

'Supporting Businesses to Thrive'

**The impact of
OxLEP Business support**

APRIL 2021 TO MARCH 2022

OCTOBER 2022



Foreward

As I look back on the past year, I do so with a sense of pride. Supporting businesses to thrive in Oxfordshire is so much more than a job for my team and I, it is in our hearts and minds, it is who we are.

This impact report demonstrates the hard work and commitment to supporting businesses over a particularly challenging period which started during the COVID-19 epidemic and ended with rising business costs driven by a wide range of factors including the war in Ukraine. We aim to be there for every small and medium sized business based or trading in Oxfordshire.

We are motivated by the success of the businesses we support as illustrated in our case studies, whether they are an early-stage business such as Coellaborations, an innovation business such as Vann, or a fast growing business such as Trove.

I encourage you to read this full report, look up the businesses featured, and explore other Oxfordshire businesses when you next need something.

Do you know any businesses that could be benefitting from our support?

Helen Brind
Growth Hub Manager
OxLEP Business



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1.0 SUMMARY

For many businesses in Oxfordshire, the spring of 2021 was loaded with the expectation of emerging from a COVID-19 enforced hibernation. One year on from the first lockdowns that so badly affected people, communities and businesses, the restrictions were lifting and mass vaccinations were promising a roadmap to recovery.

There are over 43,000 businesses registered in Oxfordshire, at least 99% of which are SMEs. Every one of these businesses had been impacted by COVID-19 in one way or another and those reliant on face to face activities were the hardest hit.



OxLEP and the help they have provided and signposted, really have been my only source of support during the pandemic. As a result, I have spent more time working on my business than in its 20 year history. I'm feeling incredibly positive about a strong recovery and the opportunities for growth ahead. I have already taken on a new staff member as a direct result of the outcomes of my early 1:1 coaching session's and am hoping to create two new positions in the business before the end of the year.



I remain incredibly grateful and appreciate the support that I've received from OxLEP Business. To think that I've not only somehow survived 2 years of the most extraordinarily challenging trading conditions, but that my business is in the strongest position that it has ever been in, to take advantage of the imminent recovery, is very reassuring. This was always my intention going into the pandemic - to come out the other side, fit and fighting!"

OxLEP Business engages with businesses based on the support they say they need. This report showcases how OxLEP Business responded to those needs and shares some of the stories which describe the impact of that support on the Oxfordshire businesses. Between April 2021 and March 2022 the OxLEP Business team has:

ENGAGED
2500+ businesses
providing over 6,000 hours
of business support

PROVIDED
support worth
£3,500,000

SAFEGUARDED
or created
388 jobs



2.0 THE BUSINESSES SUPPORTED

A total of 1294 businesses were triaged in 2021/22 via a number of different routes. 535 completed the OxLEP Business Support Tool providing a detailed understanding of their needs and ambitions. An additional 734 businesses received "light touch" triage.

Entrepreneurs, business owners and business leaders were engaging with **OxLEP Business** for a wide range of reasons.

2.1 COMPARISON OF BUSINESS NEEDS

535 of the businesses supported, completed the **OxLEP Business Support Tool**. Information collected from the business support tool provided valuable insight on business needs and allowed the teams to shape and adapt the support services throughout the year.

These business needs have been aggregated with all previous data (since July 2020) and are summarised here:



The business needs highlighted through the Business Support Tool.

2.0 THE BUSINESSES SUPPORTED

2.2 LIGHT TOUCH TRIAGE

Ensuring that as many businesses as possible were aware of the fully funded support that was available to them was a key priority which drove the need for a 'light touch' triage approach to be introduced. The 'light touch' triage involved simple eligibility checks followed by sharing information on OxLEP's offer and options for how to engage.

“
The OxLEP Business team are extremely helpful, knowledgeable and approachable which makes you feel that they care about supporting you and your business

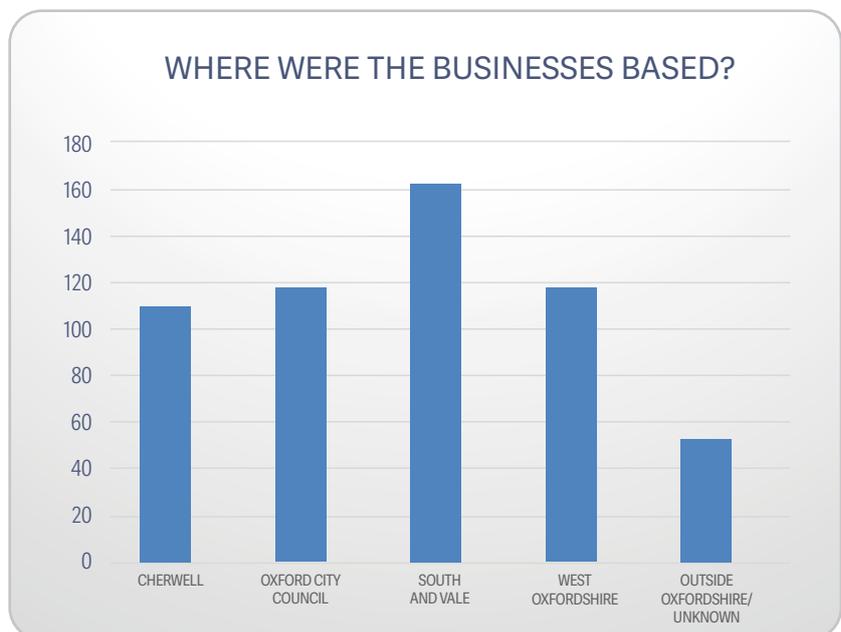
There were 734 businesses who had not completed the Business Support Tool for some reason, but were engaging with OxLEP through the following channels:

- 201** business leaders who replied to direct messages on LinkedIn and asked for further information,
- 240** clients who contacted OxLEP's frontline service,
- 100** businesses that had previously engaged, of which 72 responded and went on to receive additional support,
- 126** businesses who responded to an email marketing campaign,
- 75** businesses who applied for Peer Network, but weren't eligible,
- Clients referred from West Oxfordshire's Grant scheme.

2.2 WHERE THE BUSINESSES ARE BASED

The businesses completing the **OxLEP Business Support Tool** have been sorted by District Council. This shows a relatively even spread across the County.

The number of businesses that have completed the Business Support Tool by District council.





2.0 THE BUSINESSES SUPPORTED

2.3 WHAT SECTORS WERE THE BUSINESSES IN?

Businesses were asked what sector they were in. With a wide variety of answers, the businesses have been broadly grouped as follows:

SECTOR	No.
Other service activities	106
Accommodation / Hospitality & Leisure	93
Manufacturing / other manufacturing	80
Education	31
Human health and social work activities	30
Information and communication	30
Other professional, scientific and technical activities	27
Retail trade, except of motor vehicles and motorcycles	25
Construction	16
Finance / Legal and Insurance Activities	13
Scientific research and development	12
Activities of head offices; management consultancy activities	11
Office administrative, office support and other business support activities	7

There were an additional 60 companies that are spread across other sectors. And 19 pre-starts which didn't specify what sector they were in.



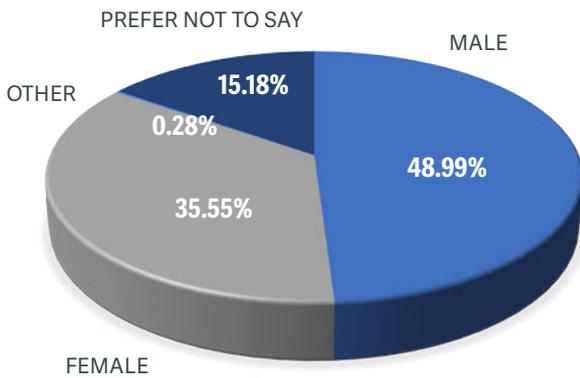
2.0 THE BUSINESSES SUPPORTED

2.4 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY OF THOSE SUPPORTED

Equality and diversity information on the people supported (where data is available).

