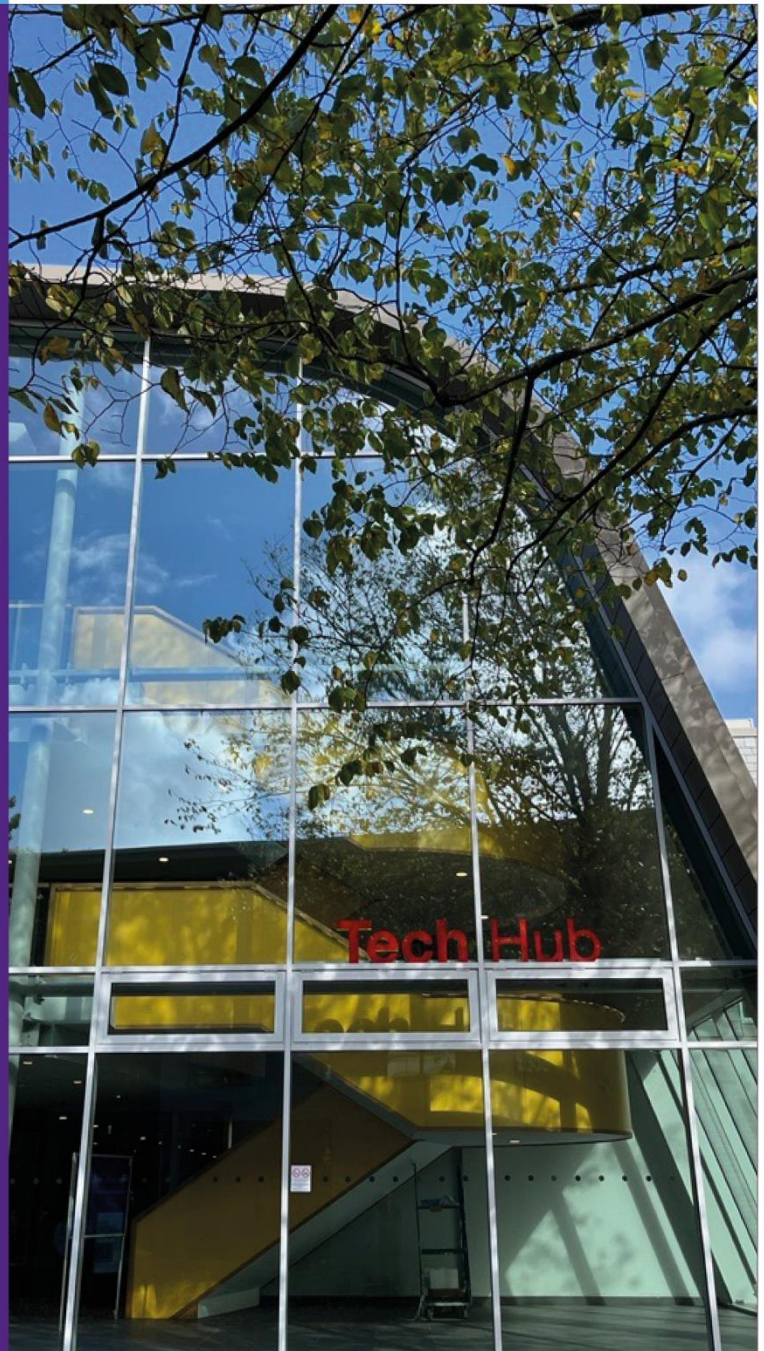


SME  
PRODUCTIVITY  
AND INNOVATION  
CENTRE  
SUMMATIVE  
ASSESSMENT:

# A REPORT FOR EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY

MARCH 2023



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the executive summary for an evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) supported SME Productivity and Innovation Centre and its Innovation Sprint Programme led by Edge Hill University.

### CONTEXT

The SME Productivity and Innovation Centre (PIC) and its Innovation Sprint Programme aims to improve the growth potential of SMEs, improve productivity and drive the adoption of technologies and the development of new products and services through an approximated 50 hours of support. The programme encompasses a company diagnostic and benchmarking, live workshop delivery and offline business resources. The programme focuses on the underlying business model, value proposition, sales approach and business analysis, to facilitate rather than direct, SME development. The programme can also be oriented for product development and market development growth strategies.

The programme's aims align with that of national and local plans such as the UK Governments Plan for Growth and the West Lancashire Economic Development Strategy seeking to improve innovation and provide scale-up support as a means to boost the economy.

### BUSINESS EXPERIENCE AND IMPACTS

The headlines from the beneficiary survey appear in chapter three.

The participants were positive about the programme and noted the following in terms of impacts:

- All beneficiaries were satisfied with the programme and all but two can be considered net promoters.
- The assistance received throughout the support provision was highly rated, in particular the 'communication' and 'programme administration and management'.
- The quality of interventions were also rated highly, specifically workshops 4-6 centred on solution and action planning activities.
- Most firms have seen improvements in their productivity and turnover and all beneficiaries have taken a more proactive approach to market penetration.
- The facilitator support's tailored approach to providing validation and guidance was widely considered the most valuable aspect of the programme. However, firms generally would have liked the programme to have continued for a longer period of time with the inclusion of a six-monthly post programme follow up.

In terms of progress against programme output and outcome targets:

- 73 enterprises (for C1/C4) have received support (101% of the target (72)).
- 22 enterprises have seen an employment increase for C8 (96% of the target).
- 31 new products have been brought to a firm for C29 (107% of the target).

The project has an economic impact (GVA Net Present Value) of £12.2m over 3 years resulting in a benefit cost ratio (BCR) of 13.3:1 i.e., each £1.00 of public investment generates £13.30. This represents high value for money according to the DCLG Appraisal Guide<sup>1</sup> which states the value for money categories as based on the size of the BCR (BCR  $\geq$  2 = High value for money).

## PROGRAMME DELIVERY

The key points are as follows:

- The rationale for the programme was valid and reinforced throughout, acting as a two-way conduit between EHU and beneficiaries to address business challenges while providing opportunities for practical business engagement.
- The programme's design ensured recruitment was targeted and removed reliance on external partners or outlays in marketing.
- The delivery model was efficient, effective and well received by those involved and management and administration went smoothly which was attributed to the significant investment in processes, compliance and training pre-programme.
- The programme's success is evidenced in the achievement of all outputs and outcomes and the generated added value such as the creation of the SME Growth Observatory and the SME Growth Research Group.
- Sustaining successes relies on the navigation of funding streams and utilising PR opportunities to publish programme successes.
- Delivery partners would like to see the programme continued and expanded into new geographies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The team may wish to consider the following recommendations:

- I. Building on the success of the programme and demand for further support by exploring alternative funding streams for future iterations or continuations. This could include Innovate UK, or UK Shared Prosperity and its successors.
- II. For policy makers future funding streams should continue to focus on targeted support for high growth firms in this way.
- III. Expanding the programme to a wider geography would help broaden the reach of EHU and enable the PIC to contribute to productivity growth across the North West and beyond.
- IV. Recording protected characteristics routinely and acting on data trends to assess and enhance performance to ensure the programme is delivered fairly and equally and in line with the equality cross cutting theme or its equivalent, in future funding packages.

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government [Appraisal Guide](#), December 2016, p 2.56

- V. Maintain and develop the academic relationships with other Universities cultivated as a result of the programme and those with LEPs and other City Regions to use as ongoing opportunities for knowledge exchange and partnerships.
- VI. Further publicise the successes of the PIC by utilising available PR opportunities such as conferences, events, podcasts and leadership articles.
- VII. Consider the implementation (if within scope) of a six-month catch up at the end of any future programme iterations to allow beneficiaries to resolve any outstanding queries or issues. Additionally to ensure solutions and action plans developed during workshops 4-6 are being implemented and on track.

# 1 INTRODUCTION AND PROGRAMME CONTEXT

This chapter introduces the aims, objectives and activities of the PIC and its Innovation Sprint Programme. It discusses the Programme's rationale and the sub-regional and national strategic context. The scope of the evaluation study, the objectives and approach are also covered (section 1.2).

## 1.1 PROGRAMME SUMMARY AND OBJECTIVES

The SME Productivity and Innovation Centre and its resulting Innovation Sprint Programme are funded under priority axis 3 of the European Regional Development Fund "Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises". The remit of the programme is to improve SMEs' potential to grow financially, improve productivity and increase their headcount. The programme primarily focuses on the underlying business model, value proposition, sales approach and business analysis, to facilitate rather than direct, SME development.

The programme provides an approximated 50 hours of support that encompasses diagnostic and benchmarking, live delivery and offline business aid. This includes a progression report and operates on an evidence-based innovation delivery model through a series of six workshops over four weeks that cumulates with a self-scored evaluation form for competency analysis. The programme does have an on-campus work space; however the majority of the programme is run online- to provide participants with the flexibility to engage on their own terms and to support the sustainability and scalability of the programme itself.

## 1.2 EVALUATION SCOPE AND STUDY OBJECTIVES

This evaluation aims to assess the success of the programme in meeting its objectives and identifying any observations to inform any future iterations of the programme. The scope and aims of the evaluation were to:

- Assess the rationale for the programme, and whether the rationale remains valid. Additionally, how it fits with ERDF priorities and those of other local, regional and national strategies.
- Assess the effectiveness of the process of delivery, including the management, administrative and delivery mechanisms. As well as impacts realised through the project.
- The appetite to invest in business in the current climate, national growth comparisons of businesses and turnover growth as a result of participating in the project.
- Identify lessons learnt and provide recommendations to improve operational delivery, beneficiary experience and project outcomes.
- Conduct a robust quantitative impact evaluation of the project that assesses performance including: the achievement of gross outputs and expenditure against its approved targets.



- Conduct a value for money assessment of the cost effectiveness in terms of input/output unit cost ratios.

An inception meeting was held to confirm the approach, agree the principal milestones, and discuss the development of the programme – providing insights to its context and original rationale. A desk review of market failures and the strategic context was undertaken. Seven institutional stakeholders from the programme’s delivery team and research and communications office were interviewed across two group interviews. 28 businesses completed an online questionnaire. Discussions included programme strengths and weaknesses, challenges and lessons. Performance against ERDF targets is considered and economic impacts. Three beneficiary case studies appear throughout.

### 1.3 RATIONALE AND MARKET FAILURE

#### MARKET FAILURE

The PIC and the Innovation Sprint Programme seek to address the market failure of the known productivity challenges facing Lancashire and the UK. In Lancashire, firms are 11% less productive than the UK average and GVA growth in the region has been 10% lower than the UK figure since 1997. A key counter to this problem is the attraction of scale-up level firms to an area, providing a boost to the economy and an increase to its productivity levels. The PIC identified instead of attracting scale up firms it could instead cultivate them, targeting hard to reach companies that are not stepping forward to receive support or to innovate. The PIC improves these businesses’ productivity literacy, highlighting the challenges that they themselves may not realise are prevalent and providing support provision in how to address them. As such the PIC stimulates these SMEs to the scale-up phase increasing Lancashire’s scale-up density and addressing the overarching productivity challenge.

#### RATIONALE

In the face of macro-level challenges in the business environment, firms are seeking support to aid their business resilience, growth and profitability. Equally the need to attract scale-up businesses to the area so as to provide a productivity boost for the aforementioned economic challenges provided the opportunity to benefit both parties. The PIC and its programme as described by stakeholders acts as a conduit for two-way engagement between firms and the University, creating a pipeline for academics and students to benefit from the experience of working on business challenges while providing the solutions to the firms themselves. The rationale for the programme was also in part based on its previous successes, having run previously over the prior three financial years the centre and its Innovation Sprint programme are proven, supported by numerous past participant testimonies.

### 1.4 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

#### LOCAL CONTEXT

The West Lancashire Economic Development Strategy 2015-2025<sup>2</sup> builds on the baseline assessment used for the West Lancashire 2014 economic study, to develop the eight core strategic themes and their contribution to stimulating growth in the region:

- 1) Stimulating Change

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<sup>2</sup> West Lancashire Borough Council, [Economic Development Strategy 2015-2025](#), 2015



- 2) Providing the right scale and mix of employment sites
- 3) Housing as a driver for change
- 4) Revitalised town centres
- 5) A better-connected West Lancashire
- 6) Promoting the place
- 7) Supporting the rural and visitor economy
- 8) Advantage through knowledge and skills

The strategy highlights many of the area's strengths including its connectivity, visitor economy and its educational excellence- more specifically Edge Hill University. However it also references many of the challenges and areas for improvement including the need for increased engagement with local firms and support provision to attempt to tackle the levels of unemployment and worklessness within West Lancashire.

The West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027<sup>3</sup> seeks to produce plans and policies to cultivate the development of the borough across the proceeding 15 years and is built upon a series of sustainable principles. The plan highlights the boroughs under skilled workforce (less than 20% having a degree or equivalent) and, as in the economic strategy, notes the increases in unemployment. Notably to the PIC the Local Plan highlights the councils desire to ensure EHU's role as a key driver of economic growth in Ormskirk and maintain its importance throughout the wider sub region.

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#### UK GOVERNMENT

The UK Government's Build Back Better: Plan for Growth<sup>4</sup> focused on investment in skills and innovation. The UK, the Plan noted, has a lower proportion of innovative businesses compared to other advanced economies and it aimed to support and incentivise creative ideas and technologies. The Plan suggested that entrepreneurs needed to be well prepared to benefit from innovation and gain the confidence to invest in developing innovative new products/services. It identified continued government support for the accelerated growth and access to finance of SMEs including start-ups and scale ups.

More recently (July 2021) the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) published the UK Innovation Strategy<sup>5</sup>. The government's vision is to make the UK a global hub for innovation by 2035. The key actions for the Strategy include supporting businesses who want to innovate and ensuring research and development institutions serve the needs of businesses and places across the UK. The UK Innovation Strategy claims government structures and the public sector must learn, from the experience of the Pandemic, to work more efficiently with industry and to improve innovation across the country. The aim of the Strategy is to create the world's best innovation eco-system.

The Levelling Up Programme<sup>6</sup> sets out a plan to increase development opportunities across the UK, realising the potential of all places and not just major cities and counties. The programme aims to develop a business-friendly environment, develop a new model of public and private investment and, to incentivise inward investment. It includes a series of UK successor funds and programmes to reinforce

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<sup>3</sup> West Lancashire Borough Council, Local Plan 2012-2027, 2013

<sup>4</sup> Gov.UK, [Build Back Better: our plan for growth](#), 2021

<sup>5</sup> Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, [UK Innovation Strategy](#), 2021

<sup>6</sup> Gov.uk, [Levelling Up Programme](#), 2022

this commitment including the UK Community Renewal Fund 2021/2022<sup>7</sup> and UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). It is fair to say that the regeneration agenda has shifted somewhat towards community and based priorities and whilst there is a supporting local business Investment Priority this area has less prominence and resources than was afforded by UK Structural Funds. The supporting local business priority is the most relevant:

*"Increasing private sector investment in growth-enhancing activities, through targeted support for small and medium-sized businesses to undertake new-to-firm innovation, adopt productivity-enhancing, energy efficient and low carbon technologies and techniques, and start or grow their exports."*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Gov.uk, [UK Community Renewal Fund Prospectus](#), 2021

<sup>8</sup> UK Shared Prosperity Fund: [prospectus](#) - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

# SME Productivity and Innovation Centre & the Innovation Sprint Programme in numbers

## Impacts

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**125**

Gross jobs  
(100 direct,  
25 indirect)

**£12.2m**

NPV GVA

**£1.00:£13.30**

Return on investment

**£12,644**

Per business supported

## Innovation Benefits

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**100%**

of businesses felt the benefits would not have happened in the exact same way without the support

**80%**

of businesses had seen noticeable improvement to their use of customer data in decision making

**88%**

of businesses have seen noticeable improvement in their resource allocation

**88%**

of businesses have improved their innovation and growth management

## Commercial Benefits

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**83%**

of respondents have invested some capital into process improvement

**87%**

of firms have seen an improvement in their turnover

**93%**

of businesses have seen noticeable improvement in their approach to market penetration

**87%**

of respondents have seen an improvement in their productivity

## Service Received

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**21 of 23**

participants would recommend the programme to others (net promoters)

**100%**

of businesses were satisfied with the programme

**100%**

of businesses rated the programmes administration and management as 'Very Good' or 'Good'

**100%**

of businesses rated the communication during the project as 'Very Good' or 'Good'

# Providing diverse and inclusive cycle activities and training nationwide



I had expertise that I could use...there was no reason why I couldn't do that for my own company I just needed help.

Go Velo Ltd, provides cycle training nationwide. Kirsti Grayson, was inspired to start the company after positive comments from other mums when cycling to school with her son. Seeing a demand for cycling and road safety training, Kirsti founded Go Velo in 2009, supporting 250 children in the first year and gradually increasing their customer base to almost 6,000 per annum. Since starting Kirsti and the Go Velo team have delivered Bikeability and Adult Cycle Training to more than 60,000 people in Lancashire.

Go Velo had real concerns over surviving lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Up until that point the company had been heavily reliant on government funding leaving Kirsti with a sense that 'all my eggs were in one basket'.

Kirsti realised her past experience as an tutor for British Cycling could be better utilised for Go Velo with a push from some additional support. This is where the SME Productivity and Innovation Centre (PIC) and the Innovation Sprint programme came in. Kirsti was recommended to the PIC by Boost Lancashire. The PIC provided Kirsti with a facilitator who acted as a sounding board, providing guidance and direction in a time where she needed a cohesive plan and structure. The Innovation Sprint programme enabled the company to focus on processes and procedures and to get a 'good quality CRM' in place to put Kirsti's ideas into action.

"The mentor was superb, [the support] was very focused when I didn't have a lot of structure"

As a result of the programme and its support the business is taking off. Go Velo's annual turnover increased by £120,000 in 2022 with even more growth this year expected. The changes to the business structure and turnover growth



“

It was absolutely the right time; the support was perfect, and it has been invaluable to me.

have created commercial and economic impacts. Before joining the Innovation Sprint programme Go Velo was solely run by Kirsti with sub-contractors and self-employed workers. Now Go Velo employs 6 full time and 33 part time employees and has recently purchased new office space with training rooms storage, and a repair centre. Kirsti attributes this success to PIC:

“Without the support and guidance that was given by PIC I would still be in exactly the same position that I was five years ago.”

As a result of the PIC advice and mentoring Kirsti and Go Velo were given the space and time to develop the business plan and strategy, helping her to ‘stop the clock’. Go Velo has developed nationwide coverage and Kirsti felt the Innovation Sprint programme surpassed expectations at the right time in her business journey.



© Go Velo

“From a quality point of view we were hoping to be in the top five providers, but we’re number one. We were delighted to win the Bikeability large provider award for 2022 and we’re in a position now where we can take the bull by the horns. We just need to keep doing what we’re doing and delivering high quality training across the country.”

Kirsti’s aims were for Go Velo to grow to become one of the top five providers nationally. However, after engaging with PIC this aim has been exceeded with Go Velo currently sat at number one in the UK. Building on this wide-ranging success Go Velo will continue to apply everything learned on the Innovation Sprint programme to ‘keep doing what we’re doing’ to maintain the levels of quality their customer base has enjoyed and grown to expect.

## 2 PROJECT PERFORMANCE

This chapter focuses on the performance of the programme against its financial allocation and contracted outputs, assessing economic impact and value for money.

The information has been provided by Edge Hill University.

### 2.1 CONTRACTED SPEND

The spending profile at the evaluation reference date and projections to the end of the project are illustrated in the following table.

Expenditure	Original Funding Agreement	Amount in most recent Funding Agreement Variation	Total achieved at time of evaluation	% of Profile target	Projected to be achieved at Project Closure	%of target
ERDF Capital Expenditure	£0.00	£0.00	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
ERDF Revenue Expenditure	£923,011.00	£923,011.00	£713,191.00	77%	£914,678.00	99%

Source: Edge Hill University Monitoring Data

The current ERDF expenditure is 77% (£713,191.00) of the profile target (£914,678.00) however at project close this is expected to be 99% of the profile target (£914,678.00).

### 2.2 CONTRACTED OUTPUTS

The headlines are as follows:

- 73 enterprises (for C1/C4) have received support (101% of the target (72)).
- 22 enterprises have seen an employment increase for C8 (96% of the target).
- 31 new products have been brought to a firm for C29 (107% of the target).

The output profile and achievements at project close are reported in the table below.

Indicator	Original Funding Agreement	Total achieved at time of evaluation	% of target	Forecast Total	% of target
(C1/C4) Number of enterprises receiving support/ Number receiving non-financial support	72	73	101%	76	106%

(C8) Employment increases in supported enterprises*	23	22	96%	29	126%
(C29) Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	29	31	107%	39	134%

Source: Edge Hill University Monitoring Data

The output 'Employment increases in supported enterprises' (C8) is recorded throughout the lifetime of the project. In some instances, the creation of employment/safeguarding of jobs materialises after project end but still as a result of the project.

The University has an EDI steering group that provides a formal setting for staff representatives to lead on all areas of equality and diversity work in relation to staff and students. The group have responsibility to advance the delivery of the EDI Strategy and Action Plan. However, protected characteristics were not routinely recorded so it is hard to definitively assess performance on the equality cross cutting theme. While there were also no specific social and environmental objectives for the programme benefits did arise from individual SME beneficiaries who created products of this nature. For example, a cycle training business that created social and environmental benefits through their activity.

## 2.3 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This section looks at the economic impacts of the investment made by the project.

The analysis of impacts is based on reported outputs to date and responses to the business survey. The survey data shows the percentage of beneficiaries creating jobs, the median jobs increase per SME, and the proportion of benefits which can be attributed to the project which is used to assess attribution and deadweight. A comprehensive assessment of economic impact was undertaken comprising of:

- Net Employment and GVA Net Present Value (NPV) impacts to date (over three years of persistence).
- Total public cost impacts and value for money.

Two tiers of effects were considered:

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

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

- Deadweight was assumed at 23.86%.
- Displacement and leakage were assumed low, with each at 10%.



- A composite multiplier was used to calculate the indirect employment effects (from the HCA Additionality Guide Fourth Edition) using the sub-regional mean for business development and competitiveness (1.25)
- The persistence of the benefits i.e. how many years the benefits are expected to persist and the period over which the benefits will accrue until they reach their full potential. In this instance, a modest three-year time frame was chosen based on experience elsewhere.
- 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) of the GVA benefit stream over the appropriate persistence time period by discounting back utilising an appropriate rate. HM Treasury 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.
- Estimates for GVA per FTE used ONS (Office of National Statistics) 2020 data for the Northwest updated to 2023 prices.

The following table shows that the Project has or will create 125 gross FTE jobs and a total NPV GVA of £12.2m.

#### Economic Impacts

	Gross Jobs	Net Jobs	NPV over 3 years
<b>Total employment impact</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>£12,241,372</b>
Direct employment impact	100	62	£9,793,097
Indirect employment impact	25	15	£2,448,274

Source: Kada Research

## 2.4 VALUE FOR MONEY

This section looks at the value for money of the investment. The estimated GVA of £12.2m resulted in a benefit cost ratio (BCR) of 13.3:1 i.e., each £1.00 of public investment generates £13.30. This represents high value for money according to the DCLG Appraisal Guide<sup>9</sup> which states the value for money categories as based on the size of the BCR ( $BCR \geq 2$  = High value for money), and we would regard this as very high value for money.

<sup>9</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government [Appraisal Guide](#), December 2016, p 2.56

The cost per business assisted (intensive assist) at £12,644 is above the average benchmark for this type of activity which ranges from £5,322 in the lower quartile to £11,549 (median) and £38,497 (mean)<sup>10</sup>. The cost per gross job created is £7,384 which is below the average for this kind of activity which varies from £13,000 (lower quartile) to £29,400 (median) and £80,400 (mean)<sup>11</sup>. The project is therefore high value for money given the return on investment (BCR) and cost per business assisted figures. This would suggest that the project has been an economic success.

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<sup>10</sup> England ERDF Programme 2014-2020: Output Unit Costs and Definitions, A Final Report by Regeneris Consulting, 2013, 96

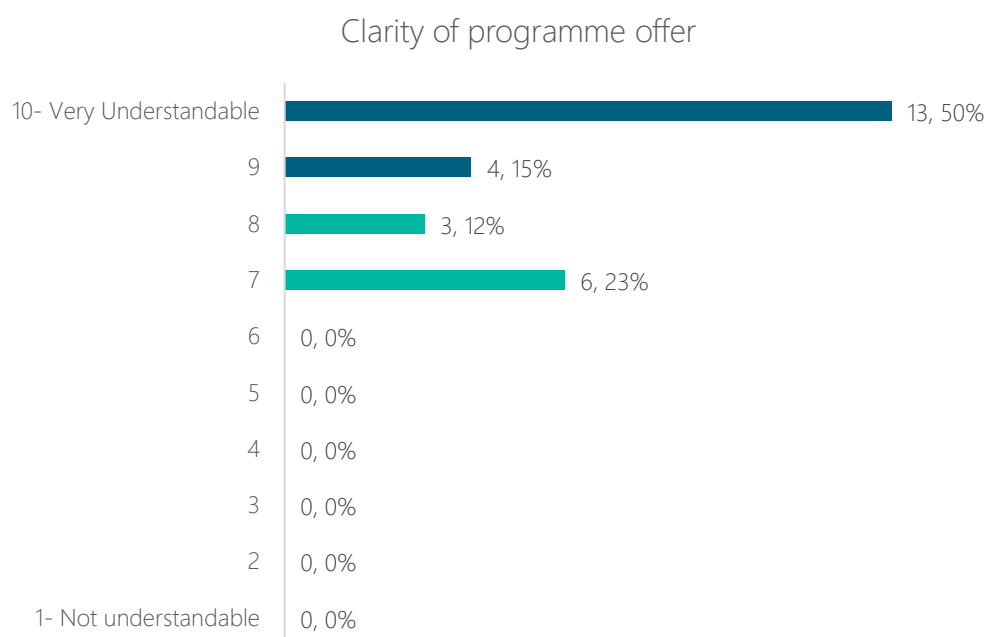
<sup>11</sup> Op. Cit;p.10.

### 3 BUSINESS SURVEY

This chapter gives the perspective of the SMEs that engaged with the programme and completed an online survey. It focuses on satisfaction, outcomes and targets and suggested improvements.

The findings draw on a beneficiary survey completed by 28 companies that were part of the programme.

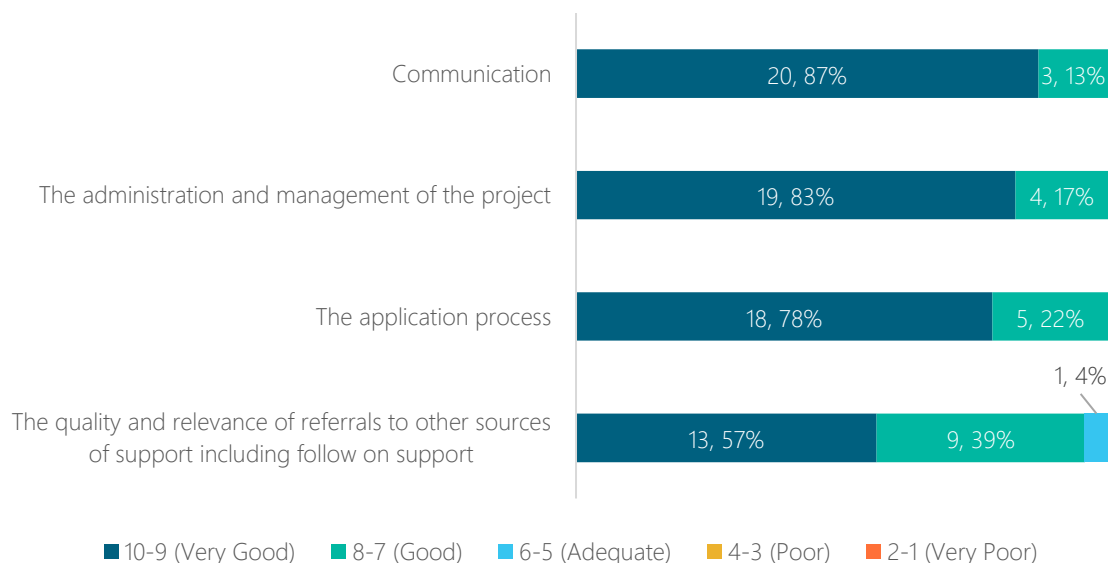
#### 3.1 ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAMME



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=26)

The programmes offer was considered clear by beneficiaries with half of interviewees (13) rating the clarity of the programme offer as 10/10 or 'Very understandable'. No respondents provided a response lower than 7/10.

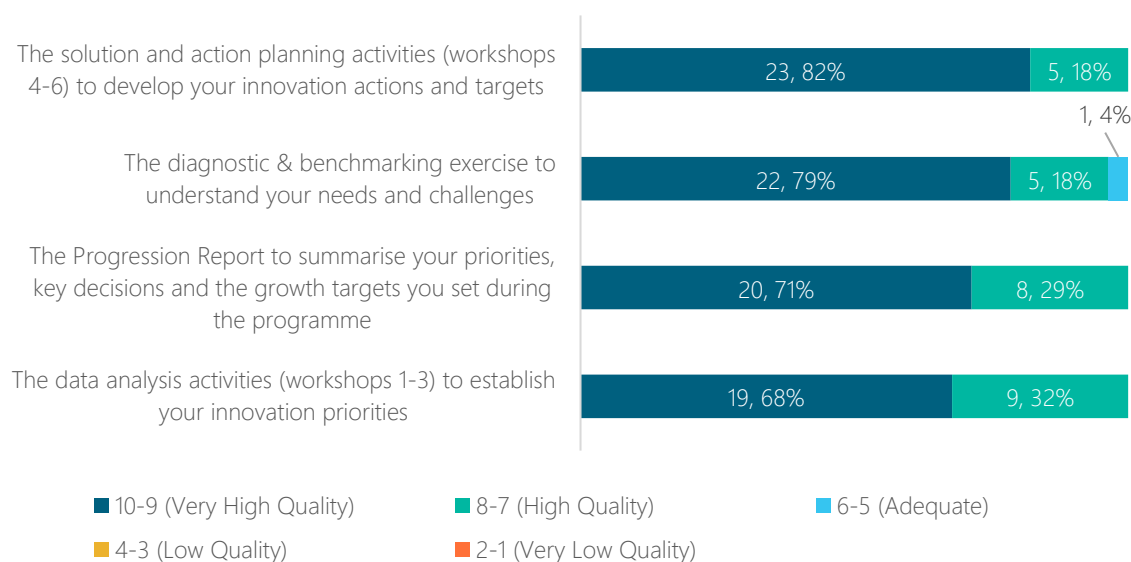
## Rating project elements



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=23)

The project elements were rated highly. The most positive feedback was attributed to the communication during the programme with 20 respondents (87%) citing it as 'Very Good' and the remaining 3 (13%) as 'Good'. This was followed by the programme's administration and management (83% Very Good and 17% Good). No project element received any rating indicative of dissatisfaction and only one firm provided an 'adequate' response, relating to the quality and relevance of follow-on support referrals.

