



Innovate
UK

Evaluation of the Birmingham Innovation Hub Further Education Innovation Fund (FEIF)

Reporting Period
April 2024 to March 2026



Report Prepared by EPM Consultancy



www.epmconsultancy.eu

About the Authors

EPM consultancy is a multi-disciplinary consultancy company providing specialist advisory and consultancy services in the areas of grant funding, programme management and evaluation. We are experienced in the development of Government-funded projects, managing and delivering UK and EU funding programmes, Public sector, Private sector and collaborative projects, and evaluating project delivery, performance and impact on intended beneficiaries. We have unrivalled experience in developing, managing and administering UK-funded projects and evaluating programmes, including Innovate UK, part of UKRI funded projects.

All our evaluations are bespoke to the project, requiring a multifaceted evaluation methodology and in line with governmental guidance.

This evaluation report has been compiled by EPM Consultancy with input from Birmingham Metropolitan College and delivery partners of the Birmingham Innovation Hub.

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1: HIGHLIGHTS



1 HIGHLIGHTS

- The Birmingham Innovation Hub is a £997,932 project funded by Innovate UK, which is part of UKRI. Led by Birmingham Metropolitan College (BMet) in consortium with five other colleges, the project aims to create a network of hubs referred to as the Birmingham Innovation Hub and targets digital technology adoption within SMEs in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, construction, dental, digital, and engineering. Additionally, the project facilitates industry placement opportunities. The pilot project has benefitted from a 12-month extension. This final report covers the entire delivery period from 01/04/2024 until 31/03/2026.
- The programme offers the following services to businesses:
 - Organisation Needs Assessments (ONAs)
 - Innovation Action Plans
 - Workshops
 - Knowledge transfer activities
 - Technology demonstrations
 - Internships and apprenticeships
- The final evaluation of the programme was conducted between January and March 2026 based on a combination of evaluation tools with inputs and analysis from official contracts and claims, survey responses from 24 project beneficiaries, interviews with beneficiaries and wider stakeholders, and a Management and Delivery Team workshop.
- The majority of companies benefiting from the Birmingham Innovation Hub pilot project (66.7%) were medium-sized, employing 50–250 full-time equivalents (FTEs), while the remaining 33.3% were small businesses with 10–49 employees.
- The most frequently accessed services through the Birmingham Innovation Hub project were access to events (53.6%) and 1.2.1 support (39.1%).
- Thanks to the support provided by the Birmingham Innovation Hub project, 8.3% of beneficiaries reported securing at least one new commercial contract.
- 55.6% of beneficiaries have adopted environmentally sustainable practices, and 45.8% have reported experiencing social benefits as a result of their participation in the project.
- 46.6% of beneficiaries reported initiating new R&D collaborations, while 12.5% noted the creation of new patents, designs, trademarks or copyrights.
- 87.5% of beneficiaries reported that the services they received from the Birmingham Innovation Hub project met or exceeded their expectations.
- At the time of the evaluation, only 37.5% of beneficiaries had implemented the innovative measures following the ONA. It takes time for SMEs to embed new knowledge and innovation practices.
- The services found most useful are the ONAs, scoring the highest with 12.82%, followed by SMEs visiting College Campuses at 10.26%.
- Concrete impacts reported by beneficiaries include: 25% improvement in employee upskilling, 20.83% improved efficiency, 29.17% increase in productivity, 20.83% increase in new business opportunities and revenue, 29.17% forming new collaborations with Further Education (FE) colleges.

- 37.5% of companies reported making progress towards new-to-firm product or service with an increase in TRL of +1.55 (and 51% due to the Birmingham Innovation Hub pilot project intervention).
- 13 FTE jobs have been created across 5 companies 53 FTE jobs safeguarded across 7 companies at the time of the evaluation. In addition, fifteen students or interns were offered positions within the host companies.
- The main channels of referrals are: word of mouth and recommendations from other SMEs (16.7%) and multiple referral sources.
- The project is on track to exceed all four of its targets, with much of the impact expected to materialise after its conclusion.
- The main themes of interest mentioned by the beneficiaries for future activities are: technology and digital transformation, automation, talent and skills development, mentoring, grants, sustainability and sales/marketing strategies.

EPM provides the following recommendations for the legacy of the project:

- **Support SME implementation:** Continue to encourage SMEs to act on the recommendations from the ONAs. Where budget constraints exist, offer guidance on new potential funding sources.
- **Improve Data Capture and Longitudinal Tracking:** Develop a more structured post-support monitoring system to capture long-term outcomes (6-12 months post-intervention) to capture the embedding of ONAs into SMEs which will occur beyond the end date of the project. Implement a light-touch CRM enhancement to better track collaboration, referral pathways, and cumulative SME engagement.
- **Advocate for continued financial support:** Promote ongoing funding opportunities including grants, subsidies, and investment funds to help small organisations develop innovative products. There is scope to explore closer integration of AI technology within traditional SMEs and their supply chains, including the potential development of a funding model for a legacy project.
- **Enhance project visibility and sustainability:** Continue building the Birmingham Innovation Hub project's brand through additional marketing activities, such as case studies, videos, and podcasts, to showcase successes more widely and attract further funding. Investigate alternative funding sources beyond UKRI to sustain the services provided by the fully established network of Hubs in the City and support a broader scope of interventions.
- **Formalise Cross-Hub Collaboration and Specialisation:** Formalise a cross-college referral protocol to ensure smooth routing of SMEs to the most appropriate expertise. Pilot joint "Hub-to-Hub Innovation Clinics" that bring together multiple specialisms (e.g. combining Artificial Intelligence (AI), cyber and manufacturing). Promote shared case studies demonstrating how multi-hub collaboration created value for SMEs.
- **Expand Ecosystem Links with Industry, Universities, and Catapults:** Establish regular knowledge-exchange activities with the local universities, and catapults. Encourage joint events with industry clusters such as construction, advanced

manufacturing, or AI/digital. Support Sign post and support SMEs in accessing national and international R&D programmes, including Innovate UK or Eureka competitions.

- **Embed More Structured EDI and Sustainability Interventions:** Highlight case studies of SMEs who have successfully embedded inclusive or sustainable practices. Offer optional “EDI and Sustainability Clinics” to help SMEs convert knowledge into policy or operational change.
- **Enhance Skills Development and Talent Pipelines:** Explore additional opportunities linking students (particularly T-levels and apprenticeships) with innovation-active SMEs. Showcase talent pathways in marketing materials to encourage more businesses to engage with younger workers and interns. Consider building a regional “Innovation Talent Pool” platform showcasing student capabilities, final-year projects, and technical skills.
- **Prepare a Legacy and Continuity Strategy for Post-2026:** Plan a post-pilot sustainability roadmap that outlines: continuation scenarios, preferred delivery models, long-term Hub specialisms, potential funding blends, and regional strategic alignment. Include this strategy as part of the final evaluation to influence decision-makers.

2: PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION



2 INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the findings of the external final evaluation of the Birmingham Innovation Hub project. It covers the project's activity managed by BMet College and operates from Matthew Boulton College involving a consortium of six colleges including Fircroft College, Heart of Worcestershire College, South and City College Birmingham, Solihull College and University Centre and University College Birmingham. Funded by Innovate UK, which is part of UKRI. The project is delivered in the West Midlands region. EPM Consultancy conducted the final evaluation in Quarter 1 of 2026, providing insights into progress made by this cohort and offering recommendations for legacy.

2.1 Project overview

The Birmingham Innovation Hub project is a £997,932 project funded under Innovate UK grant, led by BMet College with a consortium of six colleges. The delivery period of the Birmingham Innovation Hub project is from 1st April 2024 until 31st March 2026 (the activity end date).

The project has helped to create an Innovation Centre Service for local businesses seeking technical and innovation expertise. The primary focus of the Birmingham Innovation Hub is the adoption of Digital Technologies with SMEs in the key sectors of advanced manufacturing, AI and digital technologies, engineering, dental and construction. The project aims to drive innovation adoption among local SMEs, encourage businesses to embrace advanced technologies to increase efficiency and productivity, enabling them to stay competitive. The project created opportunities for industry placements, supporting upskilling and career development. The Innovation Centre offers business support through training, advice and access to equipment. The Centre acts as a broker to other business support networks, local authority advisors, established Higher Education Partners and WMCA Business Growth West Midlands.

Each College specialises in a specific area of expertise:

- **BMet College Hub:** Dental, Data Technology, Digital Technologies, Cyber Security, Social Media
- **Fircroft College Hub:** Built Environment and Regenerative Construction
- **Heart of Worcestershire College Hub:** AI and Digital Technologies
- **South and City College Birmingham Hub:** Construction, Engineering & Manufacturing, Women in Trade
- **Solihull College & University Centre, supported by Greater Birmingham & Solihull Institute of Technology Hub (GBSIoT):** Robotics, Internet of Things (IoT), Industrial Automation, AI and Digitech Technologies
- **University College Birmingham:** Battery manufacturing

Each college appointed industry specialists to collaborate closely with the businesses, identify their technical needs and offer various support. The 17 Industry Specialists operate as a network to offer the best solution to the businesses.

The main services and interventions on offer under the Birmingham Innovation Hub include:

- Organisational Needs Assessments (ONAs)
- Innovation Action Plans
- Workshops
- Knowledge transfer activities
- Technology demonstrations
- Internships and apprenticeships

A mandatory evaluation is required for all UKRI-funded projects. The delivery partners opted for a final evaluation in the penultimate quarter, with the work carried out in the final quarter.

The purpose of this final evaluation is to assess: 1. Project Context, 2. Project Progress, 3. Project Delivery and Management, 4. Project Outcomes and Impact, 5. Project Value for Money, 5. Conclusions and Lessons Learned

The evaluation also aims to identify best practices and provide recommendations to enhance the legacy of the initiative.

EPM Consultancy was commissioned to conduct the final evaluation of the Birmingham Innovation Hub Project. This report outlines EPM's assessment methodology, findings, and conclusions, fully aligned with the latest UKRI Impact Guidance, updated on 2 March 2023.

2.2 Innovation Hubs' expertise

At [BMet College](#), the project was delivered through the *Innovation Navigator Initiative*, led by the *Matthew Boulton* Campus in central Birmingham. The Hub supported SMEs across a range of sectors, with a particular focus on dental innovation, AI and digital transformation, and the non-profit sector. Positioned within a large further education college with specialist facilities and strong external partnerships, BMet enabled businesses to explore and adopt innovative technologies and practices to drive growth and resilience.

The Hub provides expertise across key innovation areas, including:

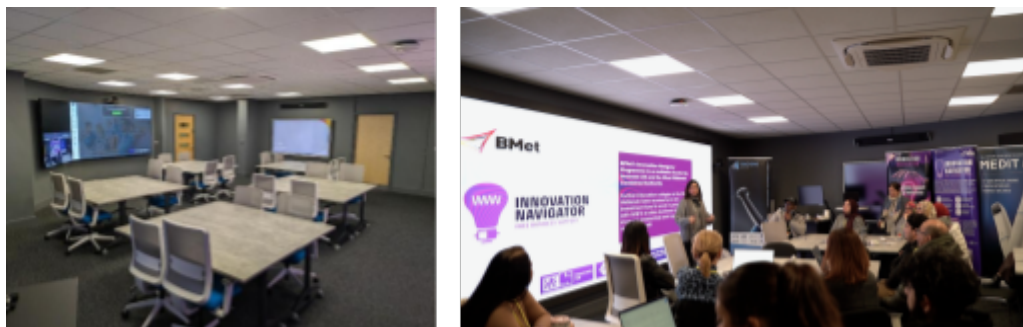
- Digital Transformation and AI Adoption
- Dental Innovation and Healthcare Technologies
- Business Support for the Non-Profit Sector
- Practical Application through Specialist-Led Workshops and Masterclasses
- Access to College Facilities as Real-World Testbeds



Reimagine your business - Design Thinking, Kulthum from Birmingham Innovation Hub

The programme delivered a comprehensive package of SME support through free webinars, workshops, masterclasses, and tailored 1:1 specialist support, designed to provide a quick and practical introduction to innovation and technology adoption within further education. This was supported by hands-on activity, including technology demonstrations, roundtables, and access to specialist college facilities.

A key strength of the BMet Hub was its practical, collaborative delivery model, which benefitted from innovation partners who are industry leaders and supported the project. This enabled SMEs to test and apply new approaches in real-world settings. While short-term funding limited early momentum, the Hub adapted over time and continues to explore ways to sustain and build on its delivery.



Immersive Room at Matthew Boulton Campus



Dental Facilities at Matthew Boulton Campus

At **Fircroft College**, the Birmingham Innovation Hub Project was delivered through the *Rebuilders* initiative, supporting SMEs within the construction and built environment sector across the West Midlands. As a residential adult college and a registered charity with a strong focus on social and environmental programmes, Fircroft positioned the Hub to support businesses seeking to adopt regenerative and sustainable construction practices.

The Hub provides expertise across key innovation areas, including:

- Regenerative Practices within the Built Environment
- Practical Build Sessions and Learning Visits



- SME Engagement in Construction and Energy Sectors
- Partnership-led Delivery with Specialist Organisations

The programme targeted engagement with 10 SMEs in Year 1 and 20 SMEs in Year 2, working with diverse businesses across the construction and energy sectors. Delivery was combined with classroom learning, practical build sessions, and study visits to projects in London, Bristol, and Liverpool.

A distinctive feature of the programme was its hands-on delivery model. SMEs participated in build days, open house demonstrations and learning visits, supporting the application of regenerative practices within their businesses. Feedback from Year 1 informed refinements in Year 2, strengthening partner collaboration and increasing practical elements.



Ladywood Community Project



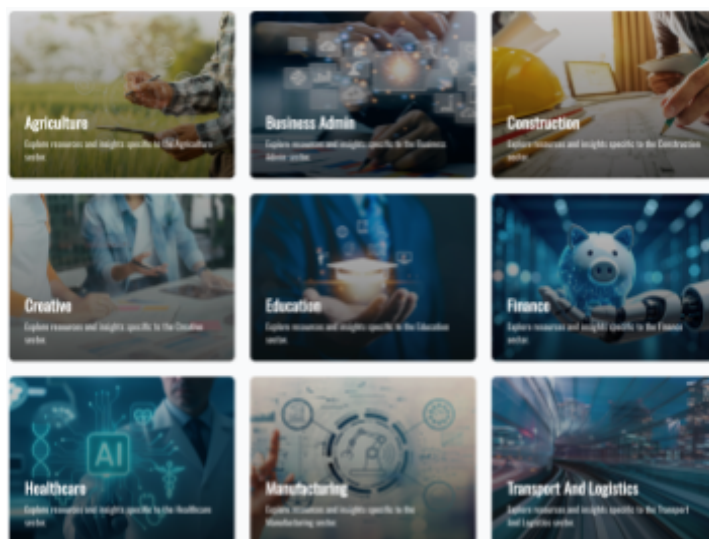
ReBuilders Programme

At **Heart of Worcestershire College**, the Birmingham Innovation Hub was delivered as a [digital-first platform](#) focused on AI adoption research and digital innovation. The College conducted research into AI adoption and subsequently developed an accessible online Innovation Hub, providing tools, resources and case studies to support digital skills development across partner organisations and SMEs. Unlike other hubs, the Heart of Worcestershire Innovation Hub operated without a physical space, instead offering scalable digital resources to enable blended learning, research and innovation activity.

The Hub provides expertise across key innovation areas, including:

- Creation of Digital and Online Learning Resources
- Curriculum and Staff Upskilling Support
- Tools and Guidance for Innovation and Blended Learning Projects
- Digital Research conducted in Collaboration with Businesses

Delivery was led by a dedicated project team, including a project lead, developer, and researchers. The programme engaged 28 businesses, resulting in 21 case studies across 9 sectors, including business administration, finance, healthcare, and transport and logistics. In addition, 52 digital resources were developed in collaboration with businesses and through research activity. Through the creation and ongoing maintenance of the online Innovation Hub platform, Heart of Worcestershire College has supported SMEs to better understand and adopt AI within their operations while strengthening internal capability in AI and digital innovation.



Sector-specific AI resources available to SMEs

At **South & City College Birmingham**, the programme was delivered through a distributed, employer-focussed model, bringing together education and industry across multiple campuses and partner venues. With a strong emphasis on retrofit, construction and green skills, South & City College positioned its activity to support SMEs, employers and learners in responding to Net Zero priorities and evolving workforce demands. Through targeted engagement, the Hub focussed on raising awareness of how further education can support businesses to adopt new technologies and transition towards more sustainable practices.



SCCB Event

The Hub provided expertise across key innovation areas, including:

- Retrofit and Net Zero Skills Development
- Construction Sector Engagement and Workforce Planning
- SME Engagement and Innovation Support
- Inclusive Pathways, including *She Builds Birmingham*
- Employer-led Training, Apprenticeships and Upskilling Opportunities

The programme was delivered through a combination of industry events, workshops, networking activity and one-to-one employer engagement, enabling businesses to build partnerships and explore innovation opportunities. Key initiatives such as *Retrofit Revolution* supported collaboration across the construction sector, while *She Builds Birmingham* increased visibility and participation of women in trades.

A distinctive feature of South & City College's approach was its strong focus on employer engagement and partnership working. The programme exceeded engagement expectations and strengthened collaboration across the Hub network. Overall, the Hub built momentum in aligning skills provision with employer demand and continues to explore opportunities to sustain its impact.



Get Set - SCCB Event

At **Solihull College & University Centre**, the Business Innovation Hub was launched in August 2024 as part of an Innovate UK-funded digital transformation programme. Based at the Solihull campus, the Hub was established to provide a complimentary innovation space for SMEs to explore, test, and adopt digital and AI-enabled solutions in a supported, low-risk environment. The Hub focuses on practical digital innovation and engineering support, embedding collaboration between employers, students, curriculum teams and innovation specialists.

The Hub delivers expertise across key innovation areas, including:

- AI Adoption and Readiness for SMEs
- Digital Productivity and Automation
- Cyber Security and AI Governance
- Emerging Technologies, including 3D Printing and BETA Testing
- Workforce and Skills Innovation aligned to Employer Demand



Through its dedicated AI Lab, 3D printing facilities and co-working spaces, the Hub has supported 156 local SMEs to engage with digital innovation. Employers participated in AI mini-audits, cyber security and smart technology workshops, resulting in an 86% uplift in confidence, a 76% increase in readiness, and 100% of participants identifying clear next steps.

Alongside workshops and networking events, the Hub delivered Organisational Needs Assessments (ONAs) for SMEs, provided free access to conference and co-working facilities, and enabled employers to join advisory boards to inform curriculum development. Student-employer collaboration was a key feature, with T-Level digital learners supporting live projects. For example, collaboration with X-Seed generated over £8,000 in cost savings while accelerating productivity gains.



Live Innovate UK–funded workshop hosted within the Hub

At the **Greater Birmingham and Solihull Institute of Technology (GBSIoT)**, the Birmingham Innovation Hub activity was delivered through a central facility, bringing together colleges, universities and employers to support innovation in advanced manufacturing, engineering and digital technologies. The Institute positioned itself as a regional centre for Industry 4.0, enabling businesses and learners to engage with emerging technologies and develop the skills required for future-focussed industries.

The Hub provided expertise across key areas, including:

- Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering
- Industry 4.0 Technologies (Automation, Robotics, Digital Twins)
- Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) and Smart Factory Systems
- Digital and Immersive Technologies (AR/VR, Simulation)
- Workforce Development and STEM Skills Training



GBSIoT Learning Factory

The programme was delivered through a combination of industry-led workshops, collaborative projects, competitions and events, alongside access to specialist facilities including cyber-physical manufacturing rigs. This enabled businesses, students and partners to gain hands-on experience of real-world engineering challenges while strengthening links between education and industry.

A distinctive feature of the GBSIoT approach was its strong partnership model, bringing together further education colleges, universities and employers to deliver collaborative, applied learning. The Hub supported regional skills development, fostered innovation and created opportunities for both learners and businesses to engage with advanced technologies, strengthening the wider innovation ecosystem across the West Midlands.



Annual Connect Event

At **University College Birmingham**, the Birmingham Innovation Hub activity supported development of battery manufacturing, supporting the Birmingham Battery Manufacturing Skills Pathway (B-MSP), that equips learners with the practical skills and knowledge required to support the rapidly expanding battery manufacturing sector. Situated within UCB's innovative Centre for Sustainable Construction in Birmingham, the programme blends immersive digital learning technologies (including AR/VR simulations) with hands-on experience in real productionstyle environments. The College can support battery assembly operatives, technicians and manufacturing engineers, high-voltage (HV) battery assembly through to advanced battery assembly and gigafactory operations.



Practical workshop area for hands-on assembly

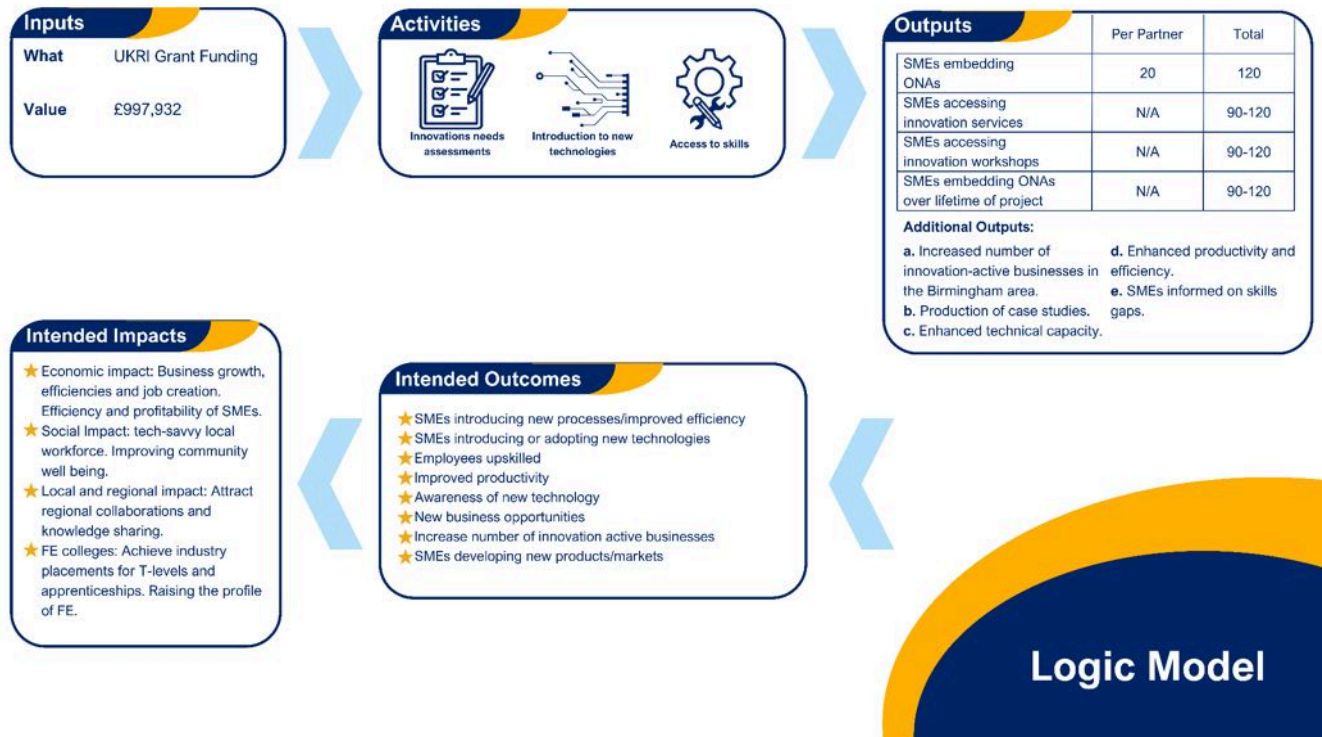


Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality simulations

2.3 Logic model

Diagram 1 identifies the key project details as set out in the grant application form and Funding Agreement.

Diagram 1: Logic model of the Birmingham Innovation Hub project



A hand holding a tablet with various business icons and a central 'EVALUATION' text box. The icons include a gear, an envelope, a line graph, a magnifying glass, a globe, a document, and another gear. The background is a blue gradient with a grid pattern.

EVALUATION

3: EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

3 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The EPM evaluation methodology aligns with HM Treasury's **Magenta Book** principles, employing a theory-based impact approach when a counterfactual is unavailable, or adopting experimental or quasi-experimental methods when a control group is accessible.

Our approach includes a range of techniques: conducting surveys and interviews, facilitating workshops, and developing a series of case studies.

In this final evaluation, we will assess the programme's effectiveness and efficiency, accounting for unintended outcomes and contextual factors, calculate value for money and estimate the net economic, social and environmental impact for the Birmingham Innovation Hub project.

3.1 Methodology

Diagram 2 summarises the methodology used to conduct the Birmingham Innovation Hub.

Diagram 2: Methodology



This methodology was conducted in three major stages:

STAGE 1 - DESIGN AND PLAN THE SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

- **Inception Meeting**

EPM consultants met with the Birmingham Innovation Governance Team during an online inception meeting on 12 January 2026 to agree the objectives, quality control, roles and responsibilities and programme of work.

- **Documentation familiarisation**

The consultants familiarised themselves with the updated Claims Forms and client relationship management and monitoring system used by the management and delivery team.

STAGE 2 - DATA COLLECTION FOR SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

- **Designing of questionnaires and 'Aide Memoires'**

EPM consultants used two sets of electronic questionnaires using Google Surveys software: one for SME beneficiaries (beneficiaries are companies who registered for and received Birmingham Innovation Hub Services -) and one for the counterfactuals, companies who were introduced to the pilot project but did not take up any services or that registered for the project but subsequently withdrew.

The purpose of the questionnaires was to collect core data with which to assess attainment of project targets, beneficiary outcomes and impacts and beneficiary satisfaction with the project, and also to identify SME needs for further support. The majority of the questions prompted a quantitative or multiple-choice answer to enable these assessments to be made in a rigorous way. These quantitative and multiple-choice questions were supplemented with a series of logic-driven questions that prompted qualitative answers that are tailored to the different types of beneficiaries. These qualitative answers enable us to interpret the quantitative answers, and provide quotes with which to emphasise key messages in this report.

'Aide Memoire' templates were prepared to support 1.2.1 phone interviews performed on a sample of SME beneficiaries and with wider stakeholders. The purpose of the phone interviews is to check correct interpretation of the questionnaire answers, to make deeper enquiries about aspects of the project that generate interesting or unexpected questionnaire results, and to give the EPM consultants the contextual understanding to prepare this report in a rounded, engaging and relatable style (as opposed to a dry, statistical style).

- **Questionnaires**

The questionnaires were sent electronically to the full list of 246 project beneficiaries. 2 emails bounced back. After a period of 6 weeks, 24 beneficiaries had responded to the survey.

- **Beneficiary and wider stakeholder 1.2.1 online interviews**

EPM consultants conducted 10 online interviews with a sample of the beneficiaries. They also conducted interviews with 4 wider stakeholders: Daniel Blyden from Civic Square, Daniel Gregory from Birmingham City Council, Suzie Branch from Skills West Midlands and Warwickshire, Ade Humphrey from Business Growth West Midlands

- **Case studies**

From the initial responses to the questionnaire, 6 beneficiaries were selected as case studies. These case study beneficiaries were identified as having had particularly great impact from participating in the Birmingham Innovation Hub project. The EPM consultants had in-depth conversations with these beneficiaries to collect the qualitative and quantitative information with which to assess the impact of the project on their individual company.

- **Management and Delivery Team workshop**

On 24 March 2026, EPM consultants ran a 'Management and Delivery Team workshop' online. The aim of this workshop was to collect feedback on the two years of implementation, specific aspects of project governance and management, team dynamics and complementarity with the Innovation Hubs other support programmes, and to hear the various project management and delivery team perspectives on the beneficiary survey and interview answers.

STAGE 3 - ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

For the project context assessment, the EPM Consultants will reflect on whether the consensus is that the project is meeting its objectives. To do this, Google Forms® was used to analyse the management team's beneficiary tracking data (e.g. company age, gender) as well as quantitative beneficiary survey responses relevant to assessing the project context. In the case of qualitative data, the EPM consultants used three-stage Framework Analysis to analyse the qualitative information and insights gained through the surveys, interviews and workshop. This analysis method begins by identifying the themes for which qualitative data exists (Thematic analysis), then separating this by stakeholder type (Typologic analysis) to create a matrix of qualitative responses from which patterns of responses between the different stakeholder types become apparent (Explanatory analysis). This analysis was independently completed by the two consultants and differences in results were discussed until a consensus was reached, removing any potential researcher bias in analysing the qualitative data.

For the project progress analysis, the consultants used the latest project claims data to forecast attainment of the project targets by project end (Innovation Organisational Needs Analysis (ONAs), SMEs accessing innovation services, SMEs accessing innovation workshops, SMEs embedding ONAs over lifetime of project, Number of case studies, jobs created, jobs safeguarded, SMEs introducing new product development, SMEs introducing new processes/improved efficiency, SMEs introducing or adopting new technologies, SMEs projecting increase in turnover, employees upskilled, improved productivity, awareness of new technology, new business opportunities).

For the project management and delivery assessment, the EPM consultants reviewed the project's approach to recruitment, communications and services delivery using the same data methods as described for the project context assessment above, namely Excel functions to analyse the relevant quantitative data and three-stage Framework Analysis of the qualitative data that helped to add context and interpretation of the quantitative data.

Finally, the EPM consultants amalgamate all the data and insights made in the process of conducting this summative assessment, including the gathering of best practice and lessons learnt, in order to make recommendations for how to maximise the impact during the reminder period of delivery of this pilot project.

3.2 Methodology challenges and Assessors' appraisal

EPM Consultants left the questionnaires open for 6 weeks during Quarter 1, 2026.

A sizable number (24) and percentage of project beneficiaries responded to the questionnaire: 9.75%. The response rate is perfectly sufficient for the purposes of this summative assessment.

**4: OUTCOMES AND
IMPACT ANALYSIS**



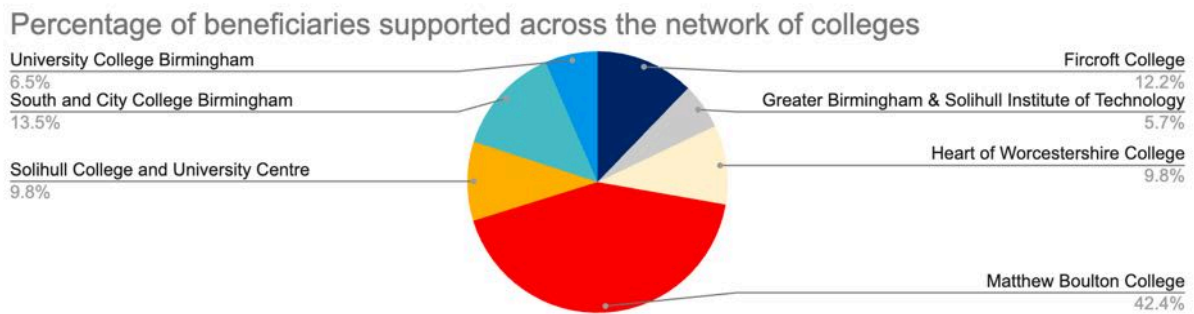
4 OUTCOME AND IMPACT ANALYSIS

4.1 Beneficiary profile

Baseline data from 246 businesses which have benefited from the Birmingham Innovation Hub project, were provided to the EPM team.

The characteristics of the participants in the Birmingham Innovation Hub are presented below.

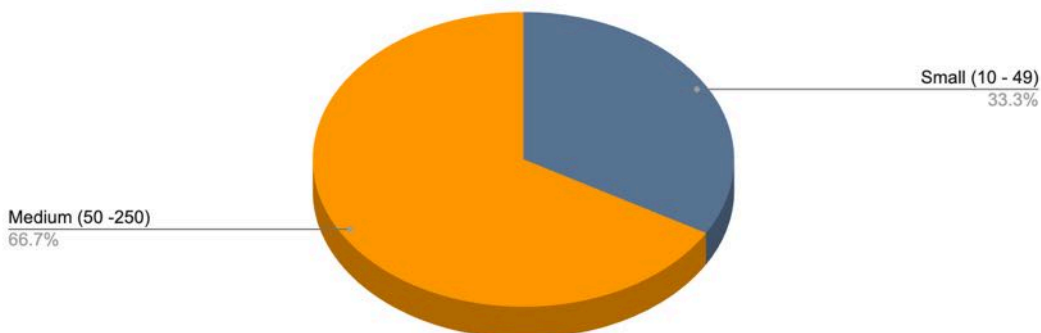
Figure 1: Breakdown of beneficiaries supported across the network of Hubs



Beneficiaries are engaging with the network through various entry points, with the **Matthew Boulton College** being the most popular, supporting 42.4% of the cohort to date. Additionally, **0.4% of companies** have received support from more than one hub.

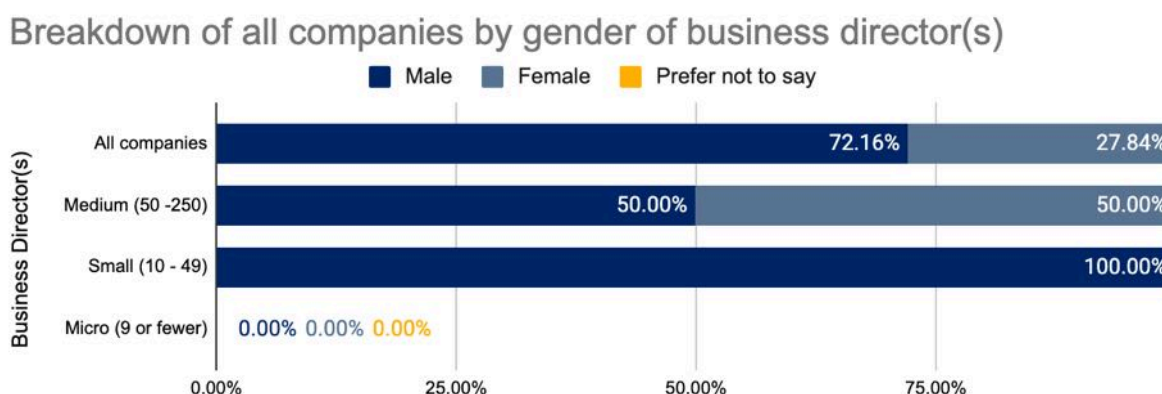
Figure 2: Breakdown of all beneficiary companies by size

Breakdown of all beneficiaries companies by size



All beneficiaries of the Birmingham Innovation Hub project are **small and medium size companies**, reflecting UKRI's focus on higher support for small businesses.

Figure 3: Breakdown of all companies by gender of business director(s)



The majority of beneficiary companies (72.16%) are male-led. However, there has been a notable proportion of female-led businesses supported, at **27.84%** .

This is well above the national average, with the [UK Government’s Small Business Survey](#)¹ indicating that only around 14% of SME employers were women-led in 2024

Figure 4: Beneficiaries’ sector of industry by SIC code



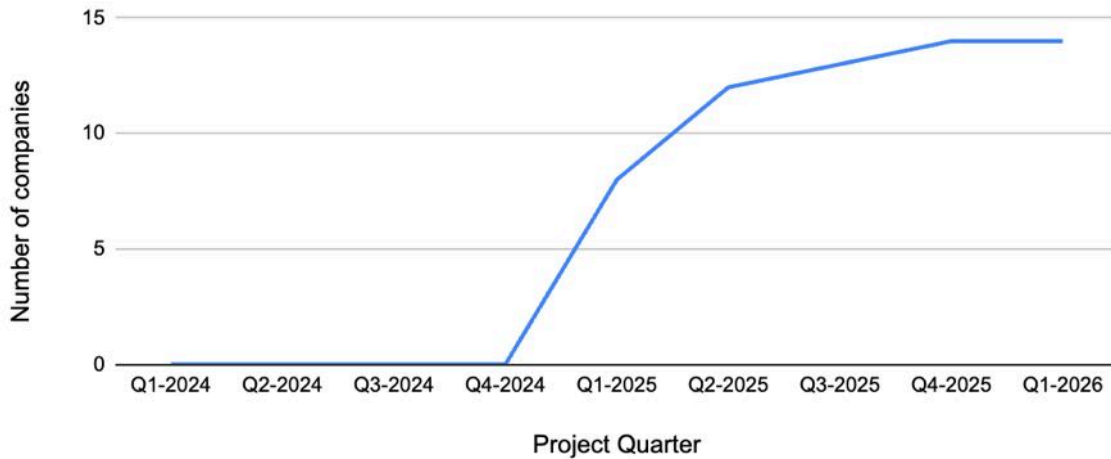
The main sector of industry represented amongst the beneficiaries are:

- 8.97 % from category “Dental practice activities” (SIC code 86230)
- 2.17% from category “Manufacture of medical and dental instruments and supplies” (SIC code 32500)
- 1.63% from category “Business and domestic software development”(SIC code 62012)
- 1.63% from category “Other human health activities” (SIC code 86900)
- 1.36% from category “Computer consultancy activities” (SIC code 62020)

¹ Department for Business & Trade, September 2025. Official statistics, Longitudinal Small Business Survey 2024.

Figure 5 : Breakdown of all companies by date Birmingham Innovation Services support started

Breakdown of companies by date support started

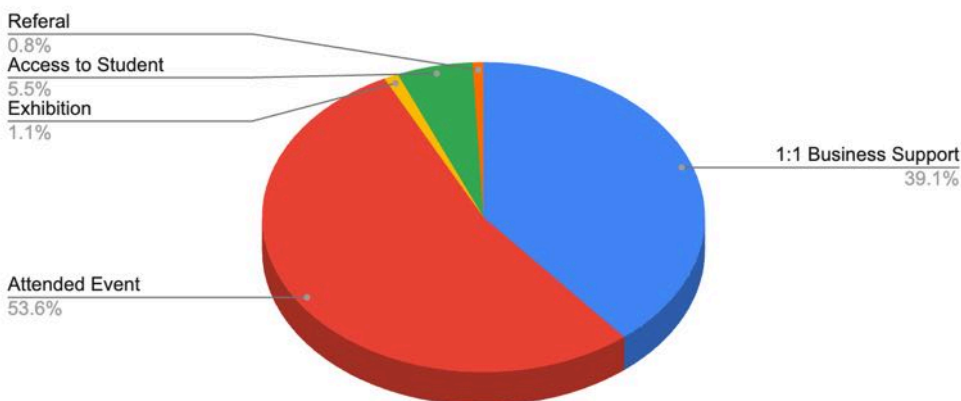


Recruitment for beneficiaries of the Birmingham Innovation Hub project began in **Q4 2024**. It took approximately six months to appoint the Delivery Team and prepare for the Hub’s launch.

Despite this initial setup period, the programme experienced strong uptake immediately upon opening. Participation continued to grow steadily, reflecting both the high demand for this type of support and the programme’s ability to leverage the strong reputation it had already established through its early successes.

Figure 6 : Breakdown of all companies by type of support they received

Type of support received by the beneficiaries



The most frequently accessed services in the Birmingham Innovation Hub project were participation in **events (53.6%)**, followed by **1-to-1 business support (39.1%)**.

4.2 Counterfactuals

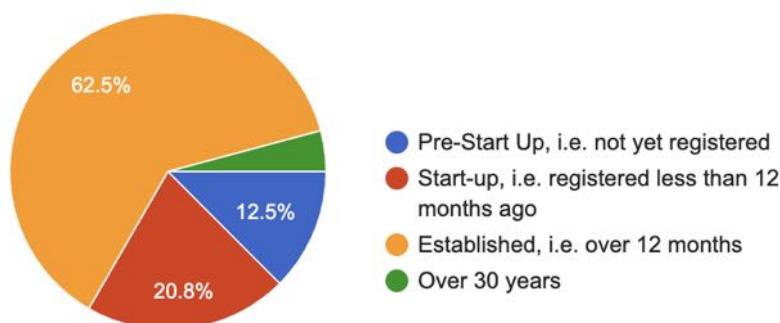
A total of 158 named counterfactuals registered for events but did not attend. No additional information was provided regarding the profiles of these counterfactuals.

4.3 Feedback from beneficiaries who completed the survey

4.3.1 Characteristics of survey respondents

The survey remained open for 6 weeks and answers were collected from 24 beneficiaries (representing 9.75% of beneficiaries).

Figure 7: Company type of beneficiaries that completed the survey at first engagement with the Birmingham Innovation Hub Services



The Birmingham Innovation Hub project has primarily supported start-up and established businesses for 87.5% of participants at the time they first engaged with the project.

Figure 8: Beneficiaries accessing the different Colleges' hubs

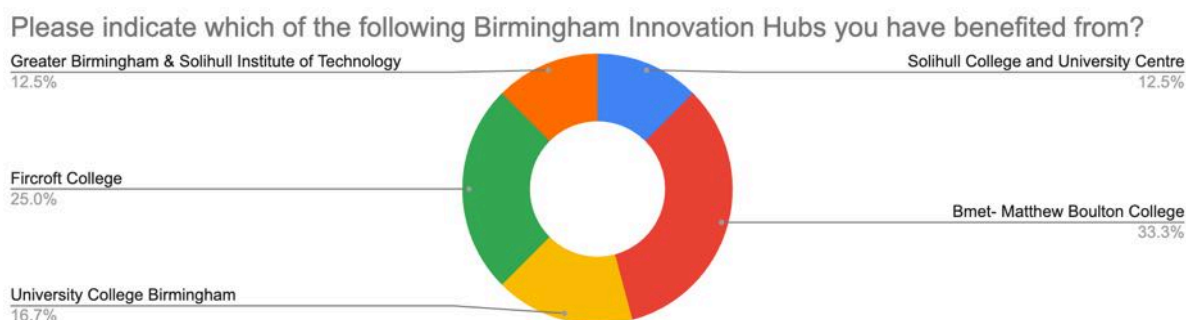


Figure 8 shows that 33.3% of survey respondents received support from Matthew Boulton College Hub, followed by 25% from Fircroft College, 16.7% from University College Birmingham, and 12.5% each from the Greater Birmingham & Solihull Institute of Technology and Solihull College & University Centre.

One of the respondents' companies was referred to another hub within the network for additional support.

4.3.2 Beneficiaries' financial position

Figure 9: Beneficiaries turnover

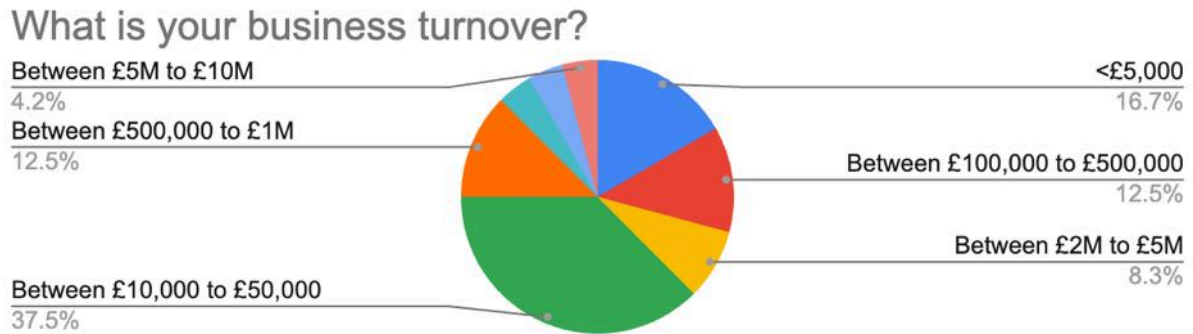
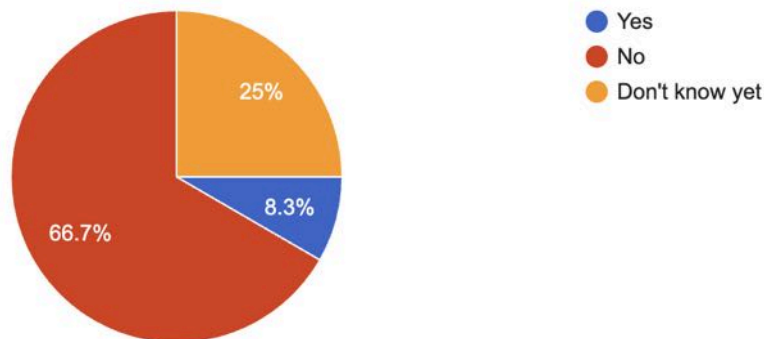


Figure 9 illustrates the distribution of beneficiaries' turnover. The largest proportion (37.5%) reported a turnover between £10,000-£50,000. A further 16.7% reported turnover of under £5,000, while 12.5% fell within each of the £100,000-£500,000 and £500,000-£1 million ranges. Additionally, 4.2% of beneficiaries reported turnover between £5 million- £10 million. This is a good sample and representation of the entire Birmingham Innovation Hub cohort.

Figure 10: Beneficiaries securing new commercial contracts



8.3% of beneficiaries reported securing at least one new commercial contract as a result of the support provided by the Birmingham Innovation Hub project.

Meanwhile, 25% said they were unsure whether the project had helped them secure any new commercial contracts to date.

The total value of new commercial contracts reported by survey respondents is **£61,200**.

Figure 11: Beneficiaries securing grant funding (non-commercial contract)

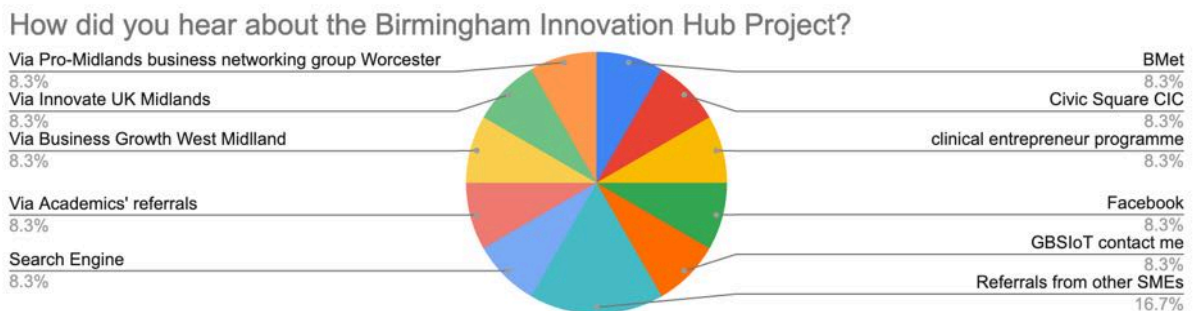


12.5% of survey respondents reported securing a grant with support from the Birmingham Innovation Hub project, while 4.2% indicated they were unsure at this stage.

The total value of grant funding secured amounts to **£349,500**.

4.3.3 Main sources referrals

Figure 12: Main sources of referrals

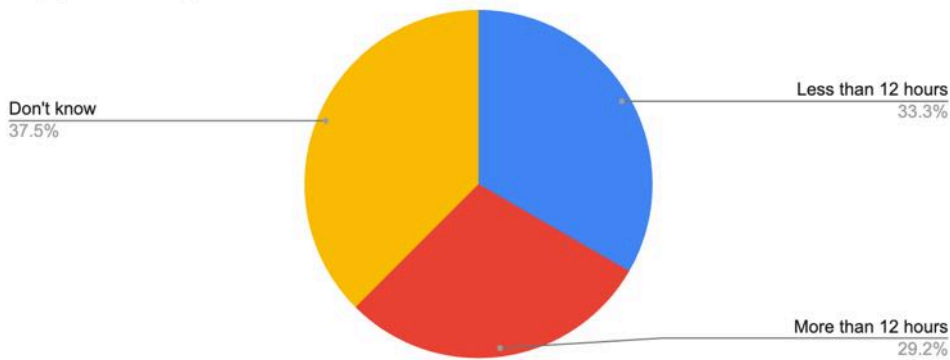


The project is now clearly well established in the region, as evidenced by multiple referral sources. The largest source of referrals is recommendations from other SMEs, accounting for 16.7%.

5.3.4 Hours of support

Figure 13: Perception of beneficiaries of the hours of support that they have received.

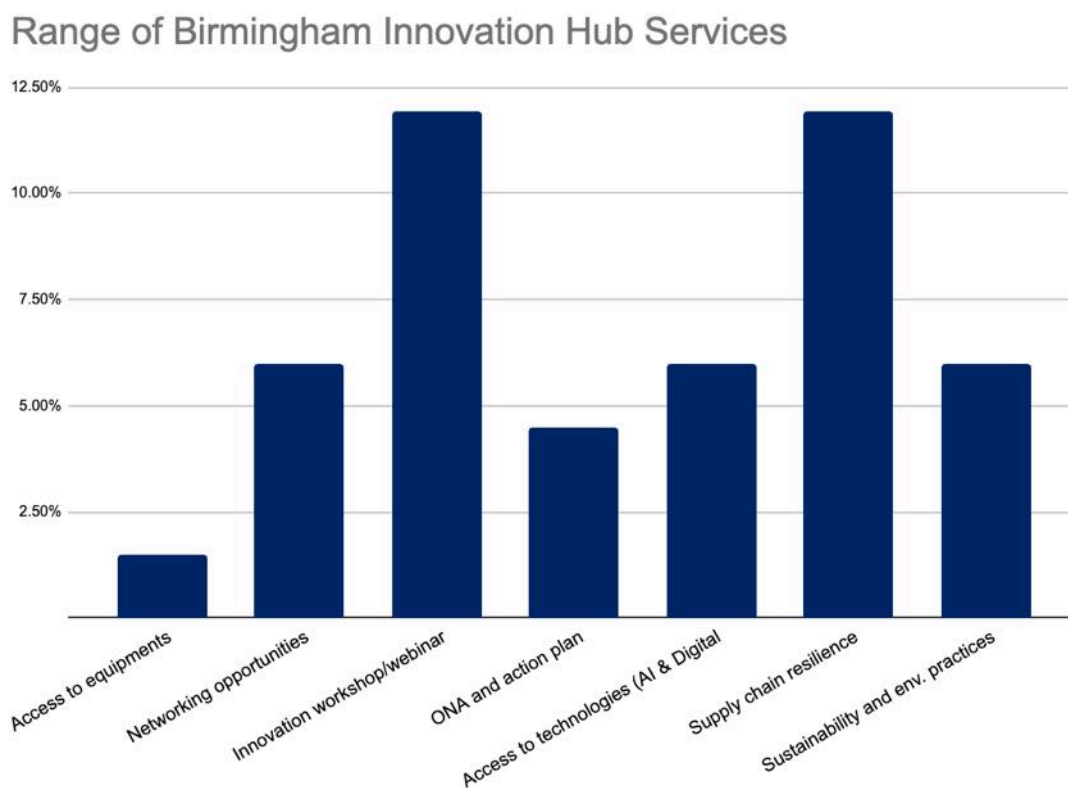
From memory, how many hours of Birmingham Innovation Hub Service support have you received?



29.2% of beneficiary survey respondents perceived to have received more than 12 hours of support, whilst 33.3% of beneficiary survey respondents have perceived to receive less than 12 hours. Lastly, 37.5% are currently unsure.

4.3.5 Support received

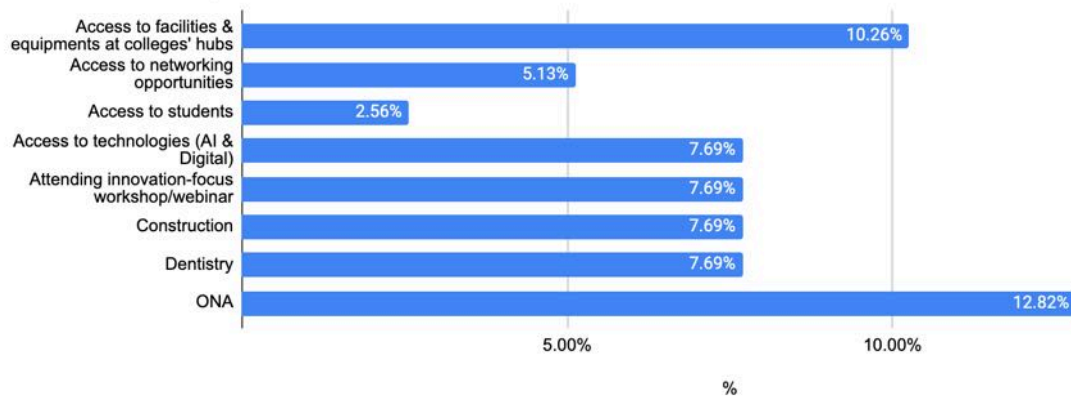
Figure 14: Range of support received by beneficiaries



As expