

OxLEP 'SIGHT' Impact Report

Start, Innovate, Grow and Help to Thrive



**Reflecting on the impacts
from six years of support for
Oxfordshire businesses**

OCTOBER 2016 TO MARCH 2023

OCTOBER 2023

Foreward

The future looks bright for Oxfordshire's businesses.

Oxfordshire's small and medium sized businesses have capable leaders, they have diverse networks, they have a clear sense of purpose, and WE have support available to help them to achieve their ambitions or overcome challenges.

Amazingly, we have delivered nearly £29m worth of support to Oxfordshire businesses, including £4.8m in grant funding and nearly 18,000 of hours of advice, guidance and up-skilling. This impact report demonstrates our hard work and commitment to supporting businesses over the last 6 years through a time of change and many challenges. We are proud that we have been, and continue to be there for every small and medium sized business based or trading in Oxfordshire.

We have passionately supported hundreds of entrepreneurs and start-ups, including our Ukrainian guests who want to establish a business in the UK. Whether it is the achievement of Oxfordshire's Apprentices, new foreign investment or businesses innovating and growing, we are constantly delighted by the successes as illustrated in our case studies; whether they are a purpose driven business such as Ducky Zebra, an innovation business such as Hutano Diagnostics, or a fast growing business such as 5C Consulting.

I encourage you to read this full report, look up the businesses featured, and explore other Oxfordshire businesses when you next make a purchase or seek a new supplier.

Oxfordshire is home to some amazing small and medium sized businesses. We look forward to supporting you and your business in the future.

Helen Brind
Growth Hub Manager
OxLEP Business

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1.0 SUMMARY

There are over 43,000 registered companies in Oxfordshire, at least 99% of which are SMEs. There are also an estimated 50,000 sole-traders. Amongst these are budding entrepreneurs, high-tech university spin-outs, builders, bakers and everything in between. Some are social enterprises, charities or otherwise purpose-driven. OxLEP Business and Skills support is available to all of them, and in this impact report we collectively refer to them as 'businesses'.

OxLEP Business and Skills overarching aims are to:

1. Support Oxfordshire SMEs to start, grow and thrive as part of a: *'vibrant, sustainable, inclusive, world-leading economy – driven by innovation, enterprise and research excellence'*; and,
2. Support businesses to recruit skilled people in a county characterised by very low unemployment.
3. Ensuring each and every person gets better access to employment and training.

These aims have been delivered against a back-drop of business needs in a continually changing business environment. Reflecting over this six-year time period, when so much has changed, it is easy to forget that in April 2017 Oxfordshire businesses were operating in the context of the UK voting to leave the European Union and Brexit was an as yet un-predictable threat. Yet at the same time, OxLEP had successfully secured European funding for the ERDF Elevate start-up and growth support programme and the ERDF Innovation Support for Business (ISfB) programme. The ERDF eScalate programme and the ESF funded Skills for Business Programme arrived soon after.



The mentoring I received was excellent, the highly skilled and experienced mentor helped me to work through some important questions, refine my goals, action plan and assess risk, making my business more sustainable.

The effects of Brexit on Oxfordshire businesses continued through until (and beyond) the UK's withdrawal from the EU in January 2020 and was swiftly followed by perhaps the most challenging period ever for businesses, the COVID-19 Pandemic. Some Oxfordshire businesses closed altogether, many struggled but survived, but thankfully many thrived.

Oxfordshire's businesses had proven themselves resilient, a capability that would again prove essential as the war in Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis created new pressures.

Throughout this time the OxLEP Business and Skills teams have been putting businesses need's first and providing much needed support to help them to develop their staff, innovate and embrace growth.

This has been a time of change, for both businesses and for OxLEP, evolving together and responding to challenges. The European funded programmes may have come to an end, and celebrating the impacts they enabled was the catalyst for this six-year reflection. However, the legacy of those programmes and the new funding and support that is in place for businesses, means that there is plenty to be excited about.



Words cannot describe how satisfied we are with the quality of support we received. Without this support, it would have been almost impossible for us to evolve and continue to support the local businesses as affectively as we are able to now. We had a few upheavals to overcome with committee changes during the project which affected our processes and administration, and OxLEP were so helpful in guiding us and ensuring we met the requirements.



This report showcases how OxLEP Business and Skills have responded to the needs of businesses through these changing times, and shares some of the stories which describe the impact of that support on the Oxfordshire businesses. Between April 2017 and March 2023, the OxLEP Business and Skills teams have:



I have been delighted with the quality of support provided from the workshops, events and the mentoring. It has provided me with clarity that has allowed me to drive my business forward. I found the advice incredibly useful.

2.0 THE BUSINESSES NEEDS

OxLEP Business and OxLEP Skills have always had strong links and networks into the business community, with a fully representative OxLEP Board and specific Board Advisory Groups. Staff and their networks are continually seeking to understand the needs of the business community they serve.

In July 2020, OxLEP Business decided to transform the way in which we collect insight on business needs, and since then have been carrying out what is perhaps the longest running Oxfordshire specific business survey. Actively collecting finger-on-the-pulse insight on what Oxfordshire businesses need to support them with their challenges or ambitions.

2.1 COMPARISON OF BUSINESS NEEDS

2578 of the businesses supported during this time, 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 continually adapt the support offered over this period.

In Oxfordshire, a place famous globally for its research and innovation, it might be expected that the support businesses would need most would be 'raising finance for growth' or 'intellectual property'.

Businesses have always been asked if they have a specific need for support. These free text responses usually include businesses looking for grants for their stage of business development and often reflect the economic context at the time. These business needs have been aggregated with all data since July 2020 and are summarised in the graph below.

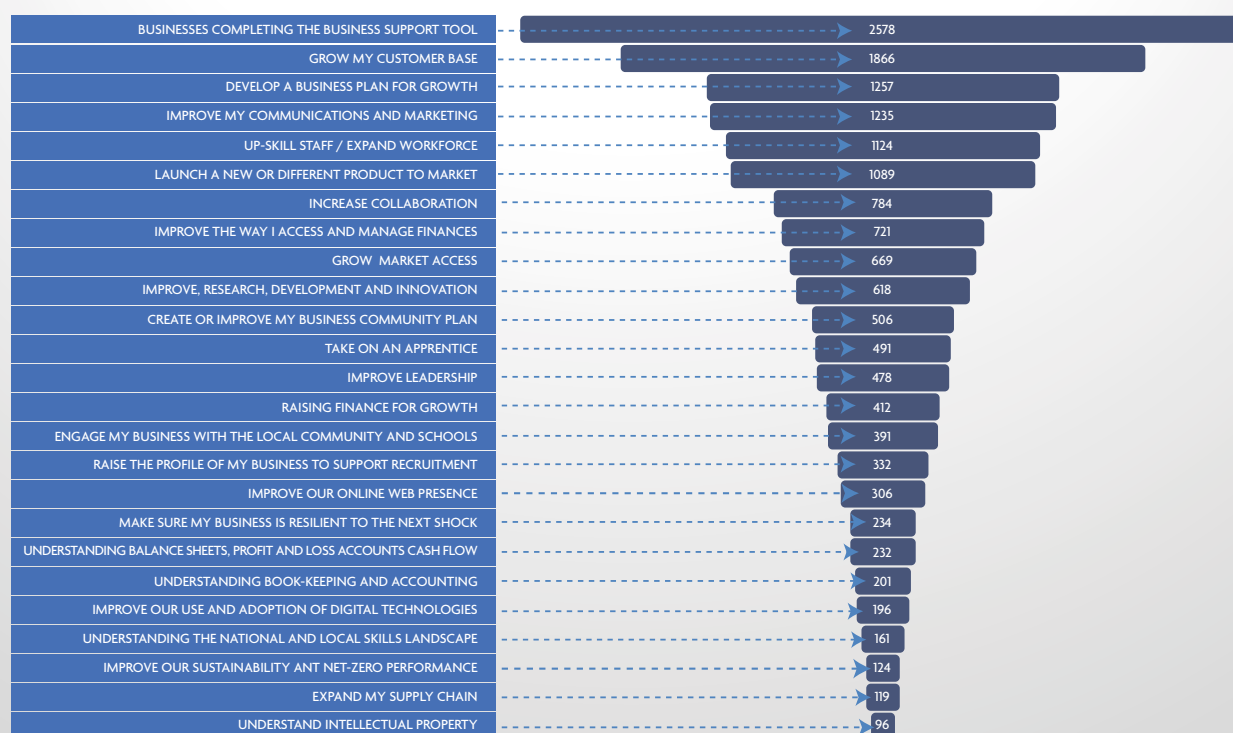
Open to any Oxfordshire SME Business, the OxLEP Business Support Tool (BST) is the easy access front door to the invaluable fully funded support available. Since July 2020, a total of 2578 businesses have completed the Business Support Tool, providing information to allow their needs and ambitions to be triaged and a support plan to be provided.

