



SOUTH EAST
LOCAL ENTERPRISE
PARTNERSHIP
COVID-19
**BUSINESS SUPPORT
FUND**



STARTING & SUCCEEDING
IN BUSINESS

STARTING & SUCCEEDING IN BUSINESS

FINAL PROGRAMME REVIEW
1st July 2021 – 31st March 2023





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The Starting & Succeeding in Business Programme was introduced by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and targeted people looking to start, or who had recently started, a new business having experienced the impact of Covid-19 such as through redundancy or unemployment.

WSX Enterprise secured the contract to deliver the programme which ran from 1st July 2021 to 30th June 2022. During the programme there were significant changes to the economy because of the pandemic and the introduction of Government policy responses, as well as wider global factors that have affected, and continue to affect, the economic landscape.

The Starting and Succeeding in Business Programme (LOT 1) was highly successful in delivering business advice and support to businesses in the SELEP region. Over 450 businesses were actively engaged with the programme, and over a quarter of those were awarded a grant in addition to business advice.

In a survey of participants six months after the programme ended, 86% of respondents said that their business had been partially or directly influenced by working with us, with 77% of them saying that they had implemented the advice we had shared with them. 68% said that they anticipated that their business would grow as a result of our advice and/or grant.

Since the end of the programme there has been even more upheaval within the economy which has included a number of parliamentary changes, various budgets, further hikes in energy bills and the continuation of rising inflation. A lot of the happenings are 'once in a generation' occurrences, which have all occurred within the same time frame- something that is unprecedented and has led to concern all around.

Despite all of this, we have received an overwhelmingly positive response from the programme both during and afterwards with our feedback suggesting that whilst some businesses have unfortunately gone on to fold, we have helped more people sustain their businesses during these turbulent times. An incredibly positive result for SELEP.

It was an honour and a privilege to be able to deliver this programme on behalf of SELEP and to feel that we have reached, supported and helped businesses who truly needed it along the way.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robyn Brookes', followed by a period.

Robyn Brookes
Programme Manager
March 2023



“

Without WSX Enterprise, my business would never have got off the ground. Talking to people who had set up their own businesses helped me believe in the possibility. When I began, I thought I wasn't a business person. I have learnt that business is about connecting with people, and marketing is telling stories.

Understanding that has given me the confidence to take it one step at a time and learn as I go.

”

CAMILLA BAKER– HERBERT BAKER FURNITURE

2. DELIVERY STATISTICS (HIGHLIGHTS)



122

GRANTS AWARDED

(AGAINST A KPI TARGET 101)



66

BUSINESSES CREATED

(AGAINST A KPI TARGET 46)



176

BUSINESSES SAFEGUARDED

(AGAINST A KPI TARGET 134)

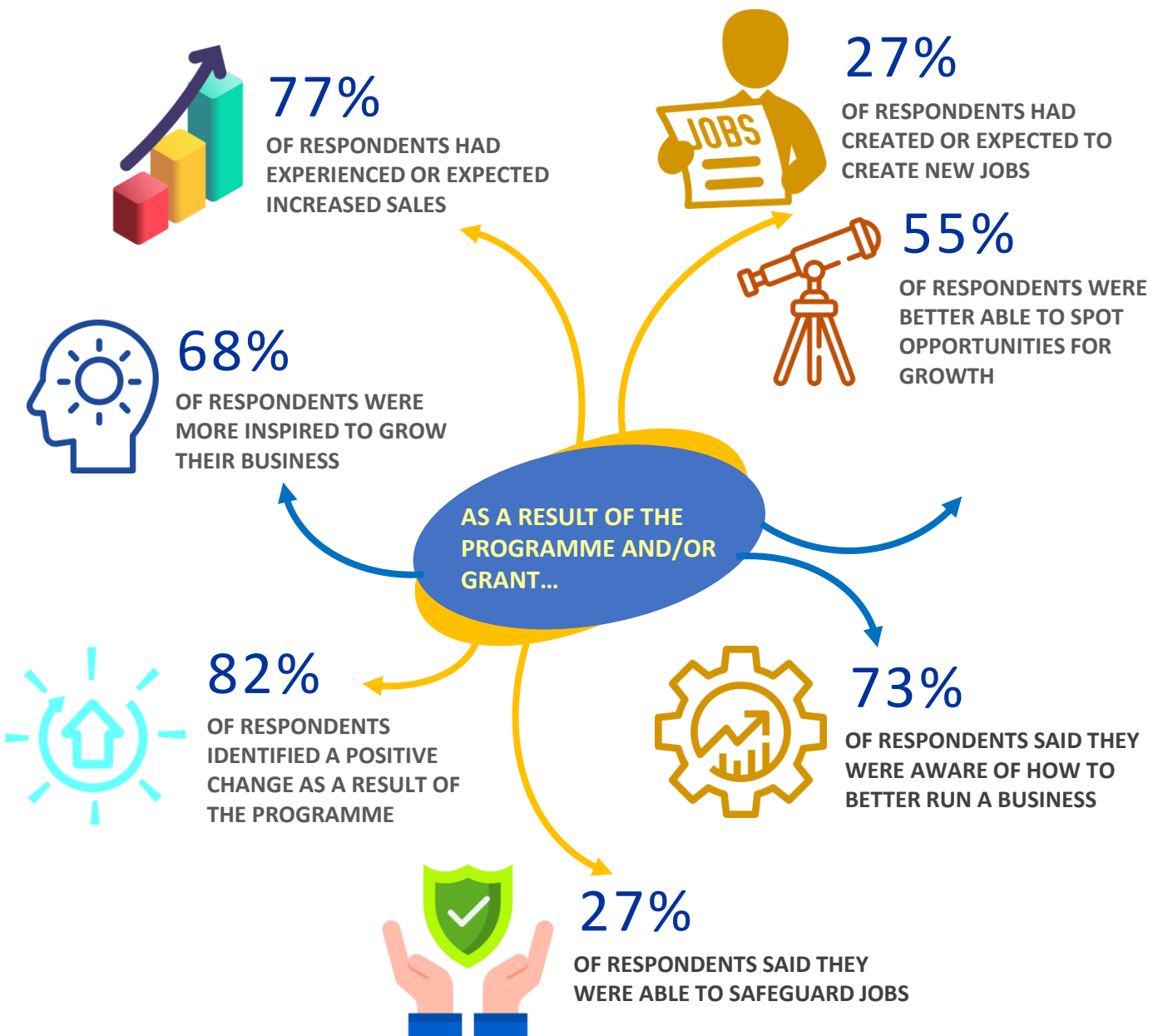


446

BUSINESSES ENGAGED

(AGAINST A KPI TARGET 300)

2. POST PROGRAMME BUSINESS STATISTICS



 **75%**

OF THE 12 JOBS CREATED OR SAFEGUARDED WERE LOCAL / REGIONAL JOBS AND OPPORTUNITIES

3. POST PROGRAMME IMPACT

The support programme and grants covered a wide range of activities and businesses. Our favourites include:



SALIENT KNIVES

Salient Knives applied for a grant to procure an engraving machine to personalise products and boost business opportunities in the UK and overseas.

Marc Engall, Chief Executive of Salient Knives, a bespoke handmade knife maker based in Rochester, said: “Our business advisor was fantastic, really taking the time to understand our business. It felt like I had a business partner rather than someone I had to impress. We discussed how we could best use the grant money and for Salient Knives that meant the purchase of a laser engraver. **Reviewing where we are now after receiving the funding and buying the engraver, I’m pleased to say it’s been game-changing for us. The flexibility this offers us and the countless personalisation requests we have been able to accommodate in-house have been amazing. We could never afford this much needed equipment without the scheme’s support. Many thanks!**”

CLICK TO WATCH OUR VIDEO CASE STUDY

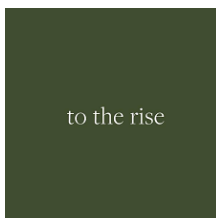


INKBOUND

Inkbound applied for a grant to support a digital marketing campaign including Google Ads

Gemma Martin of the bespoke temporary tattoo service InkBound.co.uk, which is based in Essex and has clients across the UK, said: “**My feedback is just pure and utter gratitude. I had no idea support like this was available to me. The entire programme has been a godsend.**”

CLICK TO WATCH OUR VIDEO CASE STUDY



TO THE RISE BAKERY

European style, artisan bakery in Eastbourne, East Sussex specialising in 100% sourdough bread using carefully sourced, organic and local ingredients applied for the grant to help open their premises.

Josie Pollard who runs an artisan sourdough bakery, To The Rise, in Eastbourne with her two sisters, said of WSX Enterprise: “**Without the help of the grant we wouldn’t have been able to open our bakery and establish ourselves in our hometown of Eastbourne.** It gave us the opportunity to advance our bakery production to include essential commercial equipment. This has given us the chance to make products which are specialities, creating a new market and job opportunities.”

CLICK TO WATCH OUR VIDEO CASE STUDY



BOOST ACADEMY

Learning materials and membership portal for a client made redundant in the pandemic, who set up her own English Language business.

Folkestone-based Tam Hobbs, who set up an online English language teaching school, Boost Academy, said: “The programme was exactly what I was looking for and came at just the right time for me. I thought the resources were absolutely brilliant, incredibly helpful. The business advisors were really good. What’s important is when you’ve got an idea and you think it’s great, that’s all well and good but you need somebody with expertise to give you a reality check and to say: ‘what about this?’. When I started the programme, Boost was just a small idea, but having actively participated in the course, it has been able to grow to what it is now and will keep growing.

The biggest impact from the support I received was both the training and guidance on setting up a business, which covered all of the necessary basics. Plus the financial support in terms of allowing me to purchase vital materials necessary to teach my group classes has proved extremely helpful, and allowed me to move my business to the next level.”

[CLICK TO WATCH OUR VIDEO CASE STUDY](#)

HERBERT BAKER FURNITURE

The grant provided funds to support the development of a new website. Founder, Camilla Baker also benefitted from being introduced to another business who could support to production of handcrafted benches.

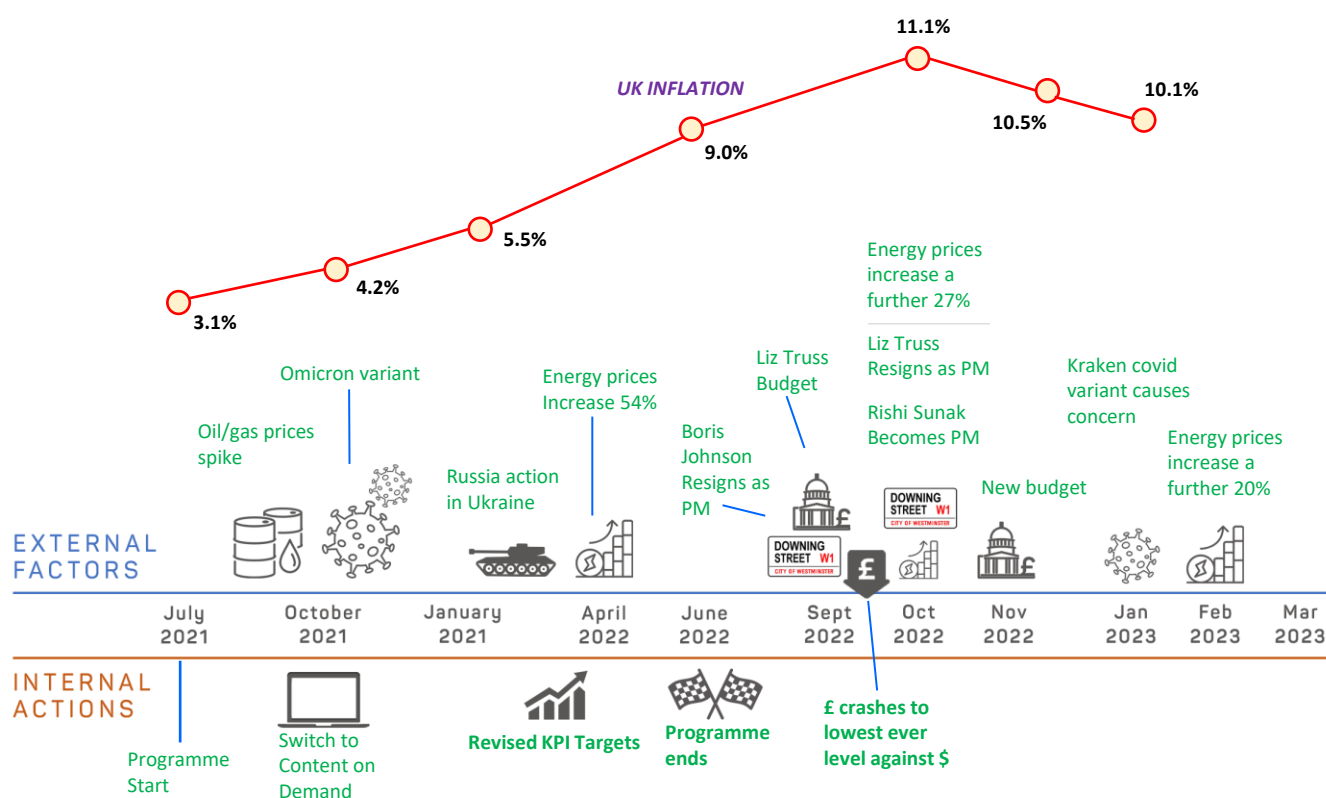
Former teacher Camilla Baker, a great granddaughter of the architect Sir Herbert Baker, was helped through the programme to launch a business designing bespoke benches, Herbert Baker Furniture. Camilla said: “**Without WSX Enterprise, my business would never have got off the ground.** Talking to people who had set up their own businesses helped me believe in the possibility. When I began, I thought I wasn’t a business person. I have learnt that business is about connecting with people, and marketing is telling stories. As a teacher I have lots of experience of both of those - and understanding that has given me the confidence to take it one step at a time and learn as I go.”