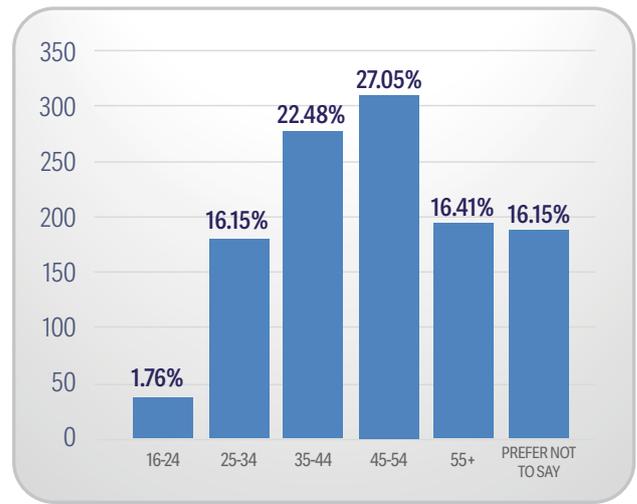
GENDER IDENTIFICATION

NUMBER OF RESPONSES: 1139



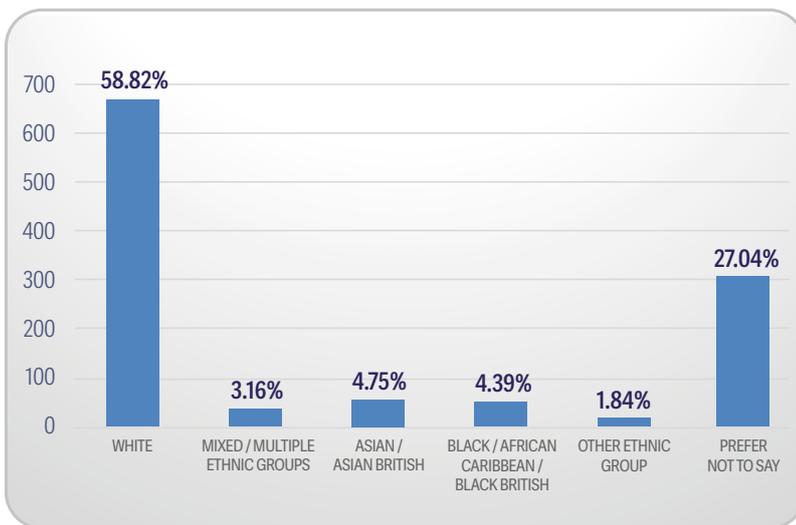
AGE BRACKET

NUMBER OF RESPONSES: 1139



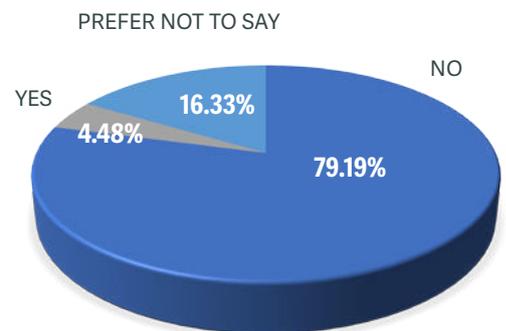
ETHNIC GROUP

NUMBER OF RESPONSES: 1139



PHYSICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS OR ILLNESS

Lasting or expecting to last 12 months or more
NUMBER OF RESPONSES: 1139





3.0 THE SUPPORT PROVIDED

Given the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, support was largely delivered online, with some face to face activity being introduced from October 2021.

Through intelligence led triage the **OxLEP Business team** worked smarter and faster to signpost businesses to the most suitable support in Oxfordshire. Elements of the support were accessible to all businesses, other support was targeted at priority sectors or businesses with the most potential to create jobs and grow. The core team, and the business advisors based in and around Oxfordshire, were able to use their knowledge of local business networks and offer their unique skill sets to help SMEs with their most difficult challenges.

The support provided included the following activities:

- Providing every client with a bespoke Business Support Action Plan which included signposting to;**
- The most appropriate support offered by OxLEP, e.g. Inward Investment, Skills for Business, Apprenticeship support, eScalate and ISfB
 - Helpful information on business recovery planning Relevant Grant schemes
 - Their local District Council Economic Development team

“
OxLEP have been able to offer dedicated support from various business professionals ranging across a varied spectrum of business issues.
It was very well received at an unprecedented time both during the pandemic and continuing to support our business post pandemic.”

- One to one support** – light touch, through to intensive support where required
- Specialist innovation advice** and guidance
- A programme of support** for Pre-Start, Start Up and Growth Businesses through the Start-Up Club and One to many webinars
- A Foundations to Growth Programme** supporting businesses ready for growth
- A Non-Exec Director “NED” for a day**, providing strategic support to businesses looking to create jobs
- The National BEIS funded Peer Networks Programme**
- A Peer to Peer Programme** for companies not meeting the eligibility for the national ‘Peer Networks’ programme
- Grant schemes through the ERDF funded eScalate and ISfB programmes** and the ‘Business Investment Fund’ funded by the Government’s Getting Building fund.



“
Peer to peer learning was great. Comparing notes, learning different ways of working”

3.0 THE SUPPORT PROVIDED

The eScalate programme has continued its support aimed at social enterprises, enterprising charities and purposeful businesses as well as growth SMEs that are scaling their business. The support on both sides of the programme is built around 1:1 support with specialist advisors, webinars and workshops on key business topics and facilitated peer groups. The programme also had a grant scheme during the period covered by this report.

A particular focus of the support for scale-up businesses has been investment readiness. In January 2022 the programme ran its first 'Pitch to the Panel' event with nine investment ready businesses pitching to a panel of investors. These businesses were narrowed down to four, who then pitched again to attract the panel's vote.

Feedback at the time from the winners:

"We are absolutely thrilled to bits and so grateful to have won. It only happened a few days ago so we need to catch up with OxLEP to go through next steps. But we've already had some positive emails from a few of the investors and one of them has even made an introduction to another potential investor, which is great."

The eScalate programme also hosted 'Women in Business Network and Support' – peer groups specifically for women recognising that whilst the last decade has seen a sharp increase in female self-employment, sadly the number of women starting, and scaling businesses remains much lower than that of men. These groups have been very popular with 4 groups completing with 37 attendees across the groups.

Some feedback from an attendee:

"I thought the topics and speakers were interesting and relevant. Andrea was great at facilitating and ensuring everyone got to speak. The mix of participants was also good (we actually picked up a client from our group, although that wasn't my primary goal!) The only thing I struggled with is fitting the 2 hours into my busy workload, being a part-timer it can be tricky, but generally doing the sessions over Zoom gave me better flexibility than regular face to face meetings which would have involved driving."

Impact investment and pitching practice has also been a focus on the social enterprise side of the programme with a 'Pitch for the Future' event delivered by Town

Square (one of the social enterprise hubs) in November 2021.