Hundreds, if not thousands of additional businesses have also engaged with support having connected outside of the Business Support Tool. From this breadth of engagement, it is clear that entrepreneurs, business owners and business leaders engage with OxLEP Business for a wide range of reasons.

That hasn't proven the case. In fact, the five most frequently identified business needs, by a factor of 2+ over 'raising finance for growth', are:

- Grow my customer base,
- Develop a business plan for growth,
- Improve my communications and marketing,
- Upskill staff / expand workforce,
- Launch a new or different product to market.

BUSINESS NEEDS IDENTIFIED, JULY 2020 TO MARCH 2023



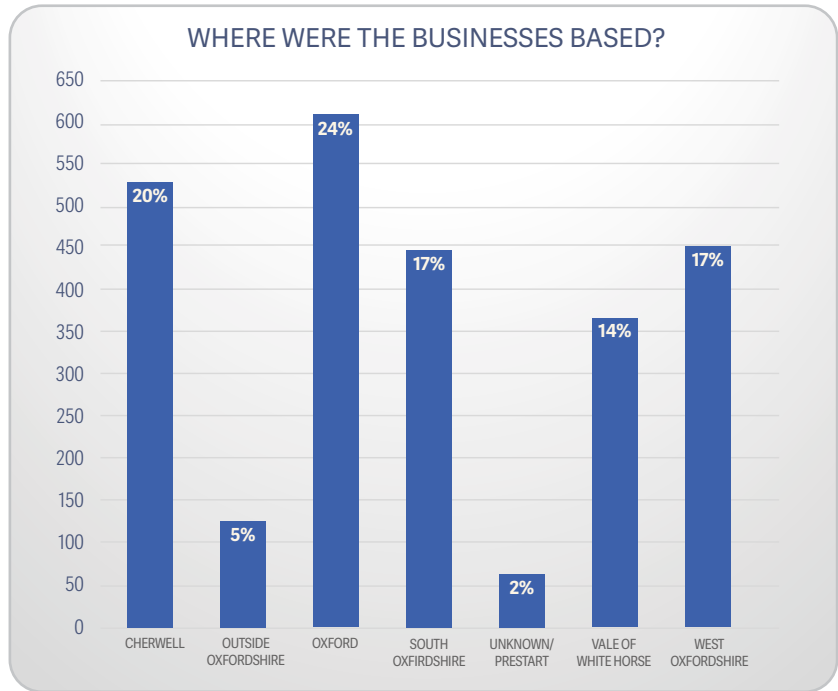
The business needs highlighted through the Business Support Tool.

2.0 THE BUSINESSES NEEDS

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.



2.3 WHAT SECTORS WERE THE BUSINESSES IN?

Businesses were asked what sector they were in and the wide variety of answers demonstrates that Oxfordshire has a very broad set of SME businesses.



2.0

THE BUSINESSES SUPPORTED

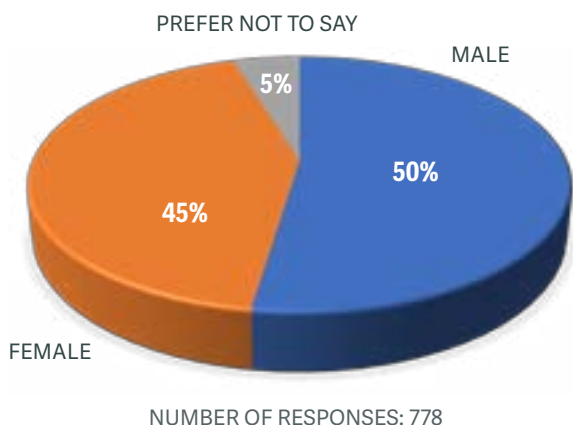
2.4 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY OF THOSE SUPPORTED

It is a fundamental belief of OxLEP Business and Skills that every Oxfordshire SME business and each and every person should feel comfortable and able to engage with the support available. Throughout this six-year period, a range of steps were taken to make the support offer more accessible and more inclusive (see Support Provided). The evidence suggests these steps had a positive effect, with an increasing diversity of those engaging with OxLEP Business support over the period in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, neurodiversity and disability.

The equality and diversity information on the people supported (where data is available) in the most recent year (April 22 to March 23) is shared below.

DIVERSITY INFORMATION APRIL 22 - MARCH 23

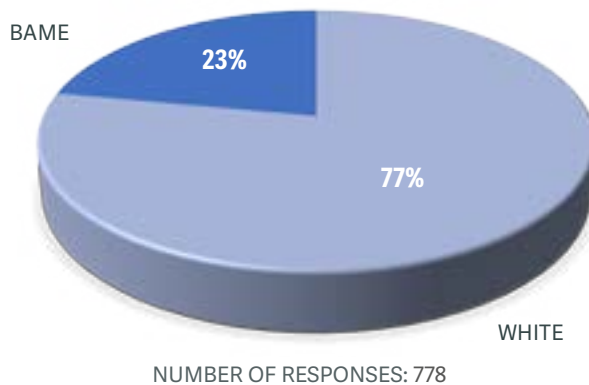
The chart below shows the number of Male and Female business applicants with a reasonably even split



ETHNIC GROUP

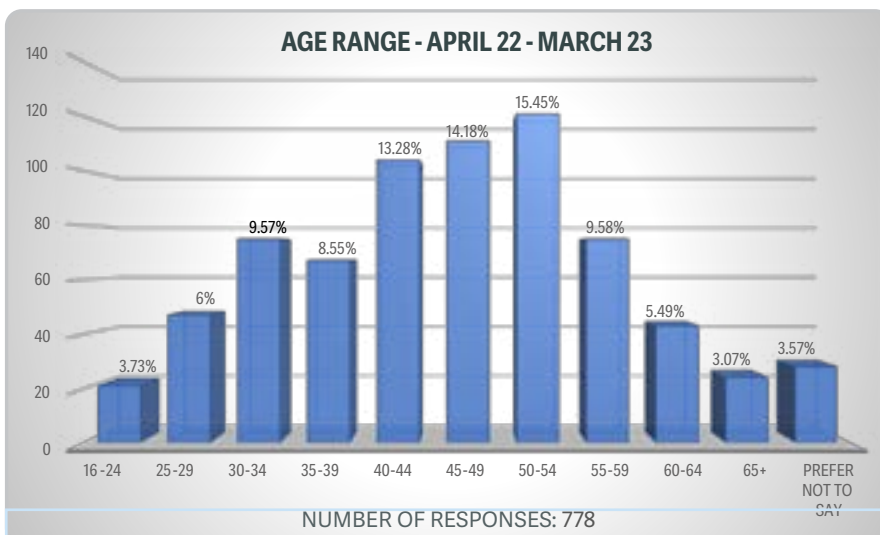
In 2020/21 14% of OxLEP Business clients were Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic or preferred not to say. By 2022/23, efforts to engage more diverse business leaders had delivered positive results with 78.6% being white and 23% declaring as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic or preferred not to say. The chart below shows the Ethnicity of the business leaders completing the BST for 2022/23.

ETHNICITY DATA - APRIL 22 - MARCH 23



AGE BRACKET

The chart below shows the different age ranges of the business leaders completing the BST for 2022/23.

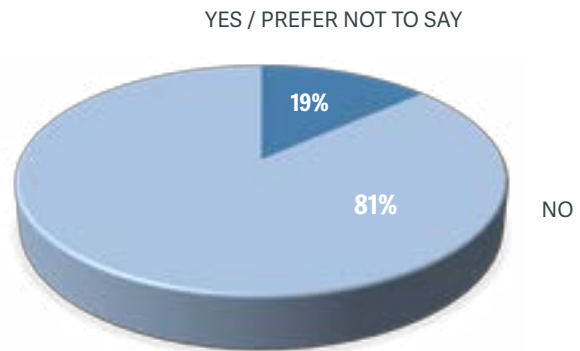


2.0

THE BUSINESSES SUPPORTED

PHYSICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS OR ILLNESS

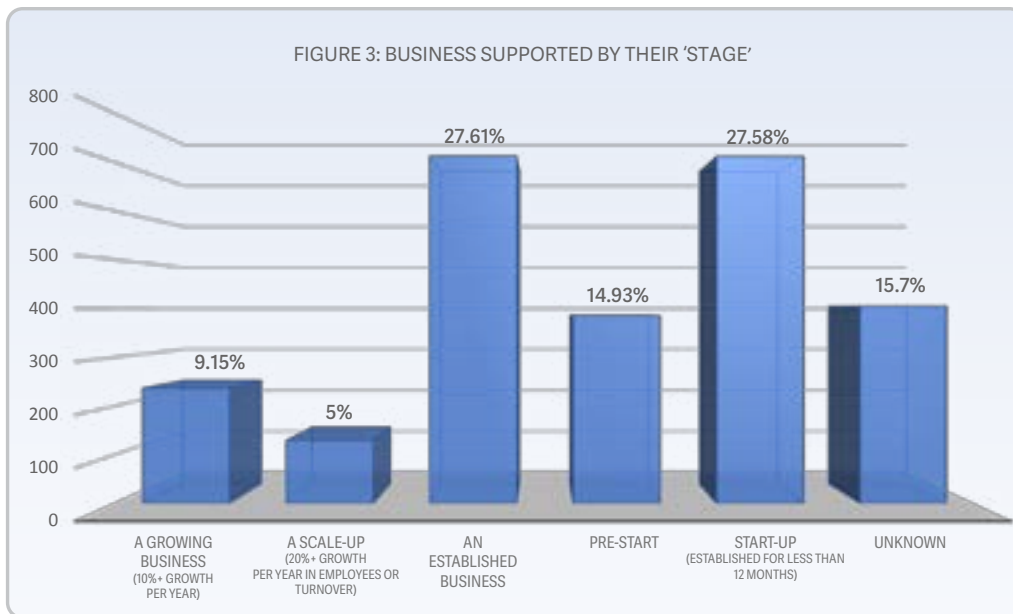
Of the business leaders completing the BST for 2022/23 who answered the question regarding, 'Do you consider yourself to have a disability?', 19% said 'Yes' or 'Prefer not to say', with 81% saying 'No'.