## Rating quality of interventions

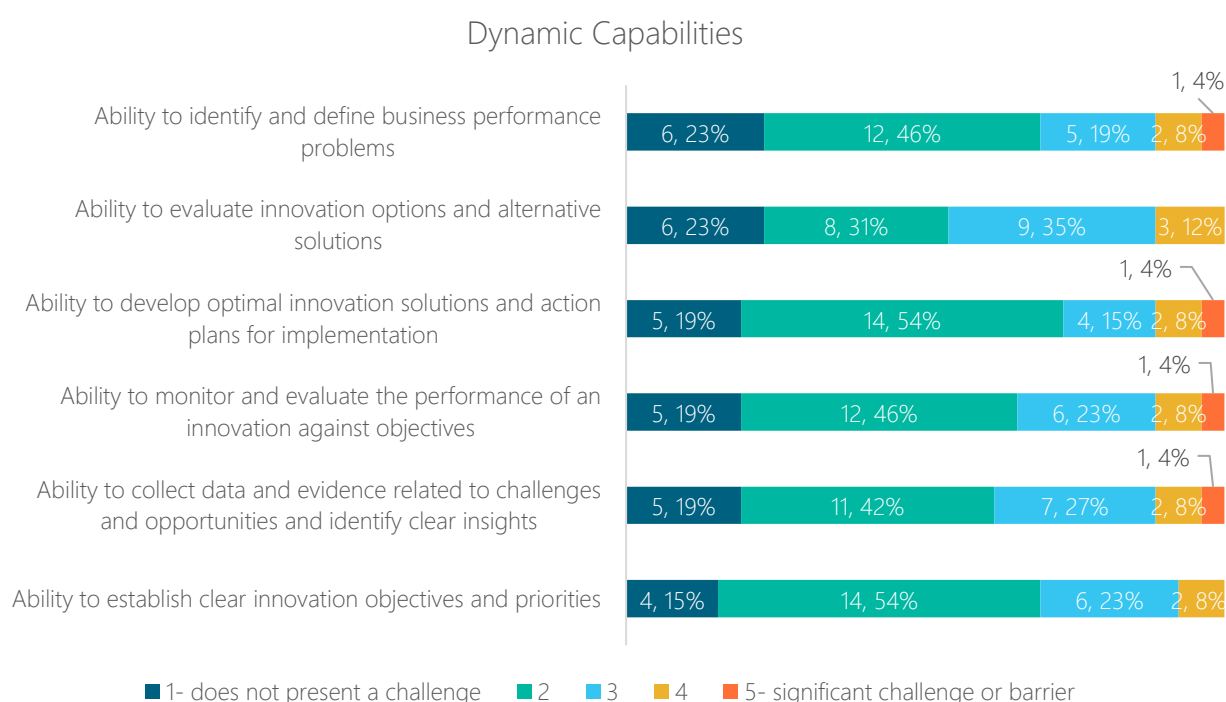


Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=28)

Firms were asked to rate the quality of interventions provided by the programme. Workshops 4-6 (involving the solution and action planning activities designed to develop innovation actions and targets)

were the most well received, with 82% of respondents advising they were 'Very High Quality' and the remaining 18% as 'High Quality'. With the exception of the diagnostic and benchmarking exercise, which received one 'adequate' response, all interventions were regarded as high in quality.

Some companies provided some additional responses specifically referencing the quality of the customer care, the programmes individually tailored approach to each business and the incentive it provided to encourage participants to think outside the box.



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=26)

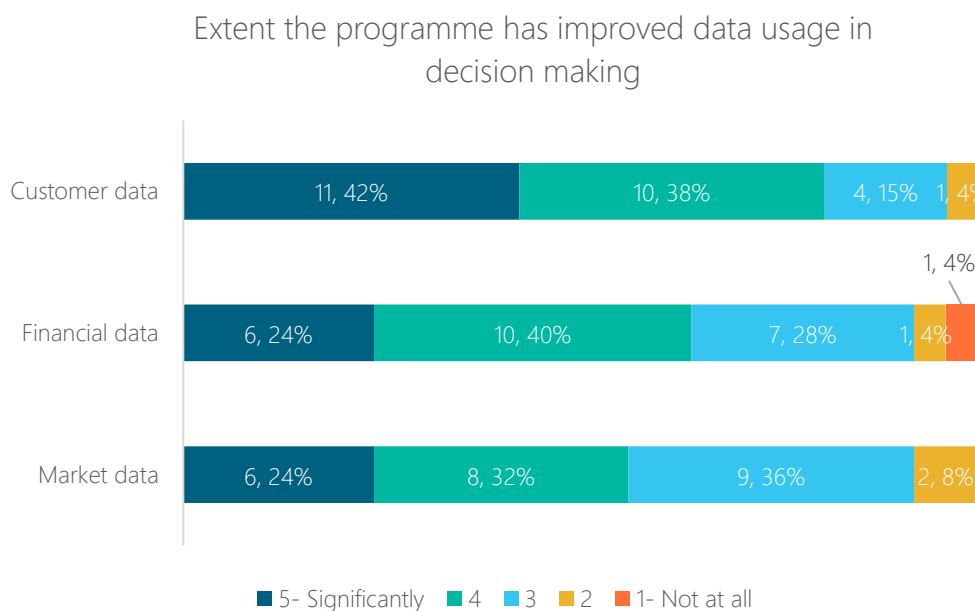
A focus of the beneficiary survey was on participants dynamic capabilities, i.e. their ability to sense, seize and reconfigure resources to address challenges or opportunities, denoted through the 'DECIDE' acronym:

- D: Your ability to identify and define business performance problems.
- E: Your ability to establish clear innovation objectives and priorities.
- C: Your ability to collect data and evidence related to challenges and opportunities and identify clear insights.
- I: Your ability to evaluate innovation options and alternative solutions.
- D: Your ability to develop optimal innovation solutions and action plans for implementation.
- E: Your ability to monitor and evaluate the performance of an innovation against objectives.

More specifically the focus was the extent to which a capability may be underdeveloped and present a barrier or challenge to the participating firms. Responses were generally positive. None of the dynamic capabilities received more than one '5/5' rating i.e. it poses a significant challenge or barrier. The capability that was of least concern was companies' ability to develop optimal innovation solutions and

action plans for implementation, with 73% of firms rating it as 1 or 2 out of 5, indicating it did not present a challenge or one of any note.

### 3.2 IMPACT OF BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT



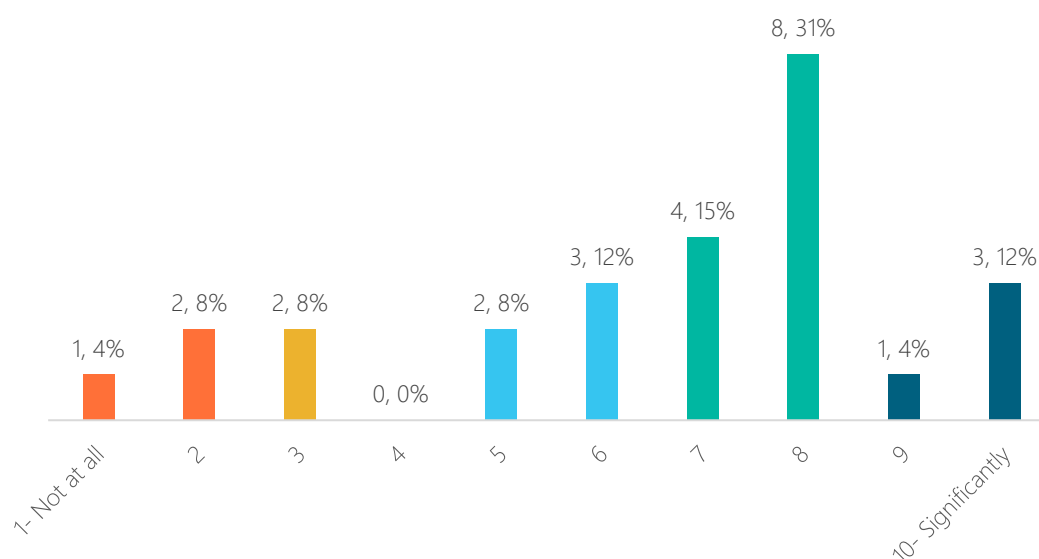
Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=25/26)

The programme has had a noticeable impact on participants use of data in their businesses decision making. The most significant change was within the usage of customer data, 80% of firms have experienced a significant (4/5 or 5/5) improvement in this area. Only one firm felt there had been no change in their decision making, respective to the use of financial data, all other firms had seen some change even if minimal.

Firms were asked to provide additional areas of improvement not listed; responses included:

- Target profiling
- Labour within quotations
- Decisions on work undertaken
- Use of performance metrics
- Data collection and management
- Website
- Meeting organisation

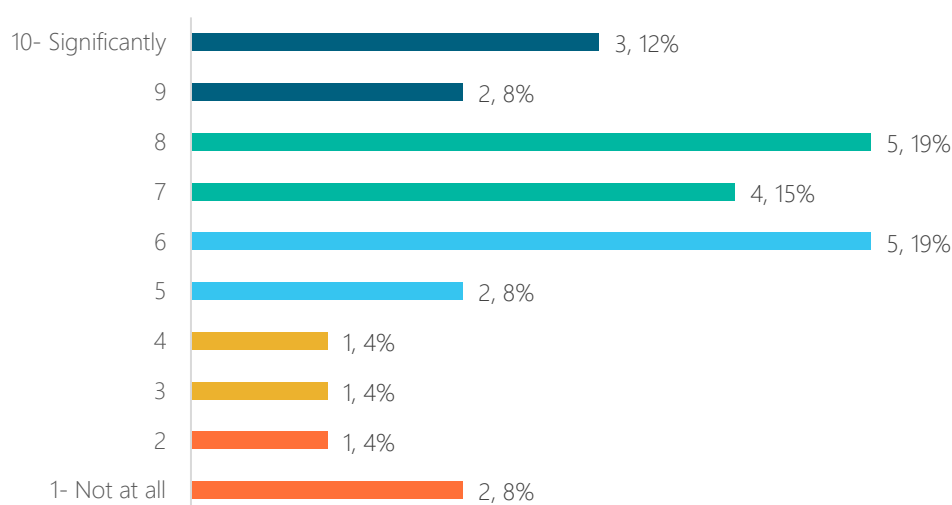
## Extent the programme has improved resource allocation



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=26)

Responses regarding the extent to which resource allocation had been improved as a result of the programme were more varied but still positive. 12 businesses (46%) had seen reasonable (rating of 7-8) improvement in their resource allocation with a further four (16%) experiencing a significant (rating of 9-10) improvement. Only one respondent (4%) had not improved their resource allocation at all. Additional comments from respondents highlighted marketing and sales, allocation of staff time, team skills development and the redirection of resource to key customers over the servicing of a lower grade base as areas of development thanks to PIC.