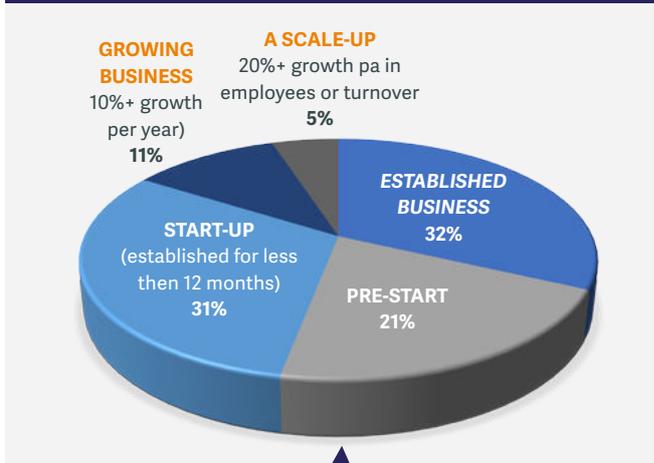
Feedback from the winner, Sally Dear, Ducky Zebra:

"Participating in Pitch for the Future has been a fantastic experience. Not only has it helped small, purpose-led businesses, such as Ducky Zebra, connect with potential investors but it has also allowed us to get 'pitch ready' in a relaxed, friendly environment. I am delighted to have won."

At OxLEP innovation thrives on inclusivity and collaboration! That's why the Innovation Support for Business programme (ISfB) provided dedicated Innovation Specialists to connect and advise. This collaborative approach allowed the team to offer Go Create grants, the best guidance from experienced advisors, connecting people, businesses, universities and research centres.

A range of customer journeys were mapped out so that integrated support was available in Oxfordshire for pre-start, start-up, growing, established and scale-up businesses. By looking at the age and size of the business and their stated needs, they could be triaged to the most appropriate support. Having a flexible approach allowed us to implement packages of support for key areas.

BUSINESS SUPPORTED BY THEIR 'STAGE'



“ I think it is a great organisation and service to help businesses such as ours get on to the first rung of the ladder to success, without which it might be impossible. It's not only advice and monetary aid but is a great vote of confidence that speaks volumes to all.



3.0 THE SUPPORT PROVIDED

3.1 THE BUSINESS INVESTMENT FUND

The Oxfordshire Business Investment Fund was launched in March 2020, funded by the Government’s Getting Building Fund. The grant scheme was developed to catalyse the county’s business community to move into an effective renewal phase following the COVID-19 outbreak. Oxfordshire businesses were invited to put forward expressions of interest for the fund’s co-investment grants of £25,000 to £100,000 for capital projects, with the ability to deliver tangible outcomes aligned to driving economic recovery, growth and job creation.

This capital grant fund specifically aimed to support businesses to accelerate investment in their respective operations, as well as strengthening business performance, driving technology and innovation adoption within businesses and helping to increase their sales and market share.

The Business Investment Fund had a grant pot of £2,227,865, which was added to, through match funding from the successful businesses, giving a total investment of £4,377,276. The outputs reported by Grant Awardees from this investment are summarised below.

Outputs	Target	Actual / Reported to date
Businesses Assisted	45	38
Jobs Safeguarded	225	278
Jobs Created (direct link to grant)	27	56
Kickstart Placements	45	12
Apprenticeships	30	7

3.2 THE OxLEP MARKETPLACE

In November 2021, **OxLEP Business** held it’s third Marketplace event; the first since Covid-19.

This event brought together over 100 businesses that OxLEP had been supporting over the past 18 months, throughout the pandemic, to network and find out more about the breadth of support available through the Growth Hub.

See more about our marketplace events [click here](#)



Scan here



3.0 THE SUPPORT PROVIDED

3.3 BUSINESS SUPPORT IN NUMBERS





3.0 THE SUPPORT PROVIDED



70+

WEBINARS ENGAGING OVER 500 BUSINESSES



17
NEW PRODUCTS BROUGHT TO MARKET

21

BUSINESS LEADERS MENTORED



NEW RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT COLLABORATIONS



11
STRATEGIC BUSINESS REVIEWS CARRIED OUT

272
BUSINESSES SUPPORTED

THROUGH 33 COHORTS OF PEER GROUPS

50%
OF THE BUSINESSES

WHO PROVIDED FEEDBACK SAID THE SUPPORT RECEIVED HAD HELPED PROTECT JOBS



6
JOBS CREATED

328
JOBS SAFEGUARDED



238
ACTION LEARNING SESSIONS DELIVERED



OVER
6
£3,000,000
IN SUPPORT PROVIDED

In their own words


ASTON AND JAMES
 Everything for the Workplace

Darren Aston
Managing Director

Click Here



Scan Here



Beer Gin Vino

Kevin Durant
Co-founder

Click Here



Scan Here


Daniela Petrovic
Co-founder

Click here



Scan Here


Lillie Jamieson
Director

Click Here



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Bill Bruty, Director of Fundraising Training Ltd had successfully adapted his face to face training business to deliver online through the pandemic. This experience encouraged him to consider whether there were other changes he should be making in his business. That is when he reached out and joined an **OxLEP Foundations to Growth group**.

"Prior to joining the OxLEP group, I had a pathological suspicion over the value of strategic planning, despite running courses on this subject. My experience had been of producing gorgeous documents for filing cabinets, all overtaken by events. The action learning set convinced me to shift my mindset. So, I crunched the numbers, considered scenarios, made projections and realised that nothing added up unless we secured a major contract to develop a training programme for a global client. Another gorgeous document was produced. But this time, it's been different, as six months later, we have secured a pilot contract for our dream product with one of the most prestigious US clients in our sector."

Bill is looking forward to growing his business, one new major contract at a time, starting with the African Visionary Fellowship

"...six months later, we have secured a pilot contract for our dream product..."

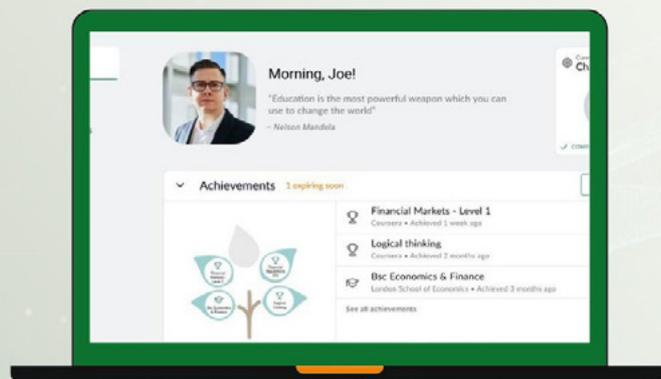
www.segalfamilyfoundation.org/avf/





THE PLACE TO GROW YOUR CAREER IS WITHIN YOU!

**Track your learning.
Build your Opportunities.
Launch your success.**



Edumenteach was founded in September 2020 with one clear vision: to encourage, motivate and mentor individuals to own their career journey and celebrate their achievements. As passionate educators, we began identifying the fissures that ran deep within the education system, especially within the realm of coaching and empowering individuals, with the hope of transforming and bringing change. After reviewing what already exists in the educational consultancy space, we realized that there was a massive gap between aspirations of individuals versus access to learning and opportunities, and how this affected their career ambition and personal growth.

Early on in our development, we learned about OXLEP's amazing services and accessed a peer networking group twice, each founder had a peer network group she was part of.

“Through the second peer networking group, our company was introduced to a different business market...”

www.cmyqual.com

This group helped our company identify our challenges and also introduced us to our first partner, Aim Higher Training and Development, a training provider delivering a set of diverse work-based qualifications.

The journey also introduced us to Brookes Business School: our participation at the Brookes Business competition saw us liaising with a team of skilled Business students, seeking to brainstorm real-world company challenges and generate a realistic plan. This invaluable experience helped us identify international students as our initial market and review our pricing and sustainability options. Through the second peer networking group, our company was introduced to a different business market and one that we are now actively pursuing as well – military-leavers.