NUMBER OF RESPONSES: 778

2.2 THE 'STAGE' OF GROWTH FOR BUSINESSES SUPPORTED

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



“

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

As previously highlighted, OxLEP Business and OxLEP Skills have been supporting business needs in a continually changing economic environment. Over this six-year period the technologies to support one to one and one to many interactions have also transformed the way that people want and expect to engage. Originally almost all support was delivered in-person, then during the COVID-19 restrictions, support was instantly and entirely moved online. A new-normal has now evolved where there is a good blend of online support and face to face interaction, with both approaches demonstrating their value.

Through intelligence led triage the OxLEP Business and OxLEP Skills teams have worked smarter and faster to support businesses in Oxfordshire. Elements of the support have been accessible to all businesses, other support has been 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 greatest ambitions and their most difficult challenges.

The support provided through an integrated Growth Hub and a range of EU funded programmes included the following activities:

Supporting budding entrepreneurs, start-ups, established, growing, innovative and scale up businesses with one to one and one to many activities,

Providing every client (since July 2020) with a bespoke Business Support Action Plan which included signposting to:

- The most appropriate support offered by OxLEP, e.g Skills for Business, eScalate and ISfB
- Helpful information on business recovery planning
- Relevant Grant schemes
- Their local District Council Economic Development team

One to one support – light touch, through to intensive support where required

Specialist innovation advice and guidance,

A Foundations to Growth Programme supporting businesses ready for growth,

Strategic support from Non-Exec Directors 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,

Support with Apprentices and other workplace skills development

A wide range of grant schemes funded through European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund, the Government's Getting Building fund and other UK Government sources.

“

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

”

“

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

”



3.0 THE SUPPORT PROVIDED

3.1 ELEVATE

The Elevate 'Oxfordshire Business Support - Start-Up and Growth' project ran from October 2016 to February 2020. Its overall goals were to:

- 'promote entrepreneurship by facilitating and fostering the creation of new businesses; and,
- 'support the creation and extension of advanced capacities for products, services and development'

3.2 INNOVATION SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS

OxLEP's **Innovation Support for Business** (ISfB) programme (April 2017 to April 2023) was designed to drive and commercialise the innovative business ideas of Oxfordshire's SMEs and entrepreneurs. The programme provided dedicated Innovation Specialists to connect and advise, as well as an extensive and varied programme of webinars and workshops on innovation-related themes. This collaborative approach allowed the team to offer Go-Create grants, the best guidance from experienced advisors, connecting people, businesses, universities and research centres. The programme also supported improvements to research and innovation infrastructure in Oxfordshire for the longer term.



We have benefitted hugely from the grants, without which I am not sure we'd still be in existence. Through lockdown, it helped us realise the full potential of reaching our parents and teachers online. Through that expansion, with delegates taking the resource from our online training to their relatives who were living with dementia, we were asked to develop a separate resource for people living with dementia and the second grant enabled us to do that. These new products will help put the company on an entirely different level of effectiveness. We will be able to reach new markets, not only in the UK but internationally. Thank you ISfB Projects for the grants! They have been put to excellent use.

3.3 ESCALATE

The eScalate programme (January 2019 – April 2023) supported:

Enterprises for social good* who needed support to develop new business models, higher-quality products, processes, services or specific products to boost productivity or resource efficiency.

SME scale-ups who were looking to increase market share, increase revenues, increase staff and add value to their business.

Start-up and growth SMEs (the eScalate programme was expanded to offer additional support to all eligible SMEs during COVID-19)

* Enterprises for social good exist in the space between traditional charities and mainstream businesses. These purposeful businesses are committed to enabling positive social and environmental impact.

Scale ups are growing businesses that are ready or are preparing to pitch to investors, looking to grow their workforce, launch new products or diversify.

OxLEP, delivered a programme built around 1:1 support with specialist advisors, webinars and workshops on key business topics and facilitated peer groups. The programme also offered grants to businesses.



The eScalate programme was hugely beneficial to us, not just from some of the workshops we were able to attend but also the 1:1 support with specialists in various key areas of running a business. The fast-track to investment workshop was hugely insightful and will play a big part in our future, whilst the digital skills session also helped to narrow down our focus on certain marketing channels which has significantly increased our web traffic and leads.



3.0 THE SUPPORT PROVIDED

3.4 SKILLS FOR BUSINESS PROGRAMME

To support Oxfordshire SME businesses in navigating the skills landscape, OxLEP jointly funded, with the European Social Fund (ESF), the 'Skills for Business' (S4B) programme. S4B offered SME's 12 hours of support through the creation of a Skills Needs Assessment to identify the business learning and development gaps. Participants in the programme were supported to produce a training and development plan, which could include recruiting an Apprentice, Intern or upskilling current staff. It also offered local market intelligence to support workforce growth and workshops/conferences.

3.5 BUSINESS RESILIENCE GRANTS (COVID-19)

OxLEP created a business resilience fund of £795,000 to help support businesses impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. The fund was designed to complement the range of support available from HM Government and provide eligible businesses with unmatched grants ranging from £1,000 - £10,000.

Revenue grants of up to £5,000, or capital grants of up to £10,000 could be used to support Sole Traders and SMEs with activities which aimed to:

- **Build business resilience.**
- **Strengthen growth.**
- **Safeguard jobs**

The funding of £795,000 was made up of £290,000 Revenue and £505,000 Capital.

3.6 OXFORDSHIRE KICKSTART GRANTS (COVID-19)

The Kickstart Grants (September 2020 to March 2021) offered 100% revenue grants of £1,000 to £3,000 to support access to specialist advice or services to enable SMEs to adapt or pivot their business in response to the impacts of the pandemic. This additional funding of £306,000 was made available via the ERDF eScalate programme. The grant funding was split into two streams:

- funding specifically aimed at tourism and hospitality-related businesses that depend on income from the visitor economy; and
- funding available to any small or medium-sized business impacted by the pandemic.

3.7 THE PEER NETWORKS PROGRAMME

The Peer Networks programme was a national peer-to-peer networking programme for SME leaders that want to grow and develop their organisation for future success. The programme brought together diverse groups of business leaders so that they could discuss their business ambitions or challenges. These collaborative problem-solving sessions helped business leaders gain and reflect on valuable feedback from their peers and identify practical solutions to overcome them.

3.8 EU TRANSITION SUPPORT

OxLEP Business worked with Newable to offer EU Transition Advisory Support to Oxfordshire SMEs following the UK leaving the European Union.

- **422 businesses** received light touch EU Transition support
- **192 businesses** received intensive 1-2-1 EU Transition support

3.0 THE SUPPORT PROVIDED

3.9 THE BUSINESS INVESTMENT FUND (1)

The Oxfordshire Business Investment Fund, launched in March 2021 and completed in December 2021, was 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.

3.10 THE OxLEP MARKETPLACE

In November 2021, OxLEP Business held its third Marketplace event; the first since COVID-19.

This event brought together over 100 businesses that OxLEP had been supporting over the previous 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](#)



3.11 THE CHERWELL BUSINESS ADAPTATION FUND

OxLEP Business administered the Cherwell District Council's Cherwell Business Adaptation Fund (CBAF) of £450,000 in 2022.

CBAF grants were available to businesses who had been trading within the Cherwell area for at least one full financial year. CBAF grants ranged between £5,000 and £20,000 for capital and/or revenue projects that delivered tangible outcomes aligned to accelerate investment to strengthen business performance, provide supply chain resilience, transition to net zero, drive technology and innovation adoption and increase sales and market share.