## Extent the programme has improved innovation and growth management



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=26)



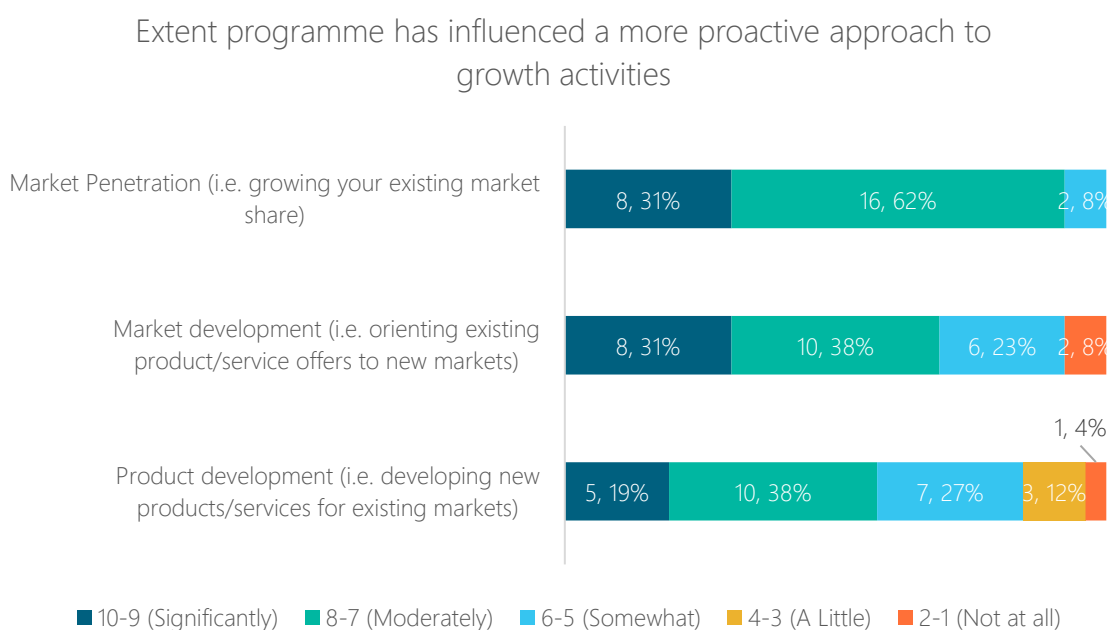
PIC participants have generally seen an improvement in their innovation and growth management following their involvement with the centre. The most common response was of a moderate improvement (rating of 6-8 out of 10) cited by 53% (14) of beneficiaries. Five firms (20%) had seen a significant improvement (9-10) and only two firms had seen no change at all.

Further comments left by businesses referenced implementing innovation KPIs, the development of new packages, services and processes to free up time and to improve customers and business links. One firm cited the ability to refocus on innovation while others felt it was too early or too difficult to say.

### 3.3 COMMERCIAL IMPACTS

The participating firms identified the following projected commercial benefits:

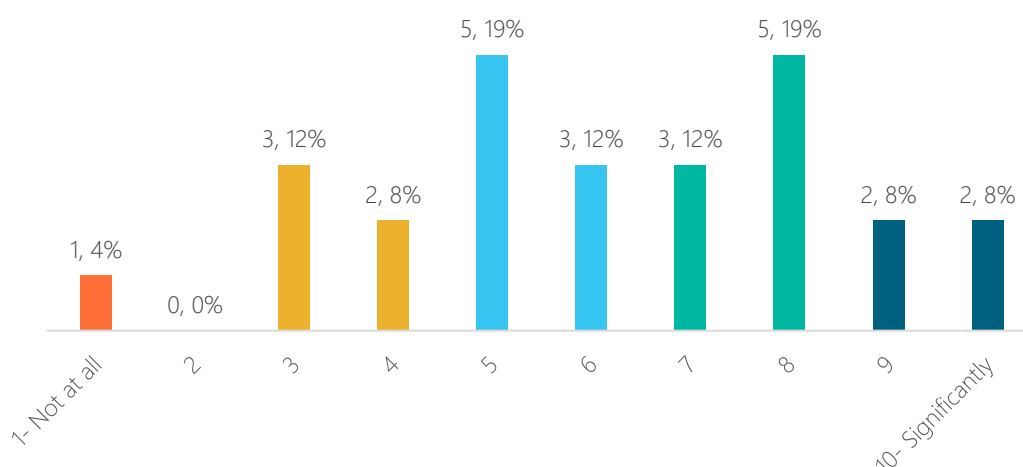
- New product development.
- New sales opportunities and funding secured including early-stage finance.
- Investment in business R&D.



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=26)

Business survey responses show the influence the programme has had on participant's growth activities. The most prominent change was firms approach to market penetration with 93% (24) of businesses having seen a moderate or significant improvement in this area. Only two firms had experienced no change in their approach to market development and one to product development, the remaining firms had all seen at least a small improvement.

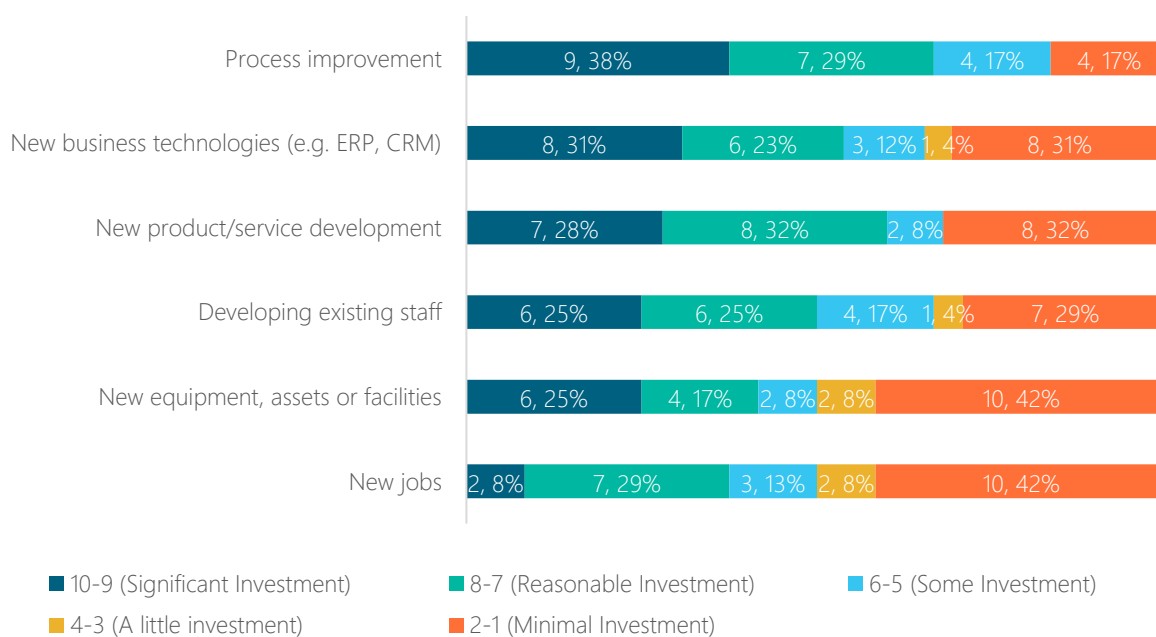
## Extent the programme has improved financial performance/available working capital



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=26)

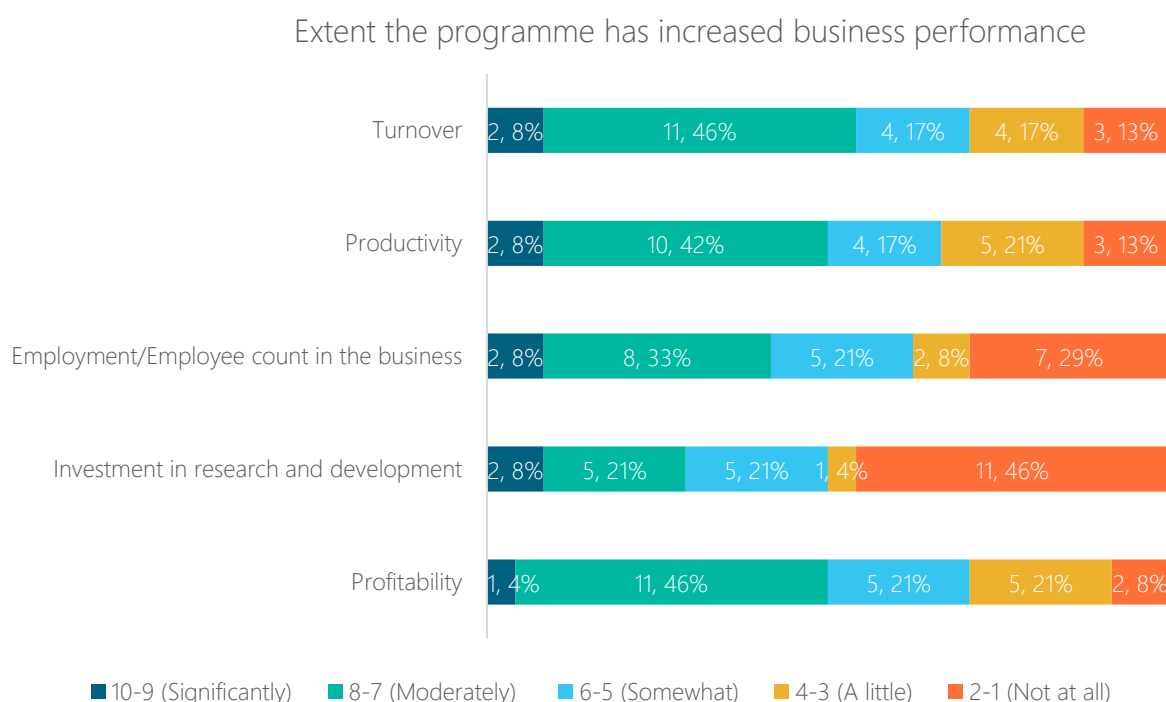
Beneficiaries had mixed views on the extent the programme had improved their financial performance/available working capital. The majority of firms (16, 62%) felt that they had adequately (rating of 5-6) or reasonably (rating of 7-8) experienced improved financial performance and working capital. Four firms (16%) felt it had been a significant change and one firm (4%) had seen no improvement at all.