[CLICK TO WATCH OUR VIDEO CASE STUDY](#)

4. BACKGROUND

The Starting & Succeeding in Business Programme was introduced by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and targeted people looking to start, or who had recently started, a new business having experienced the impact of Covid-19 such as through redundancy or unemployment.

WSX Enterprise secured the contract to deliver the Starting and Succeeding in Business programme which ran from 1st July 2021 to 30th June 2022. During the programme there have been significant changes to the economy because of the pandemic and the introduction of Government policy responses, as well as wider factors that have affected the economic landscape.



Against this backdrop, modifications have been made to the original programme design as follows:

- Recognising that people didn't want to attend courses on set times and set days, but were happy to watch the same event in their own time as a recording, led us to transfer all modules of our business support courses to video content that could be accessed at anytime of the day or night. We found that this approach increased engagement.

- By swapping our virtual courses to online learning that was accessible 24/7 meant that clients were unable to ask questions 'live' whilst attending events. This led to an increase in clients wanting calls with us which led to us increasing the number of Business Advisors that were allocated to the SSIB programme.
- By January 2022, it had become clear that given the continued uncertainty in the economy that some clients were unable to stay in their business or felt that now wasn't the time to launch a new business. We had an increase in the number of people who after participating in the programme decided to return to salaried employment for stability of income, something Business Advisors were also recommending to those who needed security of an income. This led to a change of contract to amend the KPI targets, reducing the numbers for the Business Start Up Programme and increasing the target of the Business Success programme.
- We had a number of grant applicants who underspent on their allocation. To ensure the maximum number of successful applicants had access to funding, we re-allocated money as it came back to us, allowing us to support businesses who had passed the application process but weren't allocated money due to oversubscription- this ensured we helped as many businesses as possible and only returned a very small amount of grant money.
- We tracked Clients at three points during the course of the programmes, January 2022, July/August 2022 and finally December/January 2022/2023. Whilst we tried to work with the same clients at each point to monitor the impact of the programme, this wasn't always possible for various reasons varying from illness, businesses shutting or just a lack of interest in talking to us after the end of the programme. However at each point we did speak with people who had been through the programme and in some cases had also received grants.

5. THE PROGRAMMES

Within the overall Programme for LOT 1 there were two distinct sections:



Business Start Up Programme: for businesses looking to start up, or those that had recently started trading. Businesses had to have a realistic proposal/ business idea that had the potential to operate during and/or beyond a COVID 19 climate and/or have lost their job as a direct result of COVID 19.



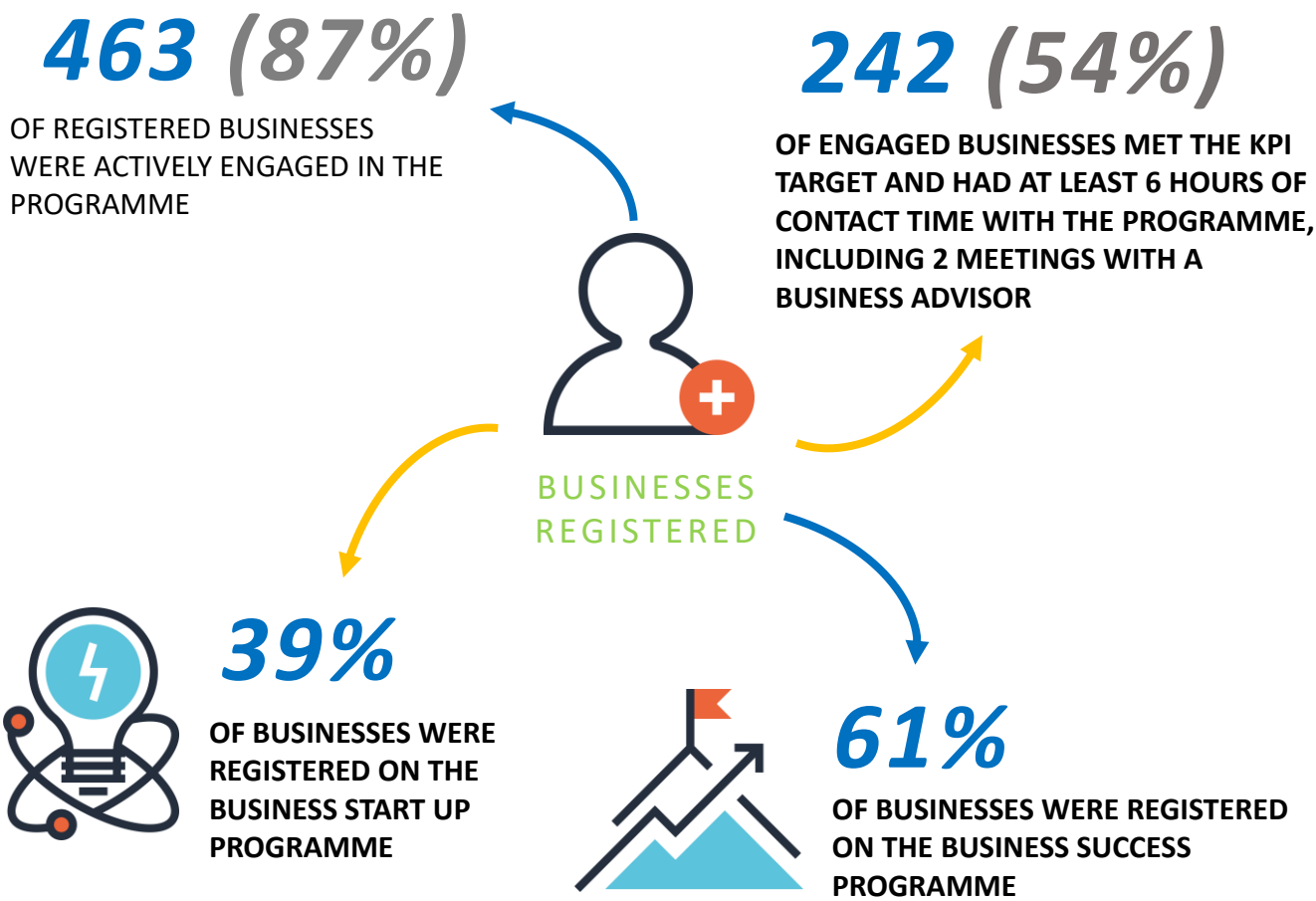
Business Success Programme: for SMEs with either sole trader status or registered with Companies House that have been trading for up to three years. Beneficiaries had to have the potential to operate during and/or beyond a COVID 19 climate and/or have lost their primary employment as a direct result of COVID 19.