- Grant awards had to deliver against at least one of the CBAF priorities:
- increased sustainable job creation.
- increased R&D and product development
- diversification into new business markets
- increased exporting capacity (manufacturing, production, and services)
- de-risked/strengthened supply chains with a focus on UK supply chains.
- transition to trade globally including new EU requirements.
- successful transition of business operations to net zero carbon emissions and lower carbon footprint.

3.0 THE SUPPORT PROVIDED

3.12 THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

The Social Contract programme is a £1.7million programme of activity funded by the Government's Contain Outbreak Management Fund via Oxfordshire County Council and led by OxLEP Skills. The aim is to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic related to the impacts of health and wellbeing through unemployment, barriers to employment, education and training. OxLEP Skills has created a series of initiatives to help support those most impacted i.e. young people (aged 16-24 years), minority ethnic communities, those furthest from the labour market and the over 50s. Through the 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.
- '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.

3.13 THE VISITOR ECONOMY GRANT SCHEME

The Visitor Economy, comprising retail, tourism, leisure, arts, culture, and heritage, is a vital component of Oxfordshire's economy and supports good health and wellbeing for local communities as well as visitors. Pre-Covid, Oxfordshire had a thriving visitor economy which attracted 30 million visitors a year generating £2.5 billion for the local economy and supporting 40,000 jobs.

Whilst the visitor economy has been decimated globally due to COVID 19, with huge implications for national and local economies as well as individual businesses, jobs, means of travel, and wellbeing, it is now beginning the process of resetting itself and recovery. The Visitor Economy Renaissance Programme was designed to help assist the recovery of this important economic sector.

A grant pot of £600,000 with grants ranging from £5,000 through to £24,999 per business was available in 2022/23.

3.14 THE OXFORDSHIRE APPRENTICESHIP GRANT SCHEME

Part of the Social Contract programme, the Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Grant scheme was managed by OxLEP Business and was available to any business to apply for, to use in supporting an Oxfordshire resident to start an Apprenticeship or support retention, to enable an Apprentice to complete their Apprenticeship. The grant scheme with a funding pot of £100,000 was open from August 2022 to May 2023.

“

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

”



3.0 THE SUPPORT PROVIDED

3.15 THE BUSINESS INVESTMENT FUND (2)

In 2022, OxLEP managed to secure additional funding to launch a second Business Investment Fund (BIF) opportunity. Grants were available to existing businesses that could demonstrate an economic benefit within Oxfordshire. BIF grants ranged from £5,000 - £24,999, for capital projects that could deliver tangible outcomes that align to driving economic recovery, growth, and job creation. Applicants who received a BIF grant in the first BIF grant programme (in FY 2021-2) were not eligible to receive another BIF grant in this programme. The Business Investment Fund grant pot was £220,000.



The BIF grant required each business to commit to deliver against 1 or more of the following 8 outcomes:

- **Employment increase or safeguarding in the applicant enterprise**
- **Support job and apprenticeship placements**
- **Net Zero transition**
- **Introduction of products new to the firm or new to the market**
- **Enterprises safeguarded**
- **Increase R&D productivity**
- **Increase export capacity to trade internationally**
- **Identify/embrace new and emerging markets**



SIMON GEORGE

5C Consulting deliver both pre-contract, business winning, consultancy support and post contract subject matter expertise in support of military training and experimentation programmes in the UK defence and security sector.

More recently, 5C have diversified into the virtual world by providing services across the spectrum of capture and delivery activities needed to create and exploit digital twins in defence and construction sector procurement.

In order to get his digital services offering off the ground, Founder Simon George was looking for external financial support, he tells us how he discovered OxLEP

"I use a virtual office at Bloxham Mill and was chatting to other businesses about networking.

I was introduced to OxLEP as a route for business support and funding.

So, I applied for a grant to help us grow our digital twinning capability and thankfully, we were successful.

The grant provided us with two complete IT systems that we use for processing the huge amount of data we capture through our digital capture devices such as Lidar scanners. In addition, the funding was used for consultancy to upskill the team on the latest technologies and we now have three trained operators.

Since then, we have won contracts totaling over half a million pounds for the delivery of our services – a route that would have been extremely difficult to pursue without the initial capital outlay that OxLEP were able to help with."

"..we have won contracts totaling over half a million pounds for the delivery of our services ..."

oxlepbusiness.co.uk/testimonials/5c-consulting/





ANDY CLAYTON

Fermtech's aim is to help solve the environmental crisis by producing nutritious, sustainable, low-carbon, animal-free protein for use in foods to meet the ever-changing needs of our planet.

Biologist and founder of Fermtech, Andy Clayton, shares his journey with us. "I'm originally a biologist and became an entrepreneur early on in my career. I have set up a lot of businesses. But I have always been nagged by a few senses of doubt. Climate change is a big problem facing us all and it needs us all to stand up and take action. I'm fortunate in having an Oxford University education and scientific skills, I'm very proud of that, but I felt I hadn't used these enough. I wanted to apply biology to help find solutions to the challenge of climate change.

Food production for me is a key area of focus and how to produce food without the use of animal farming. Animal farming is a very harmful human activity, it accounts for the destruction of eco-systems and releases a lot of carbon and other greenhouse gases into our environment. More and more people are choosing non-animal foods because of its negative impact. So, I looked at the production of high protein food, without using animals. This is the essence of Fermtech."

So, to explain in simple terms, we developed a circular economy production system using products such as spent grains from breweries and unwanted potatoes. We grow specially selected fungi on those substrates. They grow well and produce a lot of protein. We then extract the protein from that mix resulting in a pure, high functional and very nutritious protein that we can sell into companies producing plant-based products, such as vegan cheese."

"OxLEP Business have been great for us, they have been vital in providing us with support we needed at a key stage of our business. They are very personable and really care."

oxlepbusiness.co.uk/testimonials/fermtech/

"...they have been vital in providing us with support we needed ..."

fermtech.co.uk





SALLY DEAR

Oxford based clothing brand 'Ducky Zebra' inspires confidence & determination in children with their sustainable, gender-neutral clothing range

The fashion industry accounts for 10% of global carbon emissions and nearly 20% of wastewater. In the UK an estimated 350,000 tonnes of clothing ends up in landfill every year. This is not sustainable. Ducky Zebra are passionate about reducing environmental impact and working ethically. They design and produce colourful, organic clothes for children that are kind to the planet and kind to the people that make them. Using certified organic cotton they reduce environmental impact, and have slow, sustainable fashion as one of their core values.

OxLEP Business have been supporting Ducky Zebra throughout their journey since launch and Sally describes the relationship and how they have helped her success to date. "I was involved in the 'Meanwhile in Oxfordshire' programme and secured a pop-up shop in the Oxford Covered Market. This exposure came at the perfect time and totally transformed my business during launch. It was through this programme that I heard about OxLEP and was invited to some eScalate workshops. These were specifically for purpose led businesses so I jumped at the chance for free support and attended some workshops. They were a great help to me."

"I got to know the OxLEP team and they kept me up to date on other support opportunities such as the 'Pitch for the Future' competition. This gave small businesses the opportunity to practise their pitches and be in with a chance of winning £1000. So, I took part in that and Ducky Zebra actually won which was amazing. We used the prize money to help raise more awareness of our brand. The competition also gave me more confidence in articulating what we do, the problems we solve, why people should support us, as well as outlining our financials. It was a great experience and really helped refine our messaging."

"I didn't realise how valuable OxLEP's local support would be for me."

oxlepbusiness.co.uk/testimonials/ducky-zebra/





Our state of the art electric bikes will help power you through the beautiful Cotswold countryside and villages. It really is the most relaxing way for friends and families to explore this area of outstanding natural beauty.

The Visitor Economy Grant funded Tern e-cargo bikes and child seats are proving a real boon, allowing families with children under 14 to participate in guided e-bike tours and self-guided hires for the first time. Guests from the USA are the main new customer segment, with many recommending the experience to family and friends also looking for an engaging, child-friendly adventure later in the year or in 2024.

Here is a recent comment from a family who hired and enjoyed a self-guided ride I planned from their accommodation at Kingham Cottages to the Swan at Swinbrook on Tuesday 2nd August:

“Just a quick message to say we all had a fabulous day today. The bikes were amazing and we loved the cycle route you planned. We didn’t get lost once!! Thanks so much for all your help”



www.cotswoldelectricbiketours.co.uk





BETHANY WITH ROXANNE SEENEV
Lead Practice Nurse at Hedena Health

With support from OxLEP Skills and Kusham Nihjar, Apprenticeship Lead, Thames Valley Primary Care Workforce at Frimley Training Hub, coffee manufacturing company JDE Banbury has successfully helped to fund an apprenticeship position at Hedena Health in Headington. Bethany Lawrence began her two-year apprenticeship as an Apprentice Healthcare Assistant in October 2022 with the longer-term ambition to qualify as a nurse. Bethany is Hedena's first apprentice and the success of the role has sparked further internal conversations around the different qualification pathways into healthcare.