The **OXLEP networks** have been an invaluable resource without which the road would have been lonelier.





P3MO is an Oxfordshire based technology company, disrupting the traditional delivery model of a Business Transformation.

Their CEO, Andrew explains *“If we look at the way businesses are required to constantly evolve today, due to competition, legislation change or cost reduction; historically how they have managed their need for change has not evolved due to either limited internal capability or outsourcing the problem to quite costly third party experts. Companies know it is not sustainable to continue to waste hard fought for profits on failing to change efficiently. But with the power of data and technology we can help our clients deliver efficient and effective change with our product called ‘Connect’. We utilise technology and deliver a new way to achieve change and bring improved return on investment and improved lifestyles for every employee and shareholder.”*

It was in early 2019 that P3MO was established and decided to set the business up in Oxford. “We wanted to be based in Oxford because it’s such a great location, it’s central, it has a great university network and a great business enterprise network. And being part of the Oxfordshire business community meant we could engage with OxLEP. This was great as we knew they offered a whole raft of business support.”

P3MO gained support as part of the **eScalate** and **ISfB programmes**. “I thought I knew a reasonable amount about setting up a business, but I wanted to know more about marketing, digital marketing in particular. I knew how to write a business plan and I had a sales strategy, but its always good to verify from peers to know they were good enough. I needed to discover more about what was needed for a start up and that’s where the one-to-one support from the OxLEP advisors came in.”

“P3MO gained support as part of the eScalate and ISfB programmes.”

www.p3mo.io





Trove is an online food delivery service that connects you to your local fresh food suppliers and drops directly to your door. Their mission is to create the most extensive consumer facing marketplace of local independent food suppliers, retailers and producers. Their online aggregated platform enables customers to shop with the convenience of an online supermarket, whilst supporting local suppliers.

When Trove was established in 2020, founders, Flic and Tor reached out to **OxLEP Business** for support and applied for an eScalate grant. Flic explains "We've always been impressed with OxLEP's support and access to knowledge sharing. We've been able to speak to experts and listen in on workshops across a variety of areas that scale up businesses need to understand, but where their skill set may not lie. We can't speak highly enough of OxLEP's support over the past couple of years."

As a scale up business, Trove were officially invited to take part in OxLEP's Pitch to the Panel – an event that gives businesses the opportunity to meet and pitch to a group of Oxfordshire based investors. Trove won the event.

One of the investors on the panel shared with us *"Trove were the standout presenters in the first round, and they were the standout presenters again in the final. I really liked their energy and passion, and they clearly thought very deeply about the entire journey of the business."*

Tor expressed her joy of being chosen as the winners "We are absolutely thrilled to bits and so grateful to have won. It only happened a few days ago so we need to catch up with OxLEP to go through next steps. But we've already had some positive emails from a few of the investors and one of them has even made an introduction to another potential investor, which is great."



"We've always been impressed with OxLEP's support and access to knowledge sharing..."

www.thelocaltrive.com





School Space benefited from a Business Investment Fund grant, supported by the government's Getting Building Fund. School Space hire out school facilities to local community groups, providing affordable space for community events and increasing revenues for schools in the process.

School Space was set up in 2010, when co-founders Jemma and James were just 17 and saw a gap in the market for an effective business model that would support both local schools and community groups. Since then, the social enterprise has continued to grow, taking on new spaces, staff and expanding its offer - with working towards building thriving schools at the centre of thriving communities at its core. The company has generated £2.5m for the education sector and sees over 100,000 community users in an average year.

School Space co-founder Jemma said: "We knew we wanted to improve our customer experience and technology platform but didn't quite have the funds to invest ourselves – however we had raised some investment and thankfully OxLEP matching this made it possible.

"The application process was comprehensive – it wasn't short – but we felt really supported by OxLEP at all stages of the process. "The funding has allowed us to improve our customer experience, acquire many more customers and grow our school partners. Going forward, our aspirations are to grow School Space's impact across the UK and benefit as many schools and customer groups as we can."

"The funding has allowed us to improve our customer experience, acquire many more customers and grow our school partners."

www.schoolspace.org





4.0

BUSINESS CASE STUDIES



"The support was invaluable," said Naomi. "Throughout my career, I've mentored and led teams of people, so working as a solopreneur can be isolating."

The support network and collective problem solving as part of this program were really insightful as people came at any given problem from a whole range of industries and perspectives.

To hear from other businesses and the challenges they were experiencing was also reassuring to learn that nobody had all of the answers."



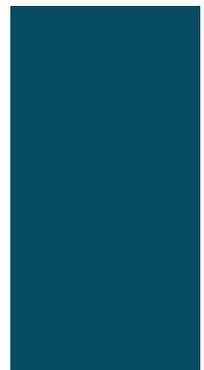
Working with businesses across Oxfordshire and beyond, Coellaborations has since developed a full range of service offerings, including; Tech Empower sessions to upskill business owners, Tech Solve packages to find the right software solution and set it up for success, as well as Tech Audits to ensure companies are receiving value for money from their software and are tech-ready for their future growth.

Coellaborations was founded by software solutions expert Naomi Coe. She is passionate about empowering people to feel confident using the software behind their businesses and loves to solve their tech headaches. Coellaborations works with entrepreneurs and growing businesses to help them find the right software, customize the technology, and train the team to get the most value from their new tools.

COELLABORATIONS

To learn more, visit www.coellaborations.com or connect with Naomi Coe on LinkedIn.

Having returned to the UK during COVID, Naomi was determined to set up her own tech consulting business and joined the **Ox-LEP Foundations to Growth** programme just a few months into her business journey.



"The support was invaluable."

www.coellaborations.com





Sarah, Peter and Max

Over the last year, the pair have graduated from the **OxLEP Peer Support Programme**, received one to one mentoring from an OxLEP Mentor, and completed the investor pitching fast track course, as well as a number of OxLEP power hours.

The husband and wife team, who run the online networking group networking-in as well as business coaching firm outside-ideas and run mastermind9 groups under their brand mastermind9, have been looking to scale their concept Mastermind9 and have been really grateful for the support that they have received.

Peter and Sarah completed the **OxLEP Triage tool** in the summer of 2021 and were "Blown Away" by the availability and quality of support. Since then, they've delved head-first into the support on offer. Their business is going from strength to strength.

The pair run regular FREE Taster sessions for small business owners to see how powerful mastermind groups can be. More information www.mastermind9.com or call Peter on 07818388642

Meet Peter and Sarah Mols,
"Power users"
of the business support
offered by OxLEP.

The pair summed up Mastermind9

"Did you know that 69% of small business owners admit to taking advice from family or friends; who have never run a business... When you're too deep in your business, good advice, support and companionship can be hard to come by. Our solution is... Mastermind9. We bring together diverse groups of business owners with different skill sets who support each other's growth ambitions.

Each Mastermind9 group contains business owners with skills in Sales, Finance, Operations, Marketing, Customer services, IT, Web, Law, Human Resources. 9 people, one purpose: To help, advise and support each other on the climb. A band of brothers and sisters, hell bent on helping you & your business grow. "

***"When you're too deep in your business,
good advice, support and companionship
can be hard to come by."***

www.mastermind9.com





Camera Confidence- A Skill That can be Learned.



Be Camera Confident

I started my OxLEP Journey in November last year, I have gained so much, I am grateful, I have the foundations in place to stop body shopping and I have a business plan I am content with.