In both cases, successful completion of the programme required at least 6 hours of active engagement with the programme (through 1-2-1 meetings and online content), with at least two meetings with a business advisor, and to have made the appropriate registrations with HMRC (either as self-employed sole trader or as a limited company). Those that did successfully meet these criteria were eligible to apply for a grant of between £500 and £2,000.

Over the course of the two programmes six business advisors provided tailored sessions to our clients. Most of our advisors had personal experience of setting up and running a small business, and all were able to provide general business advice. In addition, our advisors had specialisms covering the following areas:

- Accounting and finance
- Strategy
- Business planning
- Sales and marketing
- Purchasing and logistics
- Turnaround
- Technology
- Media
- Brand and market planning
- Sales campaigns
- Change management
- Organisational design
- Learning and development

6. BUSINESS PROFILES



Video on Demand



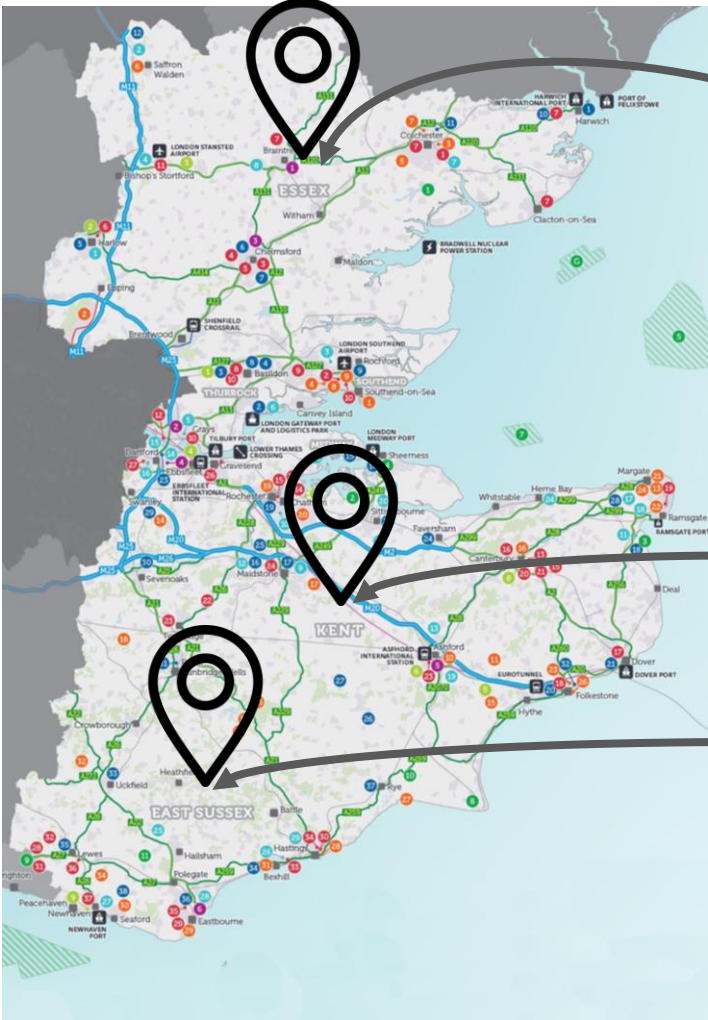
BUSINESS START-UP PROGRAMME



BUSINESS SUCCESS PROGRAMME



Business Location – Geographic Profile



34%

OF REGISTERED BUSINESSES
WERE FROM ESSEX

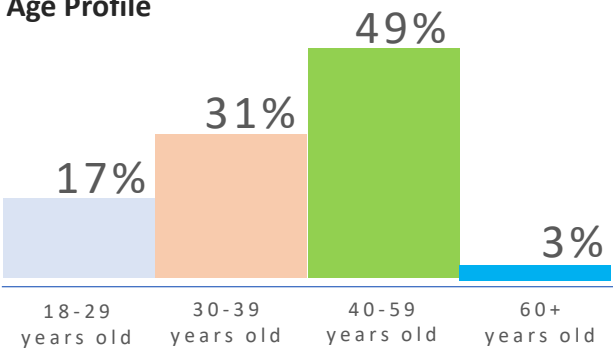
43%

OF REGISTERED BUSINESSES
WERE FROM KENT

23%

OF REGISTERED BUSINESSES
WERE FROM EAST SUSSEX

Age Profile



Gender Profile



55%

OF PARTICIPANTS THAT
DECLARED WERE
FEMALE

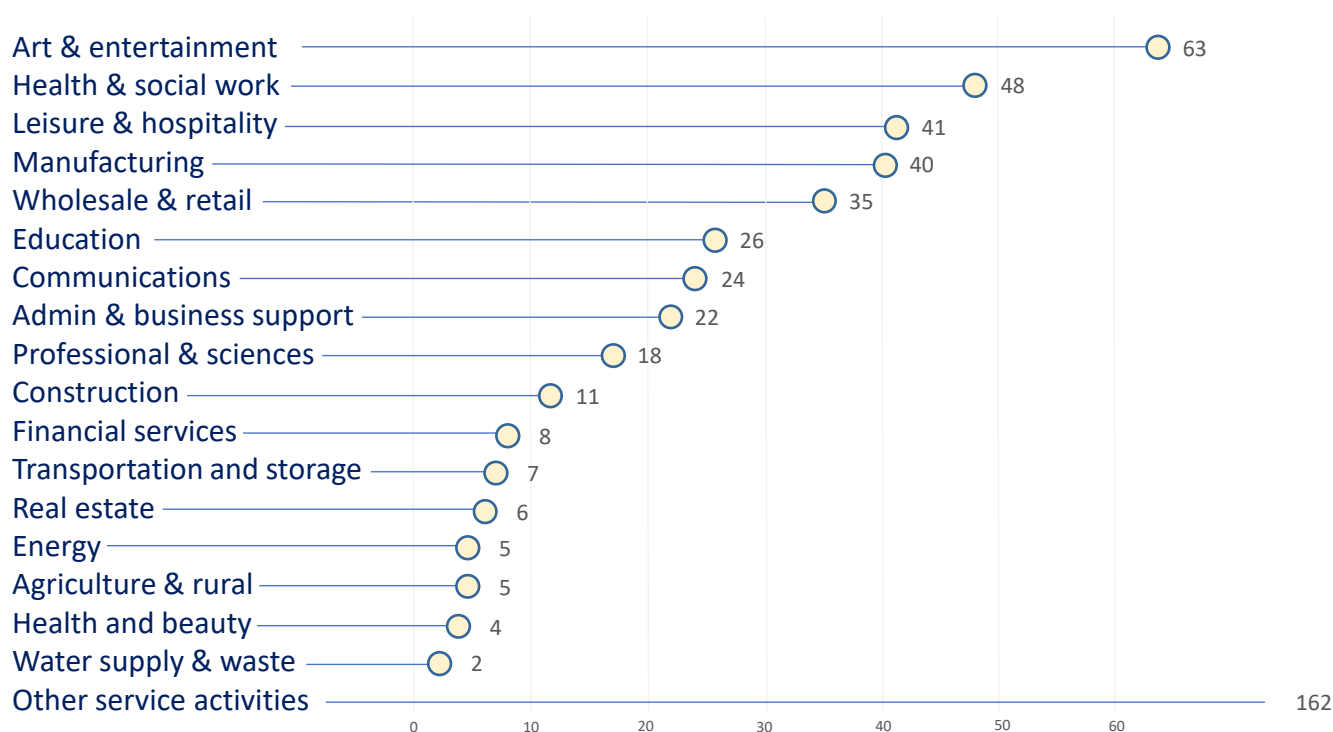
Ethnicity



70%

OF PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFIED AS ENGLISH / WELSH /
SCOTTISH / NORTHERN IRISH / BRITISH

Business Type – Businesses came from a broad range of sectors / industries



Business Size

42% OF REGISTERED BUSINESSES HAD 1 EMPLOYEE



56%

OF REGISTERED BUSINESSES HAD 2-9 EMPLOYEES



2%

OF REGISTERED BUSINESSES HAD 10 OR MORE EMPLOYEES

7. 12 MONTH BUSINESS FEEDBACK

A comprehensive survey of registered clients was carried out in July 2022. In accordance with GDPR we only requested feedback from clients that had indicated they were willing to be surveyed. Therefore 475 registered clients were asked to complete a survey. Of these, 60 clients (12.5%) responded.

In addition, 16 clients were approached via telephone for their feedback on the programme.