At a time when the NHS is under immense pressure and struggling to meet demand, organisations like Hedena Health are realising the potential of apprenticeships. With more than 350 different roles in the NHS – there's an apprenticeship route for all of them and apprenticeships available that link to all 14 key roles within primary care.

Established in 2017, Hedena Health is Oxford's largest provider of primary healthcare services. Bethany's role has encouraged the practice to take a step back and remodel the future of its workforce, exploring interest from existing employees to upskill and pursue a career in the medical profession. Once Bethany has completed her apprenticeship, she will become an independent NMC (Nursing and Midwifery Council) registered nursing professional, freeing up other nurses' capacity and assessing how services are being delivered and bolstered, for example through more community visits.

Levy transfers are having a knock-on effect to the wider sector and the retention of the workforce. If you are a business considering a levy transfer, it could have a positive ripple effect in an industry that's otherwise struggling to meet demand.

www.hedenahealth.co.uk





DR. ZSUZSA MAYER

BUSINESS IS HOTTING UP FOR ECOSYNC. FINDING THE HIDDEN PLACES WHICH WASTE ENERGY AND MONEY

Energy is wasted on a vast scale every day in commercial premises all over the world. 70% of commercial buildings are empty but heated and 40% of the energy is wasted. Whilst new build premises have much more efficient thermal performances, an overwhelming majority of buildings are old and inefficient. The financial savings from a solution developed by Oxford-based EcoSync are huge and its additional contribution to reducing the carbon footprint of buildings can make a significant contribution to climate change targets.

EcoSync's founder, Dr. Zsuzsa Mayer tells us "I set the company up in 2018. My background is in engineering. I've spent my career developing green technologies, but I now focus on saving energy. This is the future challenge – how not to waste fossil fuel. The best energy is not green energy, it's the energy that we don't use.

According to Zsuzsa Mayer, the OxLEP Business eScalate and ISfB programmes have been a significant help. "We've had a lot of support from OxLEP over the years which has been a huge help. From the start, we knew if we wanted to be scalable we needed help on the business side of things. I was looking for business support opportunities and discovered OxLEP. Their support was just perfect for us. I attended some support and mentoring sessions which gave me a great insight on how to develop a business, talk to investors and fundraise. We also met people who'd been on similar paths to ours before who offered valuable advice. Plus, we had access to all sorts of resources which helped us get ready for commercial growth. We were also fortunate to be awarded our first grant from OxLEP which helped us build.

oxlepbusiness.co.uk/testimonials/ecosync/

"We would definitely recommend OxLEP's support. Their expertise is extremely valuable."

ecosync.energy





HELEN GORDON

Based in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, KiteCreative is a purpose driven design and build studio centred around regenerative living, helping to restore the well-being of people and planet, by using a life-centred approach to reimagine the spaces we live work and play in, to design our lives, and create our futures to live and flourish.

Co-founder, Helen Gordon, shares their business success story. "Ten years ago my husband and I set up Kite as a refurbishment company. We worked on a lot of turnkey solutions for clients to reconfigure period houses into high-end rentals for young professionals. We took care of everything from design and interior styling through to construction and project management. As a company we've always been sustainable and purpose minded, but we knew we could do more. We were conscious of the amount of waste we were using and the amount of skips we were using, amounting to about 100 tonnes a year. Our ambition was to reduce our impact. During lockdown we researched everything we could about sustainability. It was during this time that we decided to completely pivot the business with sustainability at the centre and diversified from lots of refurbishment projects to more concentrated, sustainable interior solutions."

Over the past three years Kite have benefitted from a raft of OxLEP Business support ranging from one-to-one advice, webinars, peer groups to grant funding. Helen elaborates on the importance of this relationship and how it's contributed to their success.

"During my career I've always looked out for a support network, I think it's incredibly important. You need experts in the room to help you on your journey. I visited the OxLEP Business website and completed their Business Support Tool which guided me through to the support opportunities available to us."

"OxLEP's support and encouragement has been incredibly beneficial for us as a growing business. The team have been great and so efficient; they are there for you all the time and always go above and beyond."

kitecreative.co.uk



4.0

BUSINESS CASE STUDIES



MARK BROWN
www.psybersafe.com



ZORORO MUBAYA
facebook.com/DrivingMissDaisyDidcot



KIRSTY VAN DEN BULK
www.kvdb.co.uk



JAKE MOTION
www.house-of-fun.co.uk



REBECCA KEEN
keenpeople.co.uk



GILLAN WILLIAMS
clarityvideo.co.uk



HESSAM SEYFOLLAHI
www.moorishbar.co.uk



JAKE SWINHOE
www.velocitycc.co.uk



CLAUDIA KOZENY-PELLING
translatedigitalmarketing.com



ALISON THOMSON
www.thesafetyelf.co.uk



JANE HYDE-WALSH
www.aimhighertraining.com



VANESSA BARZASI
www.biobright.co.uk



EMMA GEORGIOU
www.emmageorgiou.com



YASMIN SPARK
www.alignevents.co.uk



HELEN FALLON
www.globalcts.co.uk



KARN JANES
thekjway.co.uk



BRUCE TREBBLE
trebble-trading.com



KATE BRYAN
stalis.com



STEPHEN THOMAS
www.saunagus.co.uk



JEN MEAKIN
theallergyteam.com



ROB THAKRAI
www.alberon.co.uk



ELIZABETH GONERA
directlinkcare.com



RAINY YU GUAN
www.talesfromtheeast.co.uk



YOU
Your Business



MARK VINGOE

By unlocking the potential of people wanting an engineering career, Bicester based company, Engineering Trust Training, are bolstering the engineering and manufacturing sector in Oxfordshire. Engineering Trust Training (ETT), is an apprenticeship training provider with around 180 apprentices working in engineering, manufacturing and maintenance, in Oxfordshire and the surrounding counties.

CEO, Mark Vingoe, engaged with OxLEP's one-to-one mentoring and the Peer Networks programme. "Being part of these opened loads of connections to other businesses. It was again useful to be able to talk to other businesses and find out what they are doing and how they were approaching dealing with the pandemic. The peer network meetings were good in a more general sense as it is reassuring to know that others are going through the same problems and concerns as you, plus having a group to bounce ideas and problems off was very beneficial."

ETT recently opened a 7000sqft training facility in Bicester, renovating an existing property and turning it into The Engineering Skills Academy. With the support of Cherwell District Council's Business Adaptation Fund (CBAF) delivered by OxLEP Business, they were able to implement a brand new IT suite.

"I'm a big fan of OxLEP. Across everything they do, they actually make a difference in terms of bringing business, education and skills training sectors closer together."

oxlepbusiness.co.uk/testimonials/engineering-trust-training/

"Across everything they do, they actually make a difference..."

www.theengineeringtrust.org





Big Scary Monsters is an independent record label. It first started in Oxford back in 2001 and is still based here, having worked with artists from all around the world. The label prides itself on discovering new talent and bringing it to a new audience, as well as organising live music and pop-up shop events all over the country.

The music industry is an ever-changing space, with new technology and increased competition making it a difficult place to establish a business and to cut through the noise. We pride ourselves on coming up with creative solutions for this, helping artists to find new pathways, both in the physical and digital world.

OxLEP have been invaluable to us in the past couple of years. They put us in touch with a business mentor, which is something I probably wouldn't have tried otherwise but found it incredibly useful. Through these conversations I now have a long term plan for the business and clearer goals than ever before. We also successfully applied for a Visitor Economy Grant, which allowed us to promote a series of live music showcases including a festival right here in East Oxford. These events helped raise awareness of our business and our roster of artists both locally and nationally.



"OxLEP have been invaluable to us..."

bsmrocks.com





DREW KAMPHUIS

NOT YOUR AVERAGE FIRST AID OR FIRE SAFETY TRAINING PROVIDER

We're First For Safety Oxfordshire Ltd - Based in West Oxfordshire. Your local leading provider of Affordable First Aid & Fire Safety Training. What's makes us unique is that ALL our fantastic instructors (a 10 strong team) are serving Emergency Services Professionals (medical & fire respectively depending on course) with years of front line experience. You can be assured that you'll be receiving fun, upbeat training from the people who actually do the job.

Founded by Drew Kamphuis in 2012, we've grown from strength to strength on account of our outstanding reputation. When not teaching, Drew works on emergency ambulances covering Oxfordshire. Drew's a passionate first aid trainer who believes everyone should have basic, easy to learn Life Saving Skills. Co-Director & Fire Officer Justin heads up our fantastic Fire Safety Training delivered by our amazing team of serving Fire Fighters & Fire Officers

Whether you're looking for Accredited First Aid Courses, Short First Aid Courses, Fire Safety Training, Fire Risk Assessment, Fire Door Surveying, Manual Handling or Mental Health Training, we're here & would be delighted to hear from you:

For many years, we've been attending OxLEP networking meetings & are currently in the process of gaining 1:1 marketing support with an OxLEP marketing specialist. Very much looking forward to this opportunity. OxLEP are always really friendly, helpful & very approachable. We would always encourage SMEs to consider their advice services.

"OxLEP are always really friendly, helpful & very approachable..."

www.firstforsafetyoxfordshire.co.uk





ATHERTON MUTOMBWERA

SIR CHRIS EVANS MBE

In 2018 Hutano Diagnostics Ltd was officially registered as a business with a board of directors in place. Founder, Atherton Mutombwera, 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.

The OxLEP team were excellent; there was so much support on offer and they helped me with my grant application. The funds we received helped us progress the technology and support our work in the lab in general."

Fast forward to 2023 and Hutano Diagnostics has been acquired by EDX Medical Group PLC, based in Cambridge. Their new Point of Care Innovation team will develop a new generation of rapid healthcare tests capable of detecting and characterising a wide range of diseases within minutes. The new, miniaturised tests are expected to enable the identification of up to 10 disease markers simultaneously. These advanced 'point-of-care' tests will be used by health professionals wherever they work to identify early signs and details of cancer, infections, and cardio-vascular conditions.

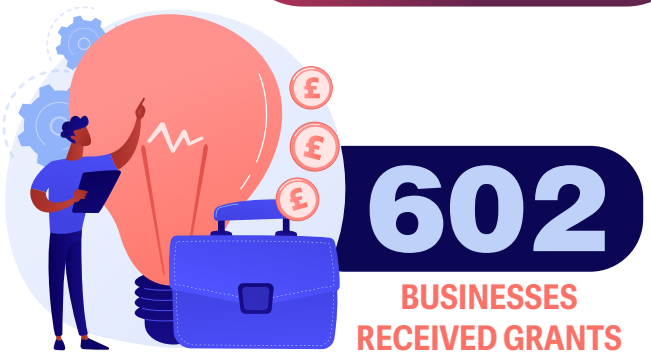
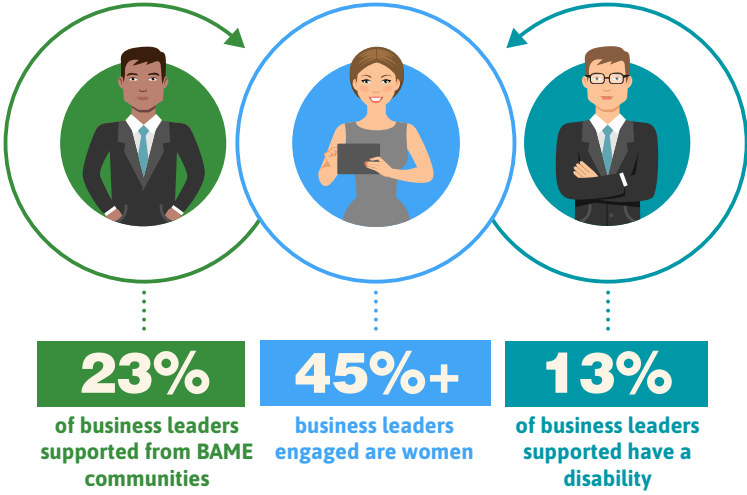
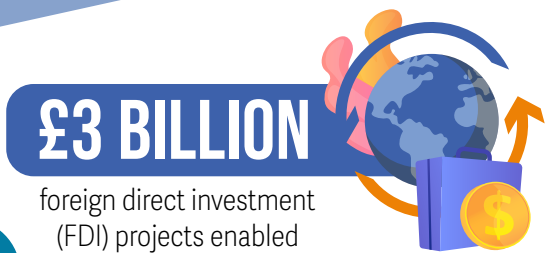
Professor Sir Chris Evans, OBE, founder of EDX Medical, said: "We are tremendously excited by the prospect of making the most advanced point of care tests available for the benefit of patients everywhere. This is a great joint endeavour by scientists at Oxford and Cambridge. Hutano has the ambition and technology to develop truly unique tests which, when combined with EDX chemistry and smartphone expertise, will generate game-changing new digital diagnostic products."

<https://oxlepbusiness.co.uk/testimonials/hutano-diagnostics/>

"The OxLEP team were excellent; there was so much support on offer..."

www.hutano-diagnostics.com





£4,842, 892
of grant funding
direct to
businesses



OVER
500
BUSINESSES



supported to engage with their
local community and schools

£4,467,198
OF PRIVATE
INVESTMENT
RAISED TO
MATCH GRANTS



£760,113
'and growing' of
Apprenticeship Levy
pledged to support SMEs



80
Apprentices supported
with grants

15
Community
Employment
Plans



36
businesses supported
to recruit their
first Apprentice



75
Oxfordshire Apprenticeship
Awards presented

AT LEAST

325
JOBS CREATED



THOUSANDS
OF JOBS PROTECTED

51
businesses supported
to collaborate with
research
institutions.



198m2
of research and
innovation
infrastructure
built or renovated



5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

OxLEP Business and OxLEP Skills are 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 and is summarised here.

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.

“Throughout the process of support, I have always felt that OxLEP’s focus and that of the facilitators has been on doing whatever they can to help my business. Signposting has always been genuine and without any vested interests.”

“
Throughout the process of support, I have always felt that OxLEP’s focus and that of the facilitators has been on doing whatever they can to help my business. Signposting has always been genuine and without any vested interests.
”

5.2 ELEVATE

Elevate supported over 940 entrepreneurs or early-stage businesses, with analysis showing the value for money was £4.86 for every £1 invested in the project.

- Across the 3-year period of the programme 111 workshops were delivered (5 of which were Grant Application workshops).
- We held two Bootcamp events for pre-start entrepreneurs with 47 attendees across the two events.
- We held a Growth Accelerator event with 17 attendees.
- We held two Marketplace events
- Network Navigators provided in excess of 2,622 hours of one to one support
- We ran 8 grant rounds and 42 businesses were awarded grants. 18 start-up grants totalling £68,326.07 and 24 growth grants totalling £116,730.16. Total grant funding awarded was £185,056.23
- 43.6 jobs were created as a result of support
- 13 enterprises introduced new to market products
- 20 enterprises introduced new to firm products.



“
The OxLEP Elevate Programme was a really positive and encouraging experience, the grant acted as a springboard to think about bigger things for the business. It gave us the confidence to look for additional sources of business support and we are investing in our future through hiring an apprentice
”

5.3 INNOVATION SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS

The ISfB programme achieved the following overall outputs:

- **780** businesses supported,
- **75** of these receiving grants,
- **£1,336,623** of grants awarded,
- **£1,689,432** of private investment raised,
- **4347** hours of support received,
- **99.4** new FTE jobs were created across 39 businesses
- **36** jobs were safeguarded across 13 businesses,
- **51** enterprises cooperating with research institutions,
- **44** enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products,
- **198m²** of research and innovation infrastructure built or renovated.

“

This support gave us the opportunity to gain a fast-track understanding of how the NHS operates and valuable practical advice when developing a product for the NHS as a Start-up.

”

The most popular type of support accessed through the ISfB project is workshops/webinars (e.g. innovation funding) (67%), followed by one to one advisory support (41%), the ISfB Go-Create Grant (35%) and then the peer to peer support (20%). The value for money of this programme was particularly good, with every £1 invested in delivering this project, creating £11.72.

ISfB post project feedback:

- **24%** reported an improvement in productivity
- **32%** reported an increase in revenue.
- **6%** reported reduced operation costs.
- **32%** reported improved robustness.
- **18%** reported an improved sustainability/environmental impact

“

Our business mentor was excellent. She quickly understood our business and knew where the grant money could be best spent.

”

“

Although I did not have a successful outcome with the ISfB Go Create grant, I found the process of going through the business plan and getting all my ideas that were floating around in my head, down onto paper, was really useful and helpful.

”



5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

54 eSCALATE

A particular focus of the eScalate support for scale-up businesses was 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. *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.

This extra focus on supporting women delivered results as by the end of the programme nearly 51% of the businesses engaged had female leaders or a female majority in their board of directors. This is considerably higher than the national average, which is 29%.

Impact investment and pitching practice was also 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.

”

The eScalate programme achieved the following overall outputs:

- **696** businesses supported,
- **58** businesses receiving grants,
- **£629,376.50** total value of grants
- **£628,355** of private investment raised,
- **7644** hours of support received,
- **57.26** new jobs created 59 FTE jobs safeguarded across 40 businesses
- **46** new to firm products launched by supported enterprises

5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

The most popular type of support accessed through the eScalate programme was workshops/webinars (68%), followed by 1.2.1 advisory support (62%), then the peer to peer support (33%) and the eScalate Grant (21%). The value for money of this programme was particularly good, with every £1 invested in delivering this project, creating £20.93.

eScalate post project feedback:

- 38% reported an improvement in productivity/efficiency
- 41% reported an increase in revenue.
- 13% reported reduced operation costs.
- 26% reported increased social/community impact.
- 13% reported improved sustainability/environmental impact.

55% of businesses reported to be badly or very badly affected by the EU Exit. Only 3 companies saw some benefit from the EU Exit. 49% of businesses reported to be badly or very badly affected by the rising energy costs.



“ Having received grant funding, we subsequently received so much additional support. ”

“ The whole Team at OxLEP has been incredibly supportive. ”

“ I feel part of a business community now. ”

“ It became apparent that our project did not match the requirements. However, engaging with eScalate did encourage us to consider other options and we subsequently developed our products and secured funding from another source. ”



5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

5.5 BUSINESS RESILIENCE GRANTS (COVID-19)

As was expected this grant scheme proved to be extremely popular with 844 applications received. After careful assessment by an external panel of business leaders, 114 applications were supported. £289,709 of revenue funding was provided and £504,016 of capital funding was provided. The total grant funding given out was £793,726.

District Council where business was based	No of grants given	Revenue Funding allocated	Capital funding allocated
Cherwell	20	£56,973	£75,960
Oxford City	35	£82,858	£178,283
South and Vale	43	£112,983	£180,067
West Oxfordshire	16	£36,895	£69,707
Total	114	£289,709	£504,017

5.6 OXFORDSHIRE KICKSTART GRANTS (COVID-19)

The Kickstart Grant programme allocated £305,302.85 to 121 Oxfordshire Businesses as follows:

- **26** businesses funded adaptation of new technologies/ online systems,
- **47** businesses purchased new equipment,
- **32** businesses funded specialist advice,
- **16** businesses funded a mixture of the above items.

5.7 THE PEER NETWORKS PROGRAMME

The national Peer Networks programme was funded in Oxfordshire in 2020/21 and again in 2021/22. This programme played a significant role in supporting business leaders during and after the lock-down periods of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“
Being able to share a business challenge with peers and use their input to shape our approach is invaluable.
”

“
Today has been my last day at the OXLEP Peers network program and it has been an excellent experience. I recommend this to all SME. The 1-2-1 are brilliant. The networking has been fantastic.”
”

“
This is a great group, whether it's my week to pose a problem or others, there's really good contribution from everyone, loads of ideas, outside perspectives. Just great! I would be giving the same feedback for every week. It always helps a lot hearing other people's journeys - even if very different to your own. Cannot recommend highly enough!
”

5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

5.8 THE BUSINESS INVESTMENT FUND (1)

Over 100 expressions of interest were received by OxLEP Business following a highly competitive two-phase application process, which following intensive assessment and scoring saw OxLEP Business award a total of £2.15m-worth of grants to 34 Oxfordshire-based businesses. The outputs reported by Business Investment Fund Grant Awardees are summarised below.

Outputs	Target	Actual / Reported to date
Businesses Assisted	45	38
Jobs Safeguarded	225	215
Jobs Created (direct link to grant)	27	86
Kickstart Placements	45	12
Apprenticeships	30	7



The collaborative programme achieved exceptional results:

- **230** business actively involved,
- **30** cohorts of businesses started and completing 9 sessions of 'Action Learning',
- **Over 3300** hours of 'Action Learning' undertaken,
- **326** hours of one to one support used,
- **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.

I would recommend this to every SME as you can not only learn from others but understand how they deal with issues (sometimes it feels like you are the only one going through this).

Its great to learn from my peers and the input from others can only serve to enrich all of our businesses. Great team work.

5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

5.9 THE CHERWELL BUSINESS ADAPTATION FUND

The Cherwell District Council's Cherwell Business Adaptation Fund (CBAF), administered by OxLEP, had a total budget of £450,000. 110 CBAF applications were received, of which 30 were fully funded. All Grant recipients reported excellent progress with their projects and positive delivery against the 7 outcomes.

The CBAF Grant funding enabled 16 jobs to be created with the potential of at least another 18 to follow, accumulating to a possible 34+ new jobs overall.

A great example of job creation was from 'aask us ltd' who have created 3 new jobs to cope with additional products that they can now supply. 'Cross Embroidery Ltd' were also able to create a job directly from the CBAF grant funding their new equipment:

“

This equipment now allows us to print transfers in house, thus creating an immediate requirement for a new member of staff, along with another in the next couple of months. Previously we had to outsource this work which was expensive and uncompetitive.

”

17 businesses were able to increase their R&D activity. 'B H Blackmore Limited' have excelled their product development with the help of the CBAF grant:

“

We have taken on a project to produce Prototype parts for a well-known UK Automotive OEM for the development of their BEV (Battery Electric Vehicle) fleet of cars. Without the extensive tooling package in the new machine we would not have been able to fulfil this project or take on this type of work.

”

5.10 SKILLS FOR BUSINESS PROGRAMME

The Skills for Business programme has had a genuine impact on our business community. The programme supported 36 businesses to recruit their first apprentice, conducted over 70 skills needs assessments and supported over 500 businesses to engage with their local community and schools.

5.11 THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

The Social Contract programme launched in 2022 has engaged with 424 businesses, 17 of which, as 'Apprenticeship Levy Paying' businesses (£3m+ wage bill) have pledged £760,113. The programme also engaged 15 additional Apprenticeship Ambassadors and supported 15 Community Employment Plans.

As part of the programme, SOFEA were commissioned to deliver the 'No Limits' Employability project. This project provided person-centred employability support to 424 participants, with 478 receiving a refurbished digital device, and 97 receiving a travel bursary.

The 'Connectr OxGROW Virtual Mentoring Platform' was also launched attracting 23 Mentees and 15 Mentors.



“

The OxLEP Elevate Programme was a really positive and encouraging experience, the grant acted as a springboard to think about bigger things for the business. It gave us the confidence to look for additional sources of business support and we are investing in our future through hiring an apprentice

”

5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

5.12 THE OXFORDSHIRE APPRENTICESHIP AWARDS

OxLEP Skills have been delivering the Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards since 2017. In that time 75 awards have been presented, which means that hundreds of Apprentices will have achieved a huge amount, been nominated and celebrated. 96% of attendees at the award ceremony in 2023 stated that the Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards is a good way to raise awareness of the value of apprenticeships.

“
The hosts were brilliant and the evening ran very efficiently and I left feeling better informed and excited about apprenticeships
”

“
Fantastic to hear all of the great success stories that have happened over the past 12 months and beyond in the apprenticeship sector
”

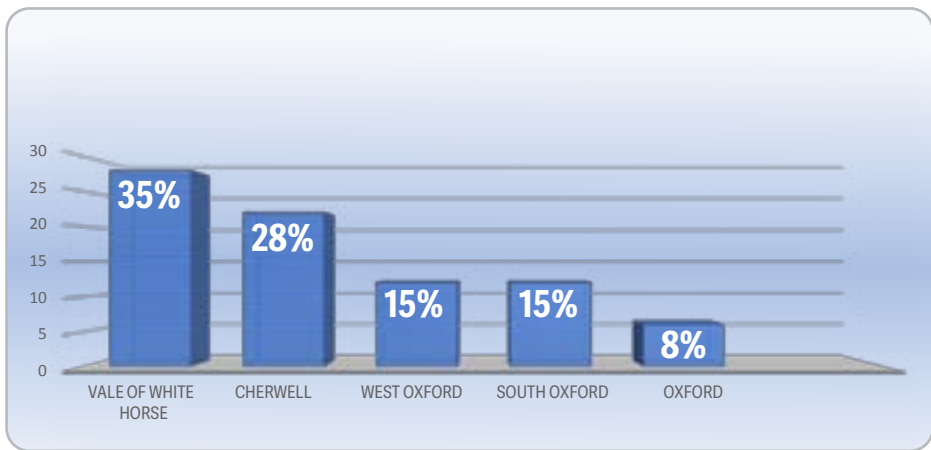
”
An amazing opportunity to show what people have achieved.
”

”
The stories of the nominees were truly inspirational.
”

5.13 THE OXFORDSHIRE APPRENTICESHIP GRANT SCHEME

The Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Grant scheme received 80 eligible applications with over £98,000 of funding distributed. These funds supported 45 new-starter Apprentices and 35 Apprentices to complete their training. The funding was used to support laptops for college work, driving lessons, purchasing own tools, additional qualifications, travel permits and a range of other items.

The Apprentices were from across all five Oxfordshire Districts.



5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

5.14 THE VISITOR ECONOMY GRANT SCHEME

The Visitor Economy Grant Scheme had a total budget of £660,000. 80 applications were received and following assessment 36 grants were awarded, with the total grant amount allocated of £597,000. Unfortunately, 1 grant recipient withdrew so 35 were completed successfully. Grant funded projects were delivered between November 2022 and May 2023, so a full evaluation of impact has not yet taken place, however the following outcomes are forecast by the grant recipients.

Outcomes	No of businesses
Adapt, diversify, or innovate its visitor economy offering	31
Encourage visitors to areas not traditionally known as 'hotspots'	25
Encourage shoulder season/off peak visitor opportunities	26
Improve digital presence to grow market share and attract new customers	23
Enhance their higher spend customer offer	17
Encourage longer stays/overnight visitors	18
Support the county's aim to be known as a COVID safe destination	24

5.15 THE BUSINESS INVESTMENT FUND (2)

The second round of the Business Investment Fund (BIF), proved to be highly competitive, with 49 applications submitted, requesting over £870,000 against a budget of £220,000. Following assessment, the grant panel agreed to fund 13 applications and allocated the full £220,000. Grant funded projects were delivered between December 2022 and March 2023, so a full evaluation of impact has not yet taken place, however the following outcomes are forecast by the grant recipients.

Outcomes	No of businesses
Support job and apprenticeship placements	4
Net Zero transition	8
Introduction of products new to the firm or new to the market	12
Enterprises safeguarded	4
Increase R&D productivity	6
Increase export capacity to trade internationally	5
Identify/embrace new and emerging markets	6
Employment increase or safeguarding in the applicant enterprise	12

5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

5.16 GROWTH HUB BUSINESS SUPPORT

The OxLEP Business Growth Hub support was 'enhanced' in 2020 as a proactive response to the challenges being faced by businesses. This was the catalyst for introducing the Business Support Tool, the Business Support Action Plans and a wide range of one to one and one to many activities to complement the European funded programmes. Highlights from the impacts of the Growth Hub Business support are illustrated below. The engagement and impact numbers delivered by this programme are significant:

- **Supported over 3500 businesses,**
- **Provided over 6000 hours of support,**
- **Created over 35 jobs,**
- **Protected over 351 jobs,**

Webinars & Workshops

We delivered over 100 business support webinars between July 2020 and March 2023. These webinars have engaged over 750 clients in that time, who almost always feedback 100% stating they would apply what they have learnt to their business.

For me, the acid test of this event was that the two hours flew by and was packed with useful and usable tips.

The explanation of a Value Proposition Canvas will help me to better understand how I can position my business to address what my customers really want/need.

Really useful information about SEO, I feel like I understand what to do and why. what people have achieved.

OxLEP Start-Up Club

Between 40% and 60% of clients engaging with OxLEP Business are pre-start or start up businesses (less than 2 years old). We created the OxLEP Start Up Club Bootcamp 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. The Bootcamp covers a range of topics that reflect demand and encourages 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.

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

In early 2022 we delivered a face to face Start-Up Bootcamp for pre-start and start-up businesses covering the basics of business planning, business structure and taxes, using social media to win your first customers, and business planning for growth. Later in 2022 we collaborated with the BIPC in Oxford and delivered 4 further face to face Start-Up Bootcamps engaging 15 entrepreneurs each time.

OxLEP staff and speakers are friendly, knowledgeable and keen to help grow businesses within Oxfordshire. Would definitely recommend to other start ups looking for solid advice and direction.

This course was perfectly timed for me as I had a great vision for what I wanted to achieve but lacked a plan to get started, so many ideas and next steps to follow up packed into one short day!

Explained everything clearly, made me realise I am capable of achieving what I want.

5.0 MEASURING SUCCESS

One to Ones, Coaching and Mentoring with a Business Advisor

One of the most valuable things we can offer a business leader is our time. We have developed a team of over 24 experienced business 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 well over 400 businesses, providing more than 1150 hours of support with an advisor.

“

My advisor really simplified business and made me think about my business in a different way and also gave me some good actions to go away and complete.

”

“

I needed advice on a strategy for a potential business partnership and negotiating contracts which I felt a bit out of my depth with and my advisor gave me very practical and detailed advice which has been invaluable in helping me try to secure the contract. I would highly recommend them!

”

Foundations to Growth Programme

Our Foundations to Growth Programme began in 2020/21 as a spin-out of the national Peer Networks programme. Aimed at established 'solo-preneurs' 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. 37 businesses have been supported through this programme receiving over 400 hours of action learning support.

“

This group was amazing - the topics, the thoughts and ideas, the solution-focus, the questioning. Despite it being a pretty small group, everyone was very different in their frame of reference (and business problems) but very similar in terms of coaching/ questioning/ open mindset. Made for many very insightful conversations!”

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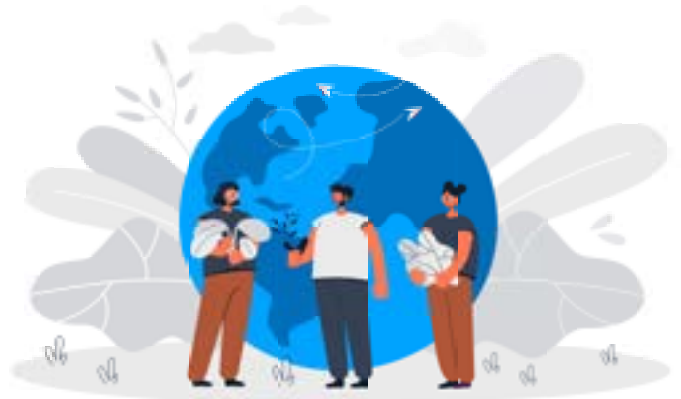
“

I needed advice on a strategy for a potential business partnership and negotiating contracts which I felt a bit out of my depth with and my advisor gave me very practical and detailed advice which has been invaluable in helping me try to secure the contract. I would highly recommend them!

”

5.17 FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT IN OXFORDSHIRE

Oxfordshire has a strong track record of attracting international investment with the OxLEP Invest Team supporting investors alongside our partners nationally and across Oxfordshire. Over the last six years, a total of 295 international business ventures – otherwise known as foreign direct investment (FDI) projects – have invested almost £3bn into the Oxfordshire economy, with significant investments into key science and technology sectors including life sciences and healthcare, automotive and space technologies, energy and advanced engineering as well as sectors in our foundational economy including retail and leisure and food and drink. These investments have supported (created or safeguarded) over 6000 jobs



6.0 THE FUTURE

In May 2023, PWC published their 'for Good Growth Cities' report¹ which presents an index of what matters to the people in our communities. Oxfordshire and Oxford top the ranking, with the city having been the highest performing since 2017.

'as one of the UK's most highly skilled and important city economies, Oxford contributes around £6.8Bn a year to the national economy.'

OxLEP Business and OxLEP Skills support for SMEs is crucial in ensuring the strength and success of Oxford is shared across Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire for the first time, now ranks above Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and our support over the last 6 years will have played a part in that. But we cannot sit back and celebrate, there remain major challenges threatening economic growth and public wellbeing.

OxLEP Business and OxLEP Skills are continually working to bring more investment into Oxfordshire to help SMEs and evolving the support that they offer to businesses. The Social Contract programme and our wider offer of skills support to businesses continues to grow from strength to strength and the impact described in this report continues to grow.

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. Our ongoing support programmes are shaped around:

- **Ongoing mentoring and business advice,**

- **Face to Face networking and events,**

- **Support setting up apprenticeship schemes or internships,**

- **One to one coaching and support, financial advice, business planning,**

- **How to promote online sales,**

- **One to one coaching/mentoring on how to get ready for investment,**

- **General business management advice,**

- **Fund raising and opening doors to relevant investment circles,**

¹ <https://www.pwc.co.uk/government-public-sector/good-growth/assets/pdf/good-growth-2023.pdf>

6.0 THE FUTURE

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 Strategy)

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

6.2 INCREASING COLLABORATION

OxLEP Business is continually seeking to engage and connect the wider business support offer across Oxfordshire. This includes the world leading universities, the District and County Councils, BIPC and a range of private sector initiatives.

For instance, 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,
- Cherwell District Council chose to work with OxLEP to manage their Cherwell Business Adaptation Fund Grant scheme,
- OxLEP Business have been leading collaboration across public and private stakeholders on Net Zero for Oxfordshire. This work is seeking to ensure that all SMEs engage with the Net Zero agenda,
- OxLEP Business delivered a business start-up programme for Ukrainian guests based in Oxfordshire, funded by Asylum Welcome and supported by Oxfordshire County Council.
- OxLEP partnered with Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and University of Oxford to secure the funding for and deliver the Innovation Support for Business programme.
- OxLEP commissioned OSEP to deliver the ‘Enterprises for social good’ support as part of the eScalate ERDF programme

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<https://www.pwc.co.uk/government-public-sector/good-growth/assets/pdf/good-growth-2023.pdf>

6.0 THE FUTURE

6.3 A GLIMPSE AT OXLEP SUPPORT FROM 2023 TO 2025

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

The lessons from delivering nearly £29m worth of support over the last 6 years, e.g. the European funded programmes, have been embedded within the ongoing activities. OxLEP Business is here to support Oxfordshire businesses to start, innovate, grow and thrive.

The future looks bright.



**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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