I feel supported by a network of likeminded business-owners who I can call on for help and support. I have a tribe and a hive of OxLEP support. I have watchers who follow my social media from when I was asked to present the Be Camera Confident Webinar for the **eScalate programme** and OxLEP clients.

I feel supported, respected, and validated. I can say 'I' instead of hiding behind the company name as the thoughts I write are my own and it is beautiful to type knowing dyslexia has not stopped me from succeeding.

All of the above is incredible, I am in year two of business, I have received support and guidance because I took a leap of faith, filled in a form, and asked for business support.

These reasons for gratitude could so easily have been negative thoughts; instead of I feel supported, "I feel alone and overwhelmed", instead of I have social media watchers, "no one is reading my posts".

Our internal voice can support us and build us up, or leave us feeling vulnerable and exposed. This is particularly true when it comes to presenting on camera.

Camera confidence is not easy, but it is a skill that can be learned. To help support you to overcome your fear of public speaking on camera, I have created six steps to camera confidence.

Want to be confident when public speaking and be camera confident?

Email me kirsty@openingdoorsconsultancy.co.uk I will help you.

"I feel supported by a network of likeminded business-owners..."





As a community interest company, UKNAR (UK National Asbestos Register) incorporated as a social enterprise in January 2020, based on the knowledge and experience of Metro Safety Group – one of the country’s leading providers of fire, health and safety services to property managers. The business was established to help management and duty holders manage asbestos simply and safely while better informing and educating those people who may be at risk.

Andrew Paten, Director, explains: *“When it came to the subject of asbestos I was probably as ignorant as most of the population and it was only about three years ago I found out more about it and realised it was a much bigger issue for the UK than I thought. The fundamental issue is that there is still a lot of asbestos about, it’s in about half a million work places, one and a half million homes, as well as thousands of public buildings such as schools – it’s all around us.”*

One of the co-directors of UKNAR, Candy March, knew of **OxLEP Business** so reached out to them for support. Following initial discussions the team at OxLEP signposted them to the eScalate programme – a business support programme designed specifically to support social enterprises in Oxfordshire.

eScalate Case Study

Our successful grant application with OxLEP meant we were able to run the viability project in the latter part of last year. This study was all about establishing if there is a market for this and would the duty holders of these buildings be willing to pay at a price that works for them, and one that we would be able to provide the service at. We also needed to explore the systems and technology we needed to be able to deliver the service successfully. So there was a lot of research that was needed.”

With the financial support from OxLEP, UKNAR were able to undertake extensive market research and product design, they built a CRM system, engaged with a PR agency and also delivered two pilot service projects.



“With the financial support from OxLEP, UKNAR were able to undertake extensive market research and product design”

uknar.org





Vann is a digital platform designed for people living with cancer to help them monitor their health and share their experiences with cancer. Anonymised Real World Evidence reported by their users will aid drug discovery and cancer research.

Vann's story begins back in 2015 when Ani, from Armenia, was accepted into Oxford to study an MBA. Ani explains "It was a very important phase in my life, Oxford was one of the milestones I wanted to reach. But then everything changed. In July 2015 I was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. I was forced to postpone my studies in Oxford to start my treatment. I was of course devastated, but I remained optimistic. The whole journey has been a very interesting journey for me.

Many people say for them it is a dark period, but for me it was productive. It was a time when I learnt so much, about myself, the disease and also the problems other cancer patients face. I didn't give up."

Leap forward 5 years and Ani was in Oxford, "I knew of **OxLEP Business** due to my connections through the University and as an Oxfordshire based, innovative business, I was eligible for support through the ISfB programme. I applied in 2020 to join their business support programme.

From the start, everything the team at OxLEP did was really great. They were so helpful and supportive. Whenever I had questions they were always there for me.

A big area of support offered, which has been a huge help in the development of the business, was the innovation grant funding.

My advisor at OxLEP informed when the grant funding round opened and encouraged me to apply. They supported me during the application process and helped guide me through the paperwork, which was excellent. I was delighted to receive a grant award!"

vann



"They were so helpful and supportive. Whenever I had questions they were always there for me,"

www.thevann.com



ISfB
case study

HUTANO DIAGNOSTICS ARE DEVELOPING A MODULAR, CONFIGURABLE LATERAL FLOW DEVICE (LFD) PLATFORM. THE PLATFORM IS BEING APPLIED TO QUICK DIAGNOSIS, TRACKING AND OUTBREAK SPREAD PREDICTION OF EMERGING AND DANGEROUS INFECTIOUS DISEASES RECURRING IN AFRICA, AS WELL AS BEING APPLIED TO SEPSIS PROGNOSIS.

Founder, Atherton Mutombwera, tells us how it all began *“As a child living in Zimbabwe I would think about finding a cure for HIV one day. I loved science and wanted to learn how to apply technology to medical challenges that people face in Africa. In 2013 I finished a Pharmacy undergraduate degree in South Africa and successfully completed a masters in Nanobiomedicine at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2015. The Ebola outbreak in Africa was happening at this time, so as part of my masters, I worked on developing a lateral flow test that could quickly diagnose Ebola. There was nothing like this on the market at that time. My focus was on innovating the way you make the test, so instead of using antibodies to make it, we used aptamers, which are cheaper to make, don’t require refrigeration and have a longer shelf life.”*

OXLEP BUSINESS SUPPORTS HUTANO FROM THE START

In 2018 Hutano Diagnostics Ltd was officially registered as a business with a board of directors in place. Atherton was looking for additional support to help him get things off the ground. According to Atherton, OxLEP played an essential part in starting up the business *“In the early stages we needed as much help as possible. We especially needed financial support to buy a machine for LFD manufacture. We didn’t have access to equipment in our lab that was specific for our purposes. So the first time we interacted with OxLEP was to apply for a grant through the Elevate programme. Since then we have received 2 grants from the ISfB programme who have also supported me to engage with research institutes which has helped me to establish collaborations which support my on going research.”*

“we have received 2 grants from the ISfB programme who have also supported me to engage with research institutes”

www.hutano-diagnostics.com





After Cloud is a purposeful business for social good. Their flagship app, 'After Cloud Moments' enables you to create a digital memory box – within the end of life and palliative care space – where you can preserve family history, relay important information to family and friends or create your daily journal.

Since launch in July 2020, founder Darren Evans has been working to develop the After Cloud brand even further, as well as creating new, exciting apps which are targeted at different demographics.

Darren explains “Our new app ‘Timelines’ gives you the ability to build a chronological representation of your life story together with a unique QR code, which can also be used on memorials, it’s the digital memorial dash of the future. More recently, we’ve been working on a version of an app called ‘Journals’ which provides support for children in the residential care sector. It’s very exciting to be moving into different verticals with our apps by empowering users with digital technology and positively assisting with their mental health and wellbeing, as we are now proving to be making a real difference”

BUILDING A GREAT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OXLEP PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Darren’s relationship with OxLEP started in 2020 when he engaged with the ISfB and eScalate business support programmes. “The support from OxLEP has been exceptional throughout. The ISfB ‘Go Create’ grant helped us create our first prototype. Then when we were ready to create our first commercial product, we applied and moved across to the **eScalate programme** for further support.

“The OxLEP team have been fantastic, and I have benefitted greatly from the peer support programme, which has enabled me to establish fantastic relationships, as well hold me to account on a week-by-week basis, in a non-judgemental, assistive and forward-thinking way. The facilitation of the programme has been exceptional, posing leading questions that make you think about what needs to be done to further evidence best practice or development, as well as providing market leading knowledge and insights. I highly recommend the Peer Networks support programme, not only for start-ups but for established businesses also.”