The team at WSX Enterprise has been exceptionally good. Particularly, with the advice, 1-2-1 session, the operational candour and most important of all, fairness and impartiality.

- Ola James via Trustpilot



From the survey and interviews, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive:

QUESTION: HOW SATISFIED WERE YOU WITH THE PROGRAMME?



55%



23%



10%



7%



5%

4 out of 5 respondents were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the programme. This reflects the quality of the business advisors and the content provided through videos and webinars. Those that were not satisfied generally cited unclear processes or the failure to receive a grant.



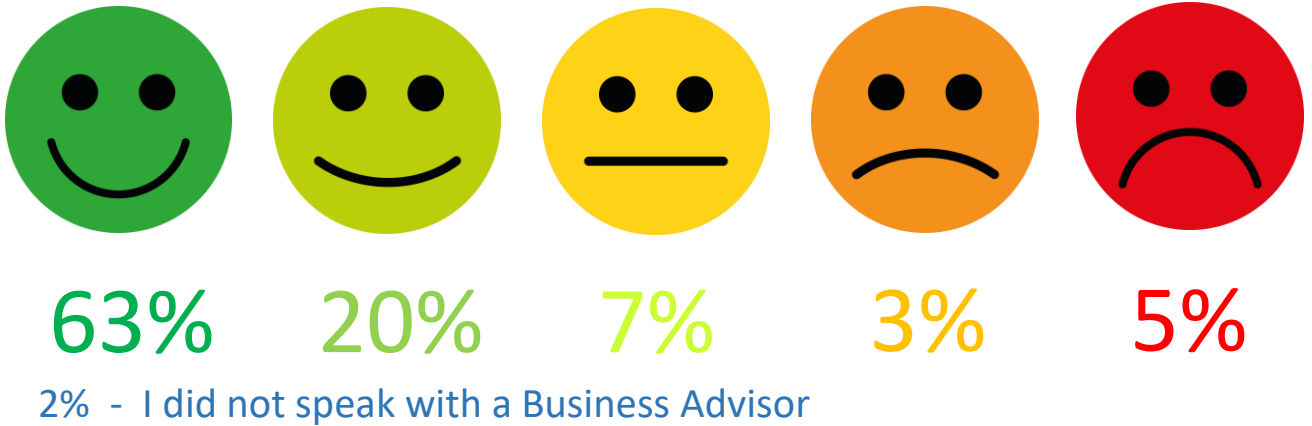
WSX Enterprise has been a great service and programme to be involved with, the one to one session were of great benefit and acted to provide useful information and a sounding board. The online content was useful, well presented and relevant, in particular the social media webinars which have proved more than useful to us and our needs.

- North Charcuterie via Trustpilot



The quality of the business advisors is illustrated by the second question of the general survey. Over 80% of respondents were satisfied with their advisor and the advice they gave. The 5% of dissatisfied respondents all reflected a lack of understanding about the programme and the grant funding process.

QUESTION: HOW SATISFIED WERE YOU WITH YOUR BUSINESS ADVISOR AND THE ADVICE THEY GAVE?



“ I had a great time with both my mentors Tony & Ross, they were very informative and gave me honest advice and clear directions on what my next steps should be. I really enjoyed the one-ones because they spoke to me from a clients perspective and it gave me a broader idea on how to market myself.

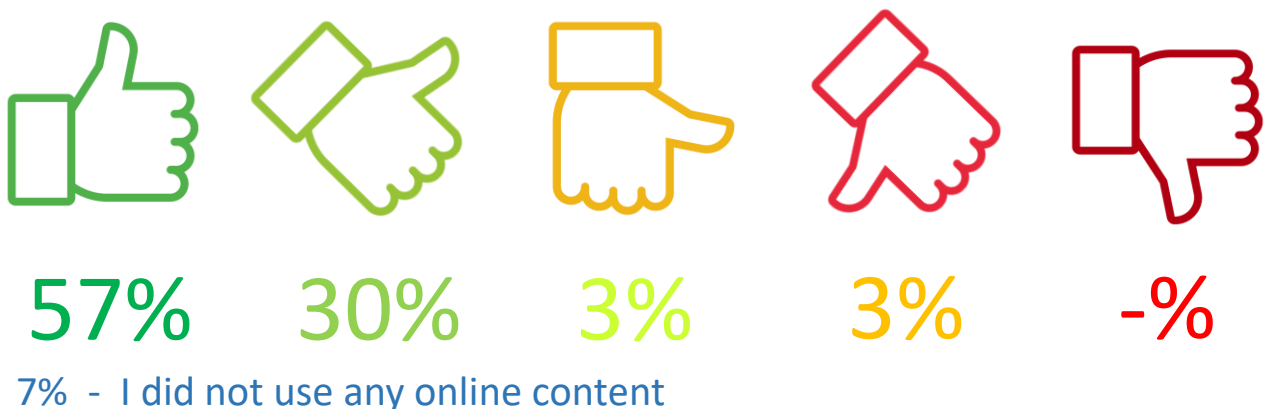


- Felician St Matthew Daniels via Trustpilot

”

Outside of the individual meetings, learning opportunities were provided by online webinars and a library of over 200 videos. The videos in particular proved popular with clients as they could be accessed at any time, and many clients reported rewatching some of them to make further notes to follow up on.

QUESTION: HOW SATISFIED WERE YOU WITH THE ONLINE CONTENT AVAILABLE (VIDEOS AND EVENTS)?