## Capital Investment



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=24-26)

Firms were asked the extent to which they have invested this additional working capital. The largest average investment was in process improvement with 67% of firms (16) having significantly (9, 38%) or reasonably (7, 29%) invested in this area. New equipment, assets or facilities and new jobs were the areas that saw least capital investment with 10 firms (42%) citing minimal investment. Other areas referenced included marketing materials and tools.



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=24)

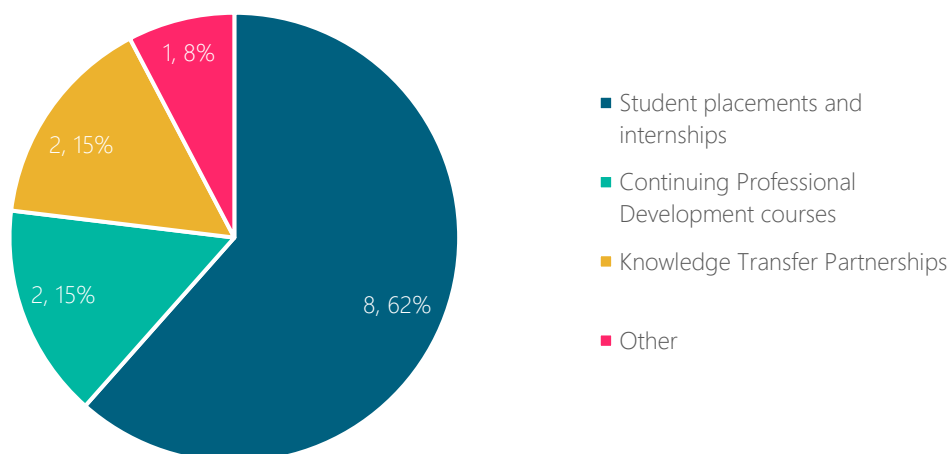
Most firms had improved aspects of their business performance as a result of the programme, the most notable area of which was turnover with 54% of beneficiaries (13) having seen a moderate (11, 46%) or significant (2, 8%) improvement. Investment in research and development was the least impacted by the programme's activities with 46% of respondents (11) having seen no change or close to no change at all.

Firms were asked the amount or value of the changes experienced:

- Turnover had varied a range of responses including £255,000 to around £1,300,000. Some businesses cited growth of 10% or sales increases of 100%, while one firm advised their turnover had dropped by 50%.
- Profitability generally ranged from +25% to +45% as per respondents, including one firm citing £200,000. The firm that had previously commented on a turnover decline advised the same for profitability.
- Two firms had seen productivity increases of 50%.
- One firm cited two new employees, a second had hired one and a third had hired 42. One firm cited none but referenced the analysis as key in deciding when to reduce employee numbers.
- One firm advised a £150,000 investment in R&D and a second investing £1500.

## 3.4 ADDITIONALITY AND WIDER BENEFITS

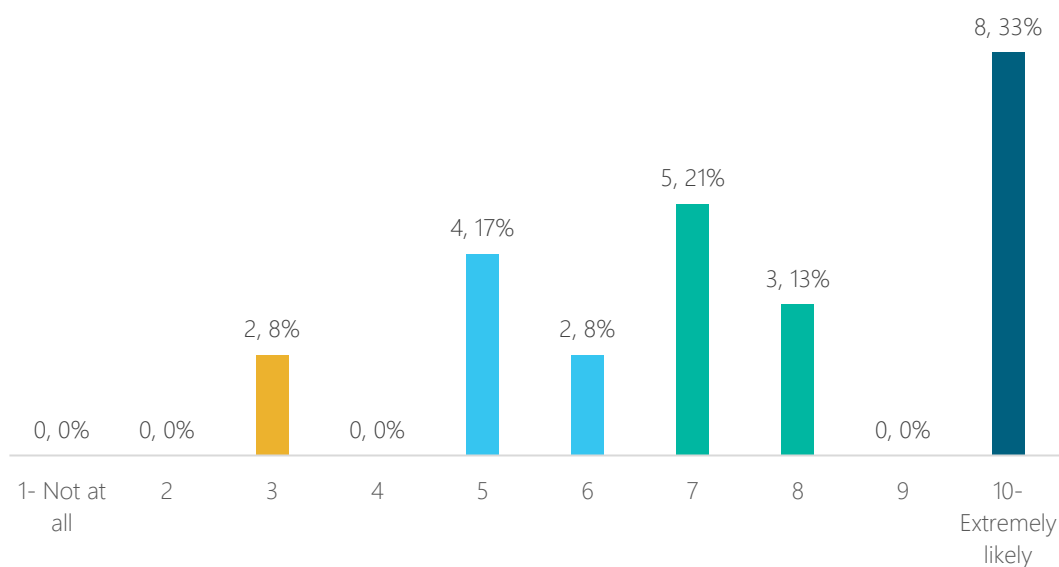
## Further Collaborations



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=9)

Nine firms advised they have developed further collaborations with Edge Hill University since their participation in the programme, some having developed multiple. The most common collaboration was student placements and internships (8, 62%) followed by continued professional development courses and knowledge transfer partnerships (2, 15% each). One firm cited 'other' referencing the start of development courses for their management team.

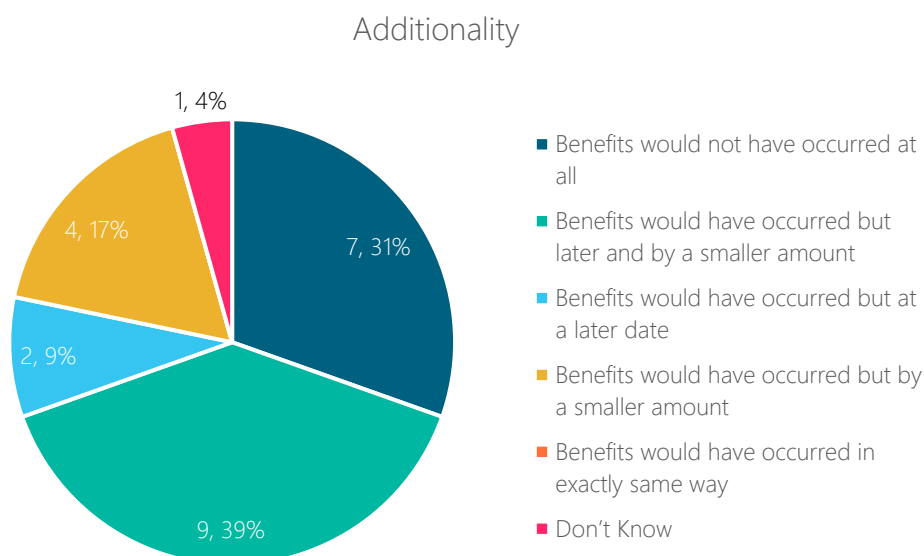
## Extent to which innovation and growth support is likely to be sought in future



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=24)

Beneficiaries were asked the likelihood that they would seek innovation and growth support in the future following the conclusion of the programme. Of the 24 who provided a response the majority indicated they were likely to do so with 67% providing a likelihood rating of between 7-10 out of 10. 33% of these advised they were extremely likely to seek out support (10/10). No firm indicated they were not at all likely to explore support opportunities although two firms advised they were not likely to (3/10).

When specifying the type of support firms would seek out the majority of businesses referenced returning to Edge Hill University with private training and local business advisors also mentioned.



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=23)

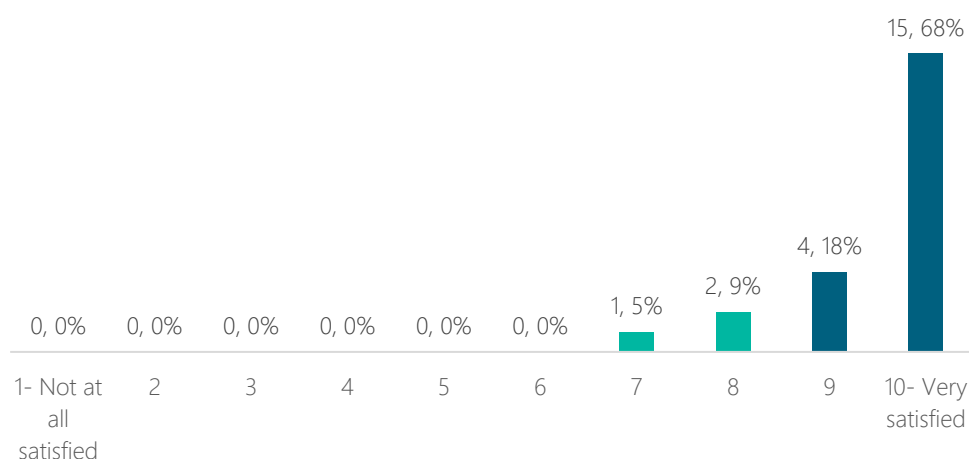
Looking at additionality (see previous chart), none of the participants cited 'deadweight' i.e. the benefits would have occurred in exactly the same way without the programme. The firms cited a combination of time and scale additionality. In other words, they felt the benefits would have occurred but at a later date (2,9%), by a smaller amount (4,17%) or a combination of the two (9,39%). One firm was unsure.

### 3.5 OVERALL SATISFACTION AND IMPROVEMENTS

Overall satisfaction responses for the programme were high. All respondents were satisfied with the support received with 68% (15) of respondents advising they were 'Very Satisfied' (10/10).

The area of the programme considered the most valuable by respondents was varied. The most common sentiment was praise for the one-to-one tailored nature of the programme, and that it was designed for firms specific needs. Businesses felt the independent third party outside view from mentors, described by one firm as "a critical friend" was vital, providing validation and confirmation of ideas and acting as a more general sounding board. The programme was also considered by participants as useful in the time it granted participants away from normal business activities to reflect and consider their next steps. Customer segmentation analysis, data use and website testing were all also mentioned.

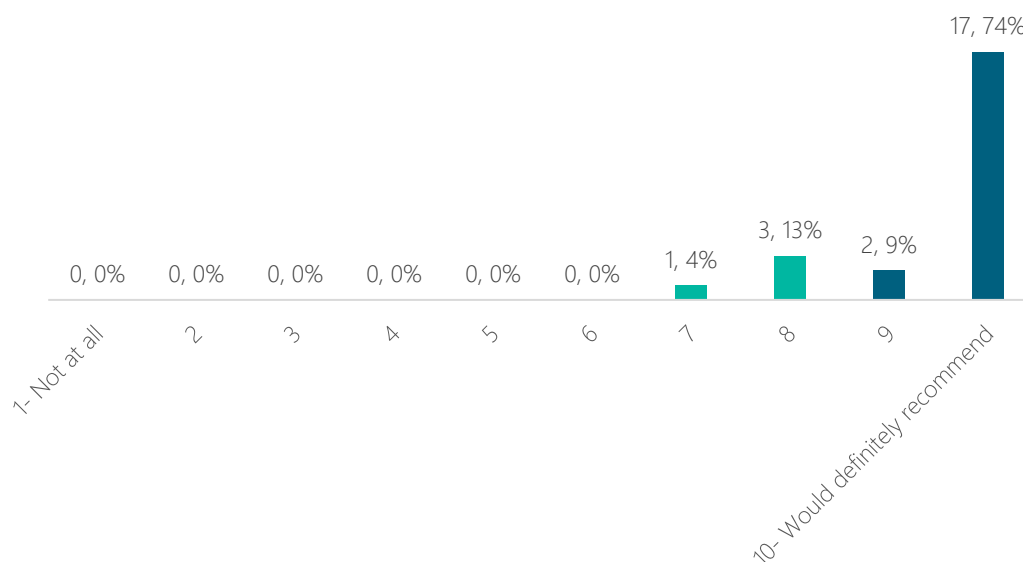
## Overall Satisfaction



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=22)

Participants were asked what improvements they would like to see; the most common response was a longer programme and the option for a six month follow up after its conclusion. Other mentions included more face-to-face time, simplification of outcomes and targets, a mentor to provide support for a year and more help on market research/trends and competitor analysis. One beneficiary advised they felt the programme had emphasis on growth through sales and would have preferred support provision on realising stronger returns on already strong sales. Another highlighted they would have achieved better outcomes if they had more company support as the course requires good company buy in.

## Extent to which you would recommend the SME PIC to others



Source: Kada Survey Analysis December 2022 (n=23)

All interviewees indicated they would recommend the SME PIC to others with 83% of respondents (26) being classed as 'promoters' as per the Net Promoter score (rating of 9 or 10/10).

## Case Study:

# Supplying reliable and affordable underfloor heating across the country



We needed support and guidance on our next growth steps.

HydroHeat has provided the supply of cost effective and high-quality underfloor heating since 2017. Lee Napier and Tom Kavanagh founded the company following an unfortunate redundancy as a result of business relocation. Having had previous success in the production of underfloor heating with a different firm he decided to start his own business with his sector knowledge and the experience he had gained. The company has grown significantly since then and is becoming one of the most popular suppliers nationwide to both domestic and commercial buildings.

Market uncertainty caused by lockdown and the pandemic meant HydroHeat were apprehensive about the future. Financial assistance was a key motivator for the company to look for support but the need for guidance on the firms next steps was just as important.

Lee and HydroHeat had engaged with a business support programme before but had been sceptical, finding it to be instructional and constrained in the support on offer. Despite his reservations he advised the PIC was completely different. The Programme allowed him the time and space for critical analysis of HydroHeat's strategy and rather than instructing what to do and how to do it. The Programme team acted as a facilitator in his review of the businesses processes and approach. The Programme enabled the identification of growth approaches that Lee might not have previously considered or realised in the Programme's absence and the Innovation Sprint team were 'great' in acting as a sounding board throughout.

"The support was brilliant; it definitely met my expectations if not surpassed them."

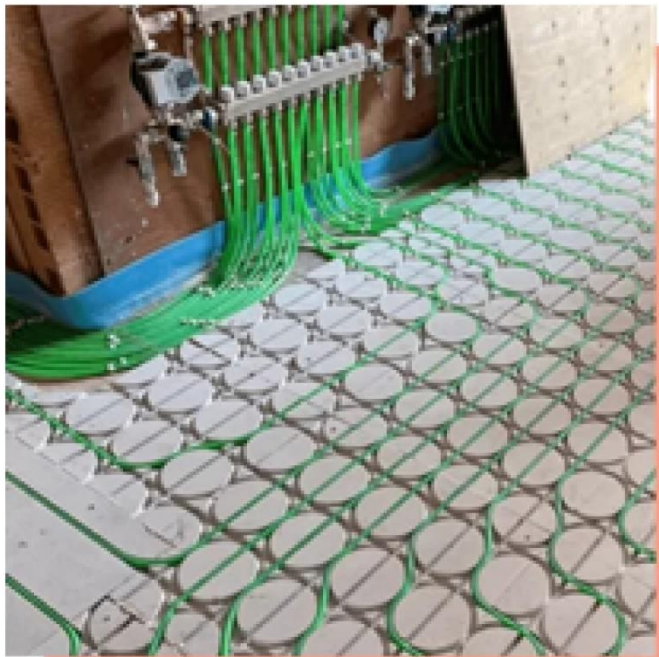


The business has grown, in part as a result of the PIC and its Innovation Sprint programme. HydroHeat has increased its turnover, created a job opening and made strides on reviewing and developing their product design. Lee conceded that it is hard to quantify the value of the support given the uncertainty caused by covid but reiterates the importance of the centre to his business:

“Given the current climate its hard to say where we would be if we hadn’t engaged with the PIC but it has definitely been significant for us and helped to evaluate the business a lot”

“

We’ve been on other programmes that are more direct telling you to change this or that, the PIC helped you just to analyse what was needed yourself.



© HydroHeat

As a result of the advice and mentoring HydroHeat was able to utilise the Programmes consultant expertise, providing them with an outside view on their business plan and insight on alternative approaches to growth that they had not considered before. Lee advised he was hesitant going into the Programme but found it went beyond his expectations and the PIC helped them to ‘[approach \[their\] business like a business and not just a job](#)’.

“Our priorities are to keep growing but also to look at our engagement from a geographical point of view and increase our reach.”

HydroHeat’s future aims are focused on the company’s continued growth and increasing the firm’s turnover but are keen to review the geographies of their customer base. By increasing HydroHeat’s reach they will be able to tap into and explore new markets. Recruitment will soon be a priority, and so far the business is pleased with the progress made and are optimistic for what the future brings.

## 4 DELIVERY AND MANAGEMENT

This section is informed by interviews with stakeholders and delivery partners. It discusses programme implementation and strengths and challenges and reviews the future direction for the centre and its programme.

### 4.1 RATIONALE AND CONTEXT

Stakeholders agreed that the rationale not only remained valid since the programmes conceptualisation but has been reinforced by the successes to date. The project has maintained a focus on addressing the market failures behind the nation's productivity challenges. These challenges include a lack of 'productivity literacy' amongst businesses and hesitancy to step forward to seek the limited support available to them. Therefore there was a clear need for the PIC:

*"Productivity literacy is lacking. Businesses don't know that they have these challenges around productivity".*

*"There's a whole swathe of companies who are hard to reach organisations. They're not innovating, they're not stepping forward for the support, and they've got challenges of productivity that they're not addressing."*

The rationale behind the focus on scale up firms was supported by pre-programme market analysis that highlighted the saturation of start-up specific support, with little dedicated support for the harder to reach scale-ups. The ambition of the PIC is to create real and substantial impact by increasing profitability whilst helping companies significantly increase turnover, providing the rationale for targeted support for established SMEs with high-growth potential.

By engaging with these firms the PIC created a 'two-way conduit', allowing the businesses in question to receive the necessary support whilst allowing academics and students within the University to develop practical opportunities for business engagement.

For EHU more widely, the PIC was an opportunity to apply research and expertise in new areas. It allowed EHU to diversify away from public sector focused work and broaden the offer to students. PIC has enabled EHU to 'plug in' to and play a more important part in the Lancashire and Liverpool City Region business support infrastructure and economic growth policy making.

### 4.2 APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

The programme's targeted recruitment approach was informed by the pre-programme analysis and in line with its rationale. As the target companies are hard to reach and not readily stepping forward to seek support a generalised marketing strategy or one operating on networks and word of mouth would not be successful.

The delivery team utilised a data led strategy using the PIC's Growth Observatory to evaluate prospective firms' levels of performance and growth within the target geography to identify those with potential. These businesses were contacted directly which resulted in the added value of higher retention and lower dropout rates as their profile and growth aspirations and 'match' to the programmes needs was pre-calculated:

*"We take a very direct approach, we understand what the territory looks like, we know the profile of the type of business. We know what the likely needs of those businesses are based on our observations of them, and we target them directly. "*

The success of the targeted data led strategy is reflected in the minimal number of inbound enquiries the PIC team received. This is owing to generalised marketing activities not being required or utilised. The PIC marketing team placed emphasis on building targeted messages and case study examples of success, generating interest from SMEs of the right profile, knowing the programme would have the desired business impact.

#### 4.3 PROGRAMME DELIVERY

##### THE PROGRAMME

The programmes delivery model was efficient, effective and well received by both the participating businesses and the team delivering it. The unique nature of the programme, in that it provided facilitated support, utilising a critical enquiry framework, was the key to its success. As opposed to directing the firms and creating a sense of micromanagement, it allowed them to be self-critical and self-initiate the changes needed to sustain impacts post-programme:

*"This program has been successful in that we transition the companies from being led to self-initiating the activity as they go, it is a facilitated innovation process, rather than an innovation led process"*

The impact driven element of the programme rather than the notional 'checkbox approach' prioritised outcomes over generic criteria like firms supported, actualising real change in the businesses involved. The digital delivery was less resource intensive on staff and the programme team and allowed a degree of flexibility and accessibility to beneficiaries.

##### MANAGEMENT, ADMINISTRATION AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Management and administration of the programme went smoothly as a result of the considerable planning and structures put in place prior to starting, which built on processes developed in previous years. These tested processes benefitted from continual reviews to make changes when required, staff were trained well and in advance in a structured manner that ensured they were ready to deliver the support to a high quality. The design of the programme and staff expertise meant relationships with the beneficiaries were in good standing. Compliance was heavily invested in before delivery which resulted in minimal issues with the funding bodies, contributing to a seamless experience for the beneficiaries.

*"I think that we had the right support structures in place, the training and the continual evaluation of performance to make sure that we didn't have any slippage"*

While the direct nature of the recruitment strategy did not require referrals or assistance from the Growth Hub, who target a different type of business, partnership working still took place. The delivery team worked cooperatively in this regard, ensuring they remained an active part of the business ecosystem however engagement took place more at a strategic level rather than operational. While not engaging with the Growth Hub directly for this programme the prioritisation of a different company profile complements their work and provides greater coverage of companies in the region. It also increases EHU's involvement with regional work and maintains local networks.

#### 4.4 IMPACTS AND ADDED VALUE

The programme has had significant impact and created added value to both businesses and EHU.

Businesses experienced tangible outcomes and impacts despite the short period for which the workshops were run, including productivity growth and job creation. The beneficiaries used the programme data to analyse their business models and increase their productivity. The self-critical approach enabled them to ask questions of themselves and their firm and utilise the relevant data, ensuring they are well placed to continue working on their own productivity gains in the future.

For EHU added value is in current and future activities. The most prominent is the creation of the SME Growth Observatory and SME Growth Research Group that sit within the banner of the PIC. The observatory service is formulated from the data-led territory analysis conducted on the programme's regions and sectors of focus, and analysis findings from the research group. The research group analyses the diagnostic and intervention data to investigate factors that affect SME growth such as dynamic, entrepreneurial and innovation management capabilities:

*"We've developed that now into a service in its own right [the SME growth Observatory] which has provided services to councils and local authorities to understand what their territories look like, where the growth potential is and to map the likely needs of those populations- what are the issues that they're likely to be facing, what types of innovation they're going to be focusing on."*

*"The model we have developed is like an innovation ecosystem in itself that informs research practice"*

In conjunction with improving the PIC and Innovation Sprint the experience has resulted in an EHU wide shift in behaviour and appetite for similar programmes. Stakeholders agreed that without seeing the successes to date engagement in other projects may not have developed or progressed in the same way. The virtual nature of the programme's delivery was also considered added value. In fact the influence of Covid on the programme's design has contributed to an increased understanding and ability for virtual delivery from the delivery team and University and was well received by beneficiaries.

The contribution to EHU's research profile was also important. Those within the University made reference to the increased visibility of EHU across Lancashire and the increased foothold gained throughout Liverpool City Region. The University has also been shortlisted for awards internationally:

*"It's going to give us some international profile as well- one of the awards that we were shortlisted for we were a runner up in Florence last summer"*

The project also won the Educate North Award 2022 for Business collaboration and partnerships award and came third for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support of the Year at the 2022 ACEEU European Triple Awards.

*"This enables us to move and be visible in an area and sector that that we wouldn't normally be visible in...the visibility across Lancashire has increased but also given us a really good foothold within the Liverpool City region as well."*

#### 4.5 KEY STRENGTHS AND LESSONS LEARNT

The key lessons learned throughout the programme centred on the strengths of the delivery model and its future use as a case of best practice. The format was unlike anything implemented by the University previously and the extensive planning and set up respective to staff training and the development of rigorous processes and compliance models ensured the programme ran efficiently and effectively. As such, evidencing the viability of this delivery model for follow on programmes and business support is seen as the key lesson learned:

*"It shows the benefit of having a good team in place targeted on something focused, previously, our approaches to knowledge exchange have been more scattered"*

The flexibility and adaptability of the programme enabled the team to make modifications as and when was needed so necessary improvements could be made in practice as opposed to becoming considerations for future iterations. Equally the reinforcement of the benefits of virtual delivery was a lesson learned, online support provision had been tested in the past but never adopted wholesale. The circumstances of the pandemic contributed to its adoption and stakeholders would be unlikely to revert back:

*"We would never go back...the move to digital and the development of digital practice in the digital spaces. Our teams have become experts in using dual technologies. It's reduced the trouble for companies".*

#### 4.6 SUSTAINING SUCCESSES AND FUTURE DIRECTION

The general sentiment amongst stakeholders was that sustaining the programme's successes and outlining any future direction was firstly dependent on securing alternate funding streams. Given the end of European financial support, the continuation and evolution of the PIC and Innovation Sprint would rely upon reviewing how they could fit within the parameters of other funds such as UK shared prosperity.

In the event of, or up until, securing alternate finance, the priority is highlighting the successes of the programme and the dissemination of promotional material:

*"The marketing function is around being able to amplify and disseminate the knowledge that sits in and underpins the program and to disseminate the successes to different audiences."*

Potential avenues for PR opportunities included discussions around the utilisation of CRM systems, the use of podcasts, leadership articles and case studies and a focus on practical marketing to drive pipelines. The publication of a book analysing the programmes journey was also mentioned.

If the programme was to continue or a new iteration launched there would be focus on expanding into new areas and extending the PIC's reach. As part of this process stakeholders advised efforts would be to use international comparators as benchmarks for success, analysing best practice from abroad that can be instilled into the development of any continuations.

*"For the long term, thinking about other ways to get the program continuing and evolving, whether around partnering with major corporate programs to bring forward supply chain or sectors/ways of thinking that we could also look at"*

The underlying aim is to produce the marketable tools to bring potential collaborators and funders closer to the programme and increase the number of future opportunities for the SME Productivity and Innovation Centre to continue its work.



# Bringing quality catering supplies to the North West



The things they said were valuable and there were a lot of good ideas there.

Merlin Food Service offers a range of catering products, from ambient goods such as tinned beans to frozen products and non- foods including takeaway products. Based in Wesham, the business is supplying the North West with the highest quality catering supplies and customers extend from coffee shops and cafes to restaurants and hotels.

The business was founded in 2017 by Ryan and his father who both previously worked for a catering company. Although Merlin Food Service was not born out of any grand business plan or trajectory, the duo knew the B2B customers they wanted to target and the good practices they wanted to employ.

Neither Ryan nor his father had any formal business training and looked to the SME Productivity and Innovation Centre (PIC) and its Innovation Sprint Programme for advice on running and growing a scale-up business, rather than addressing specific barriers to growth.

Involvement with the programme pushed Ryan to address the inefficiencies he knew the business had by supporting him to hire new admin support and change accounting software. Ryan also began to evaluate their customer base. Merlin found the advice useful even though not all the programme's recommendations could be implemented due to circumstance of the cost-of-living crisis and war in Ukraine (which forced the business to work harder to keep customers supplied). As the business shifts from just coping in this context to growing, Ryan hopes to implement all the suggested changes. The Programme's support helped Ryan prioritise issues for the business, allowing him to manage and plan changes in the future that will take longer to realise.



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“

For another business of our kind of scale I think it is brilliant.

Improving the use of business management information has meant Ryan has a far better grasp of where Merlin is heading. The PIC support has made Merlin Food Service more efficient and given Ryan reassurance and validation on his business' trajectory. It has been challenging for Ryan to utilise and implement all of the Programme's advice, but he believes the benefits will be seen in the coming years.

'The things they said were valuable and there were a lot of good ideas there'.

With no clear expectations of the programmes support and curious about what kind of help and advice he could receive, Ryan was pleased with the support provided. He noted that throughout engagement with the PIC programme, the team were flexible and worked around his busy schedule, making the programmes support convenient for him.

'We didn't exactly have expectations, but we found what they did tell us was helpful'.



©MerlinFoodService

Merlin are now on track for a turnover increase of around 200%, anticipating £1m this financial year. They have already integrated one new hire within the organisation and a further is expected. Ryan believes the commercial benefits and impacts occurred faster than they would have without being part of the Innovation Sprint Programme. This was because the programme gave him and Merlin the push needed to implement ideas he wouldn't otherwise have taken to.

Merlin Food Service is now looking to take on an additional unit to more than double capacity for frozen goods and within the next 2 years, take on another full-time driver and vehicle as well as working more directly with their frozen suppliers.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarises the report's findings to draw final conclusions and make recommendations to the management team for consideration.

### 5.1 BENEFICIARY REVIEW

The programme has been well received and considered a success by beneficiaries. Companies rated the assistance highly with specific reference to the delivery team's expertise, communication and the overall management of the PIC and Innovation Sprint. All but two of the respondents can be categorised as net promoters.

The interventions were praised, in particular workshops 4-6 which focused on solution and action planning activities. The programme had demonstrable impact on those involved, both commercially and respective to innovation - beneficiaries experienced productivity and turnover improvements, companies created jobs, made connections and a number introduced new-to-firm products. None of the businesses surveyed felt the benefits experienced would have happened in the same way without the PIC and Innovation Sprint.

On reflection firms felt the most valuable aspect of the programme was the support's tailored approach that provided them with clear guidance and validation although they would have liked the programme to have run over an extended period of time with the inclusion of a six-month post programme follow up to ensure they had significant time to develop their growth strategies.

### 5.2 STAKEHOLDER REVIEW

The PIC and its Innovation Sprint Programme was considered a success by all those involved during its delivery. The overarching rationale for the programme was justified if not reinforced throughout the programme, providing a network between the University and local businesses to address challenges and create opportunities. Beneficiary recruitment was targeted and efficient and the overall delivery model was well implemented and received, with the ease of the programme's conduction attributed to the investment into processes, compliance and training prior to its commencement.

As with the beneficiary review, impact is evident, most notably in the achievement of the outputs and outcomes and the added value created such as the creation of the Growth Observatory which will provide long term benefit to the University long after the conclusion of this programme. The sustaining of successes relies on the navigation of funding streams and the utilisation of appropriate PR channels to publish the programme's successes and achievements. Stakeholders wish to see the programme continue in some form and praised the transferable practice or 'blueprint' that has been generated. They would like to see it transposed into new geographies.

### 5.3 RECCOMENDATIONS

Based on the findings Kada propose the following recommendations for consideration:

- I. Building on the success of the programme and demand for further support by exploring alternative funding streams for future iterations or continuations. This could include Innovate UK, or UK Shared Prosperity and its successors.
- II. For policy makers future funding streams should continue to focus on targeted support for high growth firms in this way.
- III. Expanding the programme to a wider geography would help broaden the reach of EHU and enable the PIC to contribute to productivity growth across the North West and beyond.
- IV. Recording protected characteristics routinely and acting on data trends to assess and enhance performance to ensure the programme is delivered fairly and equally and in line with the equality cross cutting theme or its equivalent, in future funding packages.
- V. Maintain and develop the academic relationships with other Universities cultivated as a result of the programme and those with LEPs and other City Regions to use as ongoing opportunities for knowledge exchange and partnerships.
- VI. Further publicise the successes of the PIC by utilising available PR opportunities such as conferences, events, podcasts and leadership articles.
- VII. Consider the implementation (if within scope) of a six-month catch up at the end of any future programme iterations to allow beneficiaries to resolve any outstanding queries or issues. Additionally to ensure solutions and action plans developed during workshops 4-6 are being implemented and on track.



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