“The ISfB ‘Go Create’ grant helped us create our first prototype.”

myaftercloud.com



Thread *tales*



Thread Tales redefines hand-woven accessories and knitwear creating individual designs, hand-woven with unique and pioneering sustainable yarns of exceptional quality.

We are Oxford-based, but nurture meaningful, collaborative partnerships across our networks of indigenous Artisans in Nepal, Myanmar and India.

I have found being part OxLEP has provided me with a reassuring feeling that I am not alone in my journey as an entrepreneur and that I have the support of a local and extremely knowledgeable network. With the right business advice Thread Tales is navigating in a slightly different direction to where we were, which has been necessary due to the changing retail climate.

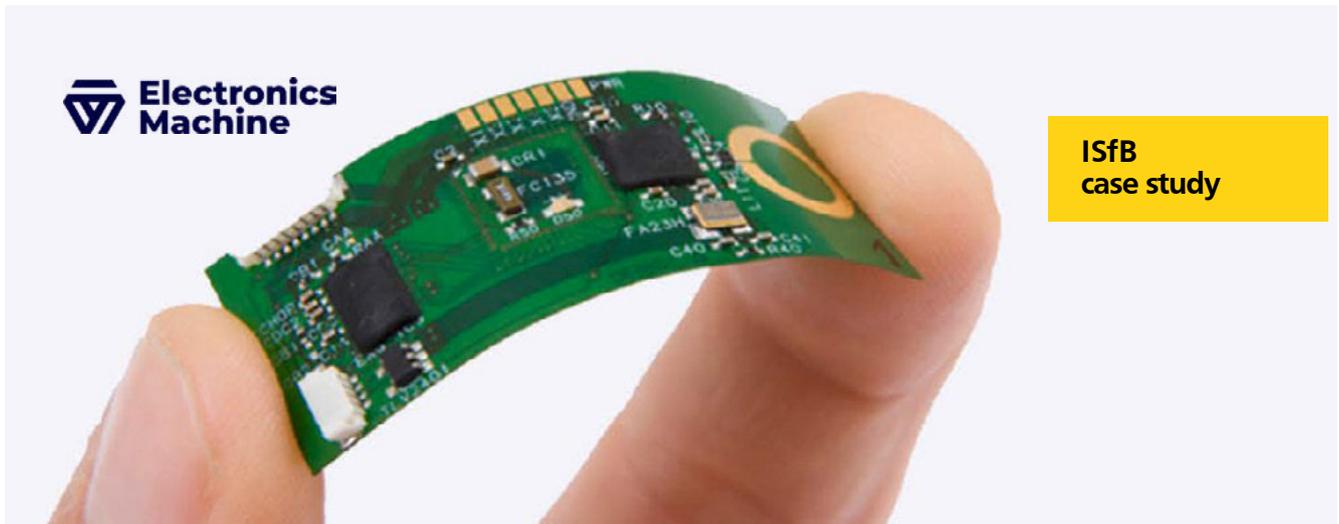
The coaching and mentoring I have received through one to one sessions has been invaluable. In particular, I have received advice on business strategy and import/export advice relating to a potentially exciting bespoke textile development contract with a Chinese company. I have learnt negotiating skills and business strategy around protecting my brand and knowhow.

During the **Foundations to Growth Programme**, I developed an important skill needed as an entrepreneur - I have learnt to focus on what matters most, and motivate my actions toward my end goals and aspirations.

“During the Foundations to Growth Programme, I developed an important skill needed as an entrepreneur”

www.threadtalescompany.com





In January of this year, after two years in the making, The Electronics Machine (EM) successfully launched the Beta stage of their innovative electronics PCB (printed circuit board) online design tool.

Ten years ago, founder Jon Hawkins, was a one-man band electronics designer, designing and manufacturing bespoke electronics for a range of new products. Having worked closely with a range of clients over the years, he made the decision to breakaway, take a risk and set up a new venture.

Jon explains: "Throughout my career as an electronics designer I always had a product idea in the back of my mind – to allow customers to easily design electronics themselves without asking any unnecessary, technical questions. Ordinarily if you're trying to develop a new product, with little electronics experience, you need to rely on an expert. Then it's very much smoke and mirrors.

The customer doesn't really know what's going on, they don't know when to test it, they hand over money and hope they get what they want.

So, I've built a website that gives customers the tools to manage this process themselves, using our online module drag and drop feature."

As a new start up, Jon knew he needed support, not only from a financial standpoint, but general business support to help guide him in the right direction as well.

"Working in Oxfordshire, I was aware of OxLEP Business and the great work they do to support businesses. I did a bit of research and was signposted to their Innovation Support for Business programme. The programme includes general business support and grant funding opportunities. I've never really thought of myself and my business idea as innovative really, but as our product is very unique and pretty technical, we fall into that category, which is great!"

Alongside his successful 'Go Create' grant application Jon also engaged with the OxLEP team for one-to-one business support and took part in the Peer Networks programme.

"Working in Oxfordshire, I was aware of OxLEP Business and the great work they do to support businesses"

www.electronicsmachine.com



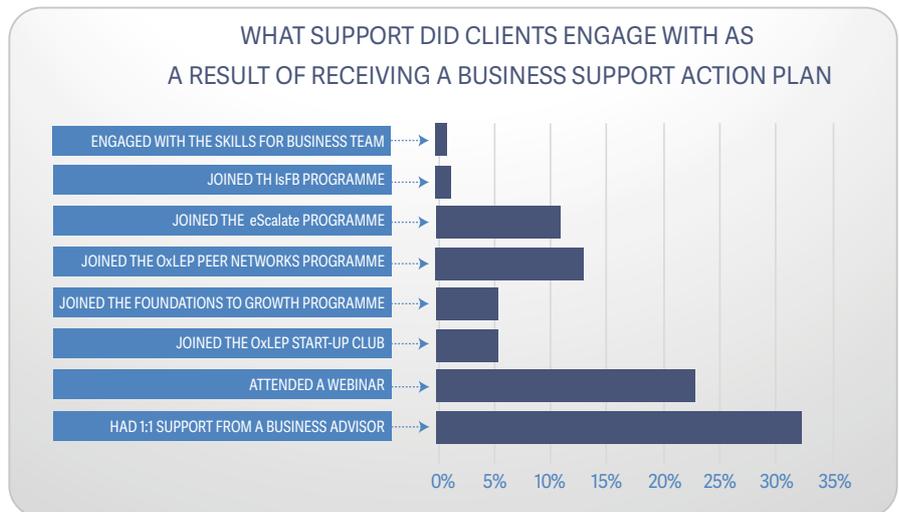
5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

OxLEP Business is continually learning about what is and is not working in terms of supporting businesses with their most challenging needs. We collected feedback from the businesses being supported throughout this period following webinars, one to one support and the more in-depth programmes. This feedback helps us to understand whether our support is helping to meet business needs or not and is summarised here.

Over 500 businesses who had received a Business Support Action Plan were asked for feedback in December 2021, and subsequently reminded to complete the feedback in January 2022. Only 50 clients completed the survey, of which 44 had engaged with the support offered in the Business Support Action Plan.

45 businesses that had engaged with one of our support services but had not completed the online evaluation were targeted in our telephone survey. They were asked similar questions to our online survey.

Of the businesses who provided feedback, 50% said the support they received had helped them to protect jobs.



The support that clients / businesses engaged with as result of receiving a Business Support Plan.

5.1 THE BUSINESS SUPPORT ACTION PLANS

88% of beneficiaries were satisfied with the Business Support Action Plan and the subsequent support they received. 88% also said that they were likely to recommend OxLEP to a friend – an 8% increase from the previous year. There were no reasons given for not finding the Business Support Action Plan useful.