Measuring a programme against expectations can be challenging, as it is a judgement not just on delivery of the programme, but also on what clients thought they would get by subscribing. In that context, 86% of respondents stating that the programme met or exceeded their expectations is a promising result.

QUESTION: HOW WELL DID THE PROGRAMME MEET YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

EXCEEDED
EXPECTATIONS



56%

MET EXPECTATIONS



30%

BELOW
EXPECTATIONS



14%

“ The programme exceeded my expectations as to the level of support and guidance offered by my mentor. It enabled me to get past the blocks I had created around the digital world and social media build a foundation on which to grow. I started the programme with one idea of where I needed to be and came to realise that what I actually needed was completely different and it helped me break it down into more manageable bite size pieces

”

- Survey respondent

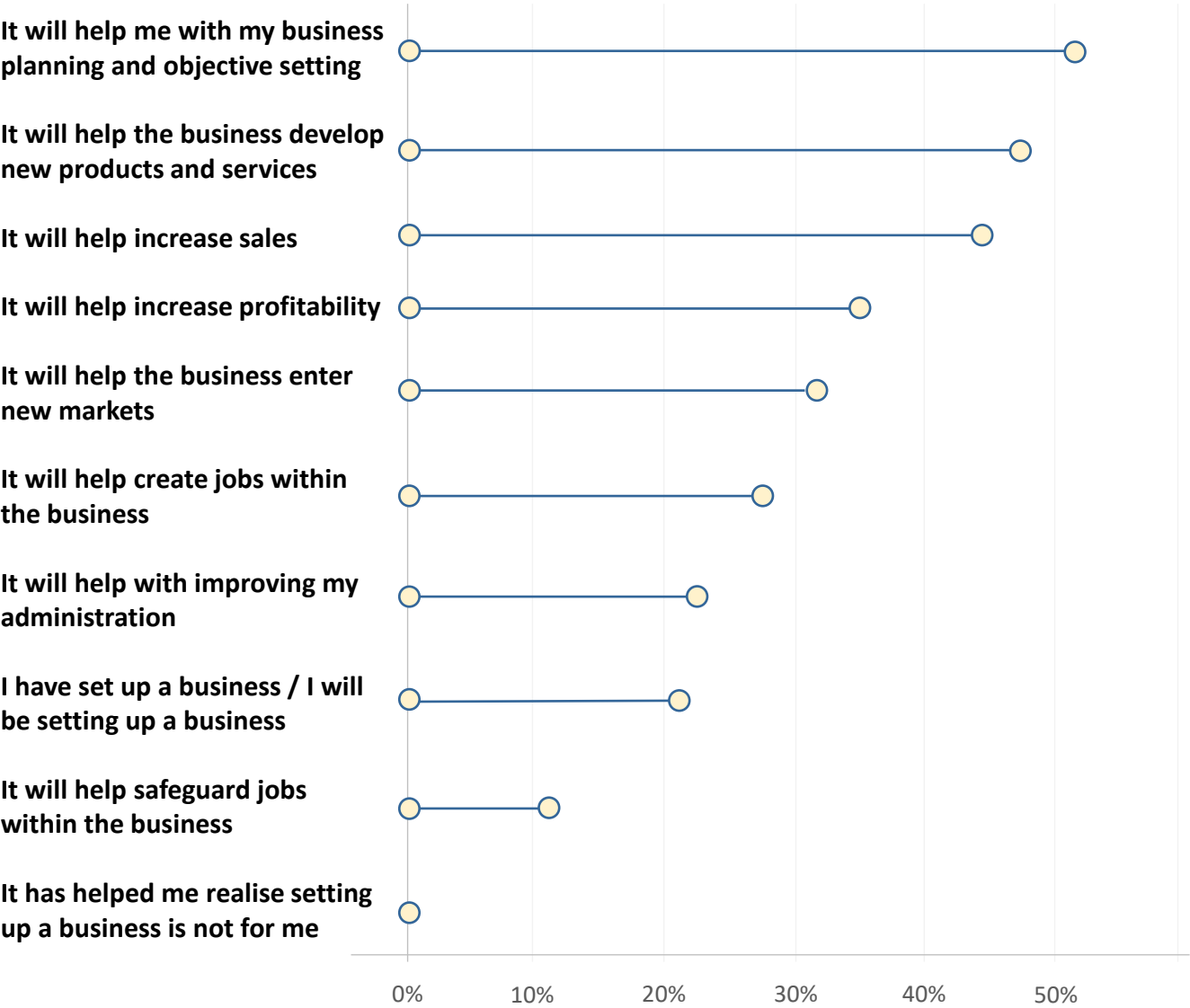
In attempting to capture the tangible benefits of the programme, within the survey we included a question that categorised the most common opportunities in our experience. There may be other benefits not captured in this chart: for example many clients just appreciated the opportunity to share their challenges with someone and be listened to.

“ I learned so much from the videos, and from speaking with my mentors. I can't thank those responsible enough for helping me to develop the knowledge to progress my business.

”

- Survey respondent

QUESTION: HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR BUSINESS WILL BENEFIT FROM YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAMME? (TICK AS MANY AS APPLY)



It is not surprising for a group of relatively new business owners that helping with business planning was the greatest perceived outcome. New businesses often need support with their initial planning and our advisory team members all had expertise in this area.

It is notable that at least a third of all respondents reported that the support offered will help them develop new products, increase sales, and/or increase profitability.

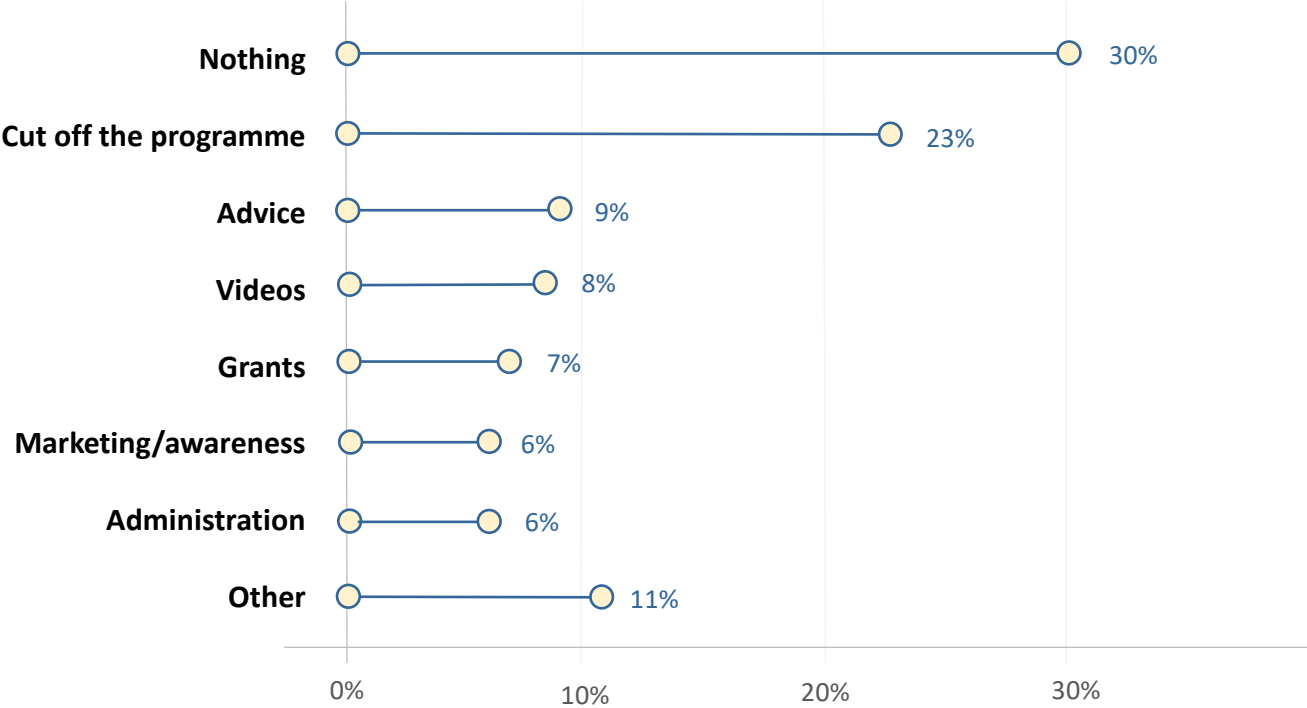
From an employment perspective it is encouraging that over a quarter of the respondents suggested they might be creating jobs as a result of the programme. It is to be expected that only 10% thought it would help safeguard jobs: many of these small start up businesses did not employ staff in any case, and so there is no opportunity for them to protect jobs.

Although no one that responded to the survey suggested they would not start a business, feedback from our advisors suggest that some of their clients did indeed make the decision not to pursue their business idea. This was typically where the client had a full-time job already, and felt that the risk of leaving that to focus on their business idea was too great for them at this time, given the wider economic environment.

Making the programme even better

As part of the survey, we gave our clients the opportunity to share their thoughts on how the programme could be improved. This was a free-text response field in the survey, but we have clustered the responses as follows.

QUESTION: HOW COULD THE PROGRAMME BE IMPROVED



Whilst it is pleasing to note that 30% of respondents thought the programme could not be improved at all, there were some suggestions.

The programme ending on 30th June 2022 was most referenced, with many clients saying they wanted the programme to go on longer. They valued the advice, videos, and grants, and wished for more. WSX have partially addressed this by launching the Transformational Business Programme, which allows for 1-2-1 advice and access to the videos, albeit for an annual fee.

Some respondents wished for more specific and technical advice. Whilst all our advisors had some background specialism (finance, sales, marketing, digital and so on) it is not possible to cover every possible aspect in business with the limited resources available to us.

Grants feedback was commented on by those who did not receive one, primarily, and who felt there should have been more funding available, or it should have been guaranteed on application, rather than assessed. Grant complaints were particularly acute towards the end of the programme. Whilst funds had been held back to ensure grants were consistently allocated, the volume of applications increased significantly in the last two months of the programme, and inevitably many applicants were going to be disappointed.

Feedback on the videos was as much about style as anything. Some felt they were too long, others felt they were too short and rushed. One respondent wanted more videos, and another remarked that some needed to be refreshed frequently as the content can date quite quickly.

Other included those who wanted face to face meetings, albeit noting that online was convenient for them, those with system problems, and someone who wanted peer networking opportunities.

8. 18 MONTH BUSINESS FEEDBACK

In January 2022, 19 Starting & Succeeding in Business clients were interviewed. Follow up interviews were carried out between July and September with 15 of these clients. The difference in numbers is mainly due to us being unable to contact some of the clients.

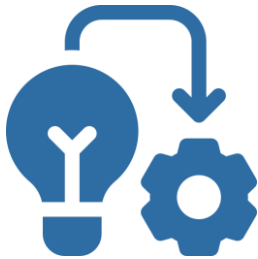
Of those spoken to, most of them reported positive progress in their business activities. Many had received grants from the programme, and whilst the benefits were not always fully realised yet, they all reported that they expected their business to benefit from the grant, and more broadly from the advice they received.

Some of the businesses reported considerable success, with one moving premises and taking on new staff, and another that has been able to establish two resellers in the USA, leading to strong export ambitions for the company.

It is important to note that the general economic climate at that time, and subsequently, isn't favourable to many small businesses. One interviewee reported that they have had no sales for their new business so far, with potential clients citing the rising cost of living as a reason not to buy her valuable, but not essential, services.

In December 2022/ January 2023 a survey was sent to 269 people from the Starting & Succeeding in Business programme (everyone else had opted out of receiving emails from us by that point). We had an 8% response rate, with only three people wishing to have a follow up call. The numbers were considerably lower than previous surveys due to people having moved on and lost interest and therefore not wishing to engage with us. We had a number of people ask to 'unsubscribe' from all communications from us as well. Some businesses did respond to our email saying that they were unable remember us, or the programme at all!

The results however were very positive and showed 77% of respondents on the programme implemented recommendations suggested to them, with 68% anticipating that their business will grow because of our advice and/or grant. Please refer to page 18 for further statistics.



77%

**OF RESPONDENTS ON THE
PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTED
RECOMMENDATIONS SUGGESTED
TO THEM.**

73% of respondents said they are more aware of how to better run a business.

One stated "The start up advice was amazing and incredibly valuable, I had no idea on how to start up a business and I got guided through this with my advisor and the programme".

Another said "The advice given on our website and social media has broadened my knowledge and prompted me to be mindful of the different ways to engage with customers and enabled me to improve on customers search results."



73%

**OF RESPONDENTS SAID THEY
WERE AWARE OF HOW TO
BETTER RUN A BUSINESS AS A
RESULT OF SSIB.**

8. 18 MONTH BUSINESS FEEDBACK

From the three businesses interviewed, one business is now in a position to be able to take on their first member of staff whilst still being in their first year of trading, and if all goes to plan there will be a further two positions available within the next year. Another business reported an increase in sales off the back of their new website which was funded using grant money from the programme and the third client has been able to enter new markets since taking part in the programme.

When speaking with the businesses it was clear to see that the programme and Business Advisors were able to help with a wide range of business needs. Between the three businesses interviewed, new marketing strategies via social media platforms, software upgrades to increase efficiency, structured financial planning and diversification of services were all areas that had been advised on.

The overall response from the businesses was that they felt we were able to confidently help with their business start-up needs, it was clear to see how valuable they had found the programme. Here's some of the feedback we received;

“ The programme and grant were invaluable, I would not have been able to get to where I am without it.

”

“ My confidence and motivation has increased further than I expected, all your help has been very valuable!

”

“ Steve's input and the video resources allowed me to see different aspects of the business and to freshen up and keep current working processes like social media, and marketing techniques.