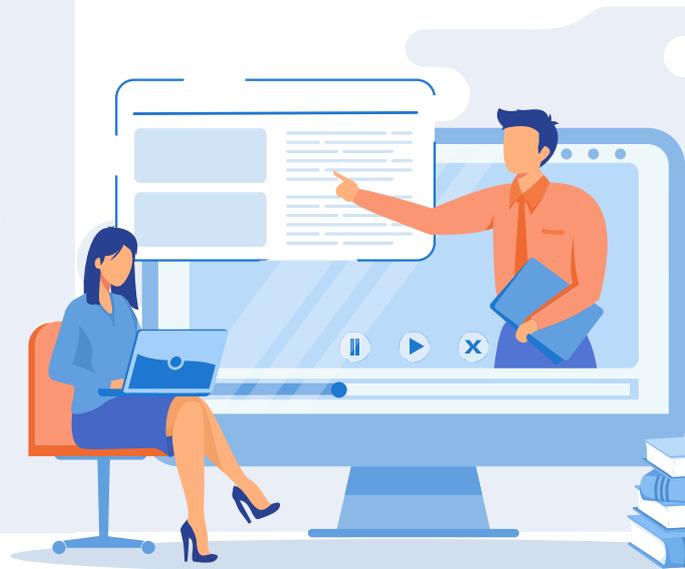


5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

5.2 WEBINARS

We delivered 70+ webinars in 2021/22. Clients that attended a webinar were sent a separate survey following their session. The results show an unprecedented level of value to clients from the support they received with 100% stating they would apply what they learnt to their business.

- *Sara Kedge delivered an impressive session on this increasingly important topic. She was very engaging, down to earth and provided lots of practical examples to support the presentation. The session was also interactive, clearly down to the way she had engaged and encouraged the audience.*
- *A very useful overview of the main topics that need consideration when looking at HR*
- *A great event that helped me understand the breadth of OxLEP services*
- *The webinar was informative without any assumptions, I didn't feel patronised and I came out feeling positive about what I needed to do next. Such great support and I have a one to one coming up so looking forward to that.*
- *Engaging, informative and with clear actions that we could take away and apply to our own organisations*



5.3 OxLEP START-UP CLUB

Over 50% of clients triaged in 2021/22 were pre-start or start up businesses. We ran the OxLEP Start Up Club series over 4 cycles in the year. This was targeted at individuals who were thinking of starting their own business, or those who were looking for some help with pivoting their business in light of the pandemic. We covered a range of topics that reflected demand and encouraged individuals to have a 1:1 session with an advisor on completion of the series. Sessions were recorded and made available for later viewing.



A great introduction to the Start-Up series. Introduces the basic concepts and builds a good foundation from which to progress.

We also delivered a face to face Start-Up Bootcamp for pre-start and early-stage businesses covering the basics of business planning, business structure and taxes, using social media to win your first customers, and business planning for growth. Of the businesses that attended, 100% were Extremely satisfied with the content on the day.



Informative webinar with lots of easy take aways. It helped that it was live so that questions could be answered live.



Great workshop - we really enjoyed it and plenty of valuable information and insights. Meeting the mentors and peers face to face was fantastic.



An invaluable day packed full of information and useful hints and tips to guide you through complex processes, so grateful this service is available!



Fantastic event providing excellent expert knowledge for those new to the business world.



Really great experience learning and networking. A great opportunity to push my business forward!

5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

5.4 ONE TO ONES WITH A BUSINESS ADVISOR

To make it as easy as possible for businesses to access support and find new opportunities, we offered one to one sessions with an experienced business advisor. During this contract we increased our 1:1 advisor team from 3 to 20 expert advisors, specialising in all areas of business need. Clients were provided with a 1:1 brochure to choose an advisor to meet their needs.

Our 1:1 support has proven valuable to over 150 businesses, providing more than 300 hours of support with an advisor.



The advice from the Advisor has rung in my ears many times since I spoke with them. Some of the advice felt like a stretch at the time but is now really helpful. It was great to be able to speak out loud with someone as starting your own business as a sole trader can be overwhelming at times.



Given me a clearer understanding about how to market my company's services.



It provided a clear path for not only persevering but gave me direction and clarity on what to do next.



We have had two sessions with our Non-Exec, helping us to really focus on what we want to achieve, and the immediate action needed to get us there. We knew where we wanted the business to be longer term but he really helped us break down what needed to be done in the next 12 weeks to work towards that. Our second 4 hour session was focused purely on expansion and looking at all the options available to us and the effect each would have on both the financials and operations. Senior business people can find it hard to stop the merry-go-round and spend the time on the strategic side of their business."

5.5 NED FOR A DAY

We introduced our 'NED for a day' support in April 2021 and it has proved popular and impactful for an intentionally small number of businesses. During the programme our "NED" Advisor carries out a Business Review with the company representatives for 2 hours and then provides a further 6 hours of support over the next few months on agreed priorities which help them to grow.

The vast and varied experience of our Business Advisors means we are in a great position to be able to offer businesses the type of insight they would receive if they had their own board of Non-Executive Directors!

NED for a day has provided eleven specific businesses with 8 hours of Advisor support where they can help to create jobs, or significantly safeguard jobs.



5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

5.6 FOUNDATIONS TO GROWTH PROGRAMME

Our Foundations to Growth Programme continued from 2020/21 and was delivered 4 times. It has helped businesses to gain new perspectives, inspire new ideas and change their way of thinking. Businesses leave the programme with access to a new support network, new tools for collaboration, improved leadership and management skills, and inspiration and motivation to grow. 20 businesses were supported throughout the year.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE SESSION?

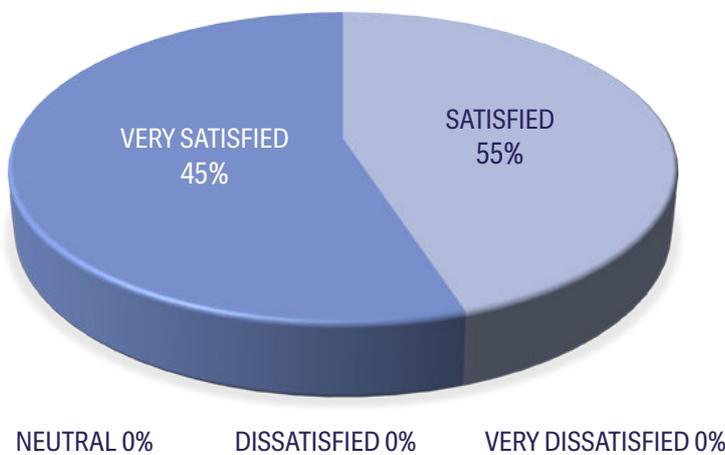


Figure 4: Shows the satisfaction level with the Foundations to Growth sessions



A very insightful session and opportunities to network with other businesses. Enjoyed the workshop and look forward to attending more in the near future



A quick email of thanks for the last six weeks, it has been really worthwhile, not just from the standpoint of engaging with fellow entrepreneurs and business owners in Oxfordshire, but it has also given me a much wider appreciation and understanding of the range of support and experience available through OxLEP and the 1-2-1 sessions.

5.7 MENTORING

In the summer of 2021, we introduced Mentoring as an offer to support Oxfordshire Business leaders. After a slow start this proved popular with twenty-one business leaders accessing 6 hours of time with a mentor over 12 weeks.



The mentoring support I have had has been invaluable. When I first met my mentor, I was at a very low ebb, worn down and somewhat 'shell-shocked', having spent two years' trying hold everything together through the pandemic. My mentor has helped me sort out a few core problems. He has also helped me identify some skills I am lacking, and which we are now going to focus on during the remaining sessions.

The 1:1 support has helped to refocus my attention on the health of the business, away from the day to day demands, and consolidate my efforts of the past 18 months in growing the business. It has also helped me to navigate some of the challenges that the Omicron variant has imposed on the business. In particular, I have found my business mentor to be invaluable in ensuring I remain focussed on my team, their well-being, productivity and feasibility.

5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

5.8 PEER NETWORKS

Our Peer Networks programme for businesses with 5 or more staff, funded by Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), supported 152 businesses. Each Peer Network programme ran for 10-12 weeks and met online with groups of around 10 business leaders who helped tackle each other's challenges by sharing ideas and experience. All the meetings were facilitated to ensure there was active learning and every group member also received 121 help from business experts of their choice to work with them on specific issues.

Over **87%** of participants were satisfied or very satisfied with the programme

Over **90%** were satisfied / very satisfied with the quality of input from other businesses in their peer network

Over **92%** would recommend OxLEP's support to a friend or colleague?

We also 'mirrored' the BEIS funded Peer Networks programme with identical support for businesses with 2 to 5 staff. Two of these Peer Networks operated supporting 18 smaller businesses.



Today has been my last day in the OXLEP Peer Network program and it has been an excellent experience. I recommend this to all SMEs. The 1-2-1s are brilliant. The networking has been fantastic. Thank you very much



6.0 LEARNING FROM 2021 AND PLANNING AHEAD

The OxLEP Business and Skills Teams continue to provide a broad range of support to Oxfordshire businesses. OxLEP is always listening and learning, and the support is continually evolving, some programmes come to an end as others start. Through all of our engagement we have been asking client businesses about what support they would value in the future. Common requests include:

- Ongoing mentoring and business advice.
- Face to Face networking and events would be such a welcome addition to the programme
- Support setting up apprenticeship schemes or internships
- 1:1 coaching and support, financial advice, business planning
- How to promote online sales
- 1:1 coaching/mentoring, how to get ready for investment
- General business management advice and introductions to industry contacts and peers
- Fund raising, door opening to relevant investment circles
- More networking

6.1 BUSINESS AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

It has long been recognised that engaging businesses with support is difficult. Businesses try to solve their own problems and often only look for help when they feel they really need it, which is why understanding their needs is so important.

“Businesses often prefer to take advice from trusted sources and they look to their existing networks, such as their peers or their accountants, when taking advice. Businesses also usually take advice at trigger points, such as when faced with particular challenges requiring change, including both competitive pressures and opportunities.”

(Business Productivity Review, November 2019, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy¹)

OxLEP Business maintains a strong focus on raising awareness of, and engagement with, its support programmes.

6.2 PROVIDING ENOUGH SUPPORT

Some businesses have required specialist advice that can't be covered in a 1 hour session. Whilst we were able to offer more in depth support to growing businesses through the mentoring and NED Programmes, finding the right balance of support for pre-start and start-up businesses that may not help achieve 'the funders' targets has been challenging.



¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/844506/business-productivity-review.pdf

6.0 LEARNING FROM 2021 AND PLANNING AHEAD

6.3 INCREASING COLLABORATION

In February 2021, OxLEP Business undertook an exercise to map out the Oxfordshire Business Support Landscape. This activity proved invaluable in reinforcing the opportunity for collaboration across the County. Highlights of this improved collaboration were:

- OxLEP Business formed a Business Support Round-Table of public and private organisations from around the County, which could share learning, inform strategy and action planning, and plan collaborative delivery
- West Oxfordshire District Council and OxLEP Business collaborated on a combined grant and 1:1 support scheme for 90 businesses still recovering from the impacts of COVID-19 and restrictions

6.4 VALUE OF THE OFFER

Due to the funding cycles of business support programmes, the value of support on offer towards the end of the programme reduced. Towards the end of the funded programmes the Business Support Action Plans were updated to signpost to more generic business support and webinar recordings, but we have seen customers coming back to us looking for more than we can give, in particular, interest in the mentoring and NED Programmes.

6.5 A GLIMPSE AT OxLEP SUPPORT IN 2022 /23

OxLEP Business's support in 2022/23 includes a range of products and services to meet business needs and support them with the development that is relevant to their ambition.

For instance, 52% of all businesses triaged in 2021/22 highlighted a problem with communications and marketing. Support this year therefore includes an increased focus on this area and looks to address these challenges through webinars, interactive workshops and peer to peer group activities including our new "Communications Zero to Hero" networks.

The ERDF funded programmes, eScalate and ISfB have also been extended to offer support throughout 2022/23.

The eScalate programme continues to deliver ERDF funded support focused on two specific areas: social enterprises (including social enterprises, enterprising charities, social entrepreneurs and purposeful businesses) and scale up businesses.



The Innovation Support for Business programme provides dedicated innovation support and access to a range of services and innovation grant funding. This includes:

- A diverse expert team of Innovation Advisors to meet the needs of innovative businesses.
- Two live Innovation Strategy workshops in central Oxford delivered by leading experts.
- An exciting programme of workshops is being developed which will help businesses with key innovation topics and skills that will help them to be more successful in their innovation
- Innovation Catapult visits

Business support also includes:

- Webinars on key business topics
- One to One advice with members from our team of more than 20 experienced Business Advisors
- Strategic Business Reviews with an expert
- Mentoring for Business Leaders
- Workshops and group programmes to support business Start-Up, Growth and Leadership Development

OxLEP Business is also delivering a range of grant funding schemes for Oxfordshire businesses including:

- The Cherwell Business Adaptation fund; £450k for business in Cherwell – now closed for applications
- GoCreate Grants; part of the ISfB programme with £400k to develop innovative products and services
- The Visitor Economy Grant scheme; £620k for businesses trading in the Visitor Economy – applications close on 5th November 2022
- The Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Grant scheme; £200k to help businesses to remove barriers for Apprentices starting or completing their Apprenticeship (applications welcome).

The Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Grant scheme is a part of the Social Contract, a new £1.7m programme of activity that aims to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on health and wellbeing for individuals, local communities and businesses. The programme aims to support those experiencing unemployment and barriers to employment, education and training, and provide support to Oxfordshire's key business sectors, experiencing skills and labour shortages.

Through the new Social Contract programme, OxLEP Skills are working to support:

- Apprenticeship Levy-paying businesses in Oxfordshire to 'Grow Your Own' talent within the county and unlock their 25% unused Levy funds, with a series of expert 'Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Advisors' on hand to offer support and free impartial advice. Thanks to £163k in pledges by JDE and University of Oxford, the training for two Apprentice Healthcare Assistants at local GP Surgeries and a Sports Coach Apprentice at a Primary School in Kidlington has been fully paid for.
- The 'Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Grant Scheme' which enables employers to apply on behalf of their Apprentice/s a grant of £1k-£1.5k (up to £3k in exceptional circumstances). The grant can be used to help remove any barriers and Apprentice might be experiencing to either starting or completing their training. Grants can be used for non-statutory items such as travel costs, Ofsted registered childcare and IT equipment.
- 'OxGrow' is a new virtual mentoring platform to introduce experienced business volunteers to individuals looking for support to find a job or change career, to help them with areas such as developing resilience, CV writing and preparing for interviews.

OxLEP Business and OxLEP Skills are committed to supporting Oxfordshire's wide range of businesses, ensuring that its resilient economy continues as one of the strongest engines for growth in the UK.

Start your business support journey with OxLEP by completing the Business Support Tool at <https://www.oxlepbusiness.co.uk/oxlep-business-support-tool>

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