”

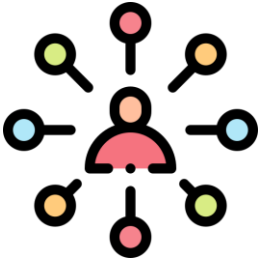
Although this is positive feedback we need to take note that since the 12 month report, the general economic climate has declined even further with inflation still rising, energy prices increasing and the cost of living crisis further escalating, along with no end to the Ukraine issues. All of these have managed to create a perfect storm for businesses with far greater than average levels ceasing trading or reporting a decrease in turnover.

Therefore, when looking at people's responses we need to bear this in mind - businesses haven't really had a good run at being able to set up and start trading, yet we do have a lot of positive responses to show that with the influence of the support that people received they have been able to keep going, or grow.



68%

**OF RESPONDENTS ANTICIPATED
THEIR BUSINESS TO GROW AS A
RESULT OF THE PROGRAMME ADVICE
AND/OR GRANT**



86%

OF RESPONDENTS SAID THAT THEIR BUSINESS HAD BEEN PARTIALLY OR DIRECTLY INFLUENCED BY WORKING WITH WSX ENTERPRISE

When speaking to the businesses, all three of them mentioned how the increase in the cost of living has impacted their profit margins and ability to stay competitive. They also expressed concerns about the constant threats of the “worst recession we have seen in a long time”, wondering what would happen to them, and if their business would survive it.

One business reported that they have taken on a part time job to subsidise their income whilst their business builds momentum, many of their clients are unable to afford to continue with their services due to the cost of living crisis.

All three businesses thought that they would have benefitted further if the support from the programme was still available.

9. GRANTS



Where clients had met the minimum requirements of six hours of time on the programme, including at least two meetings with a business advisor, and had demonstrated that they had established a business, they were eligible to apply for a grant of between £500 and £2,000.

The grant process required an online application, after completing a set criteria (this differed per programme) and a conversation with a Business Advisor to establish a barrier to growth within the business that the grant could be used for. Applications were verified to ensure compliance with the grant rules, before being assessed by a panel independent of the project delivery team. The panel scored each application that they reviewed, any that achieved a pass mark (88) were awarded a grant. Towards the end of the process, we had too many applicants for the number of grants available, meaning grants were awarded to the highest scoring first.

The grants were awarded in nine rounds of applications, starting from the 1st October 2021, with each round having an equal amount of money assigned to it. This was designed to allow funds to be released in a timely basis to those with valid applications. Should one of the rounds not have enough clients who reached the pass mark, the amount not allocated was carried over to the following month. Holding grants until the end of the programme would have disadvantaged those clients who signed up early on in the programme and awarding on a first come first served basis would have disadvantaged those who hadn't yet heard about the programme.

As the programme became more widely known, the volume of grant applications did increase significantly, which meant more people were disappointed not to get a grant, and others were unable to meet the qualifying requirements due to the programme deadlines. This is reflected in the feedback noted earlier in our report. However, the criteria applied by our panel was consistent throughout.

The grant process required successful applicants to buy the equipment or service themselves, and then apply for reimbursement evidenced by both an invoice from the supplier and by a bank statement showing the funds having been spent. Whilst this did cause some concern with a few applicants, it was designed to minimise the risk to the programme (and SELEP) of fraudulent payments. We committed to reimbursement of expenditure properly incurred within 10 working days, and usually much sooner than that.

In some cases clients spent less than their award, or ended up not claiming it at all. Where this was the case, the funds were recycled to grant applications that had just missed out on an award in a previous round. The final allocation falls just short of the financial target due to two applicants not completing the award process for the grants in the last week of the programme.

Many of the follow up interviews that took place in July and August 2022 were with clients that had been awarded grants. At this time, whilst clients were positive about receiving funds to support their business, the majority of business owners that we spoke to said it was too early to assess the impact.

In most cases, the activity paid for by the grant was still in progress (for example a new website was being finalised, but not launched) or equipment was ordered but had not yet arrived. It is therefore difficult to report on the outcomes of the grants.

Following our 18 month survey and follow up interviews it was easy to see the impact that the grants were now having with 68% saying that they could already see a positive impact due to the programme/grant. We also had feedback that included comments such as 'with my new website that the grant funded, I have been able to reach more clients and grow my business'. 'Your grant enabled me to fully start my business'. 'The grant helped me to buy a new laptop for my business which has enabled me to grow'.

The grants covered a wide range of activities and businesses. Our favourites include:



Engraving machine to personalise products and boost business opportunities in the UK and overseas



Materials and membership for a client made redundant in the pandemic, and who set up her own business



Grant to support marketing campaign including Google Ads



Grant awarded to produce explainer videos and boost understanding of his business offering



Funded new seating, including USB and power points, to create a remote working area and boost trade



Provided funds to support the development of a new website

10. PROGRAMME DELIVERY FEEDBACK

Whilst the programme was, in our opinion, undeniably successful and delivering on very nearly 200% of its KPIs, there were also learning points that might be useful to note for any future programmes that are undertaken both by WSX and SELEP. We have added our thoughts here to assist future work.

- We learnt very quickly that people did not want to attend a course at a specific time but rather choose when they learnt the same content. Had we not addressed this issue and got agreement for 'content on demand' we would not have succeeded in helping as many people as we did, nor meeting the KPIs in the time available.
- There was no way either WSX or SELEP could anticipate how many economic, COVID and global challenges would take place within the course of 12 months. A WSX key learning was adapting as soon as we needed to rather than sitting and waiting it out. Being agile was probably the most important skill for this programme.
- We underestimated the number of staff that would be needed in order to deliver the KPIs, this meant that a sudden recruitment drive needed to happen five months in to add an extra three Business Advisors for the SSIB programme- we also merged the Business Advisors so that they could all give support across both programmes.
- The programme would have benefited from not going live until about two months after it did- this would have enabled the programme to be fully up and running rather than setting it up alongside delivery. As it was we were trying to set up and run a programme at the same time which led to confusion all round.
- The regular meetings with SELEP were essential during the delivery period- without them WSX wouldn't have built up the relationships to be able to ask for changes to the contract and SELEP might not have had the trust in WSX that they were doing it for the benefit of the programme.
- The grant programme, which of course did receive negative feedback from businesses who weren't successful, did work in that it was fair and treated those that only found out about the programme towards the end the same way as those who were there from the beginning- everyone had an equal chance to access a grant, once they had met the eligibility criteria.
- Keeping both programmes separate but with all Business Advisors working across both programmes allowed us to provide continuity and share knowledge and resources for all participants.
- Allocating each client to a specific Business Advisor built a relationship and meant there was a rapport to enable both parties to bounce ideas off each other- we only implemented this half way through the programme but the level of engagement after having done so did increase dramatically.
- Our database to record all data- and show live data at any given point was a great investment. It made everything so much slicker from reporting, to seeing a live picture of where we were, to having immediate access to reporting data for SELEP. I would always ensure something similar was set up from the beginning going forward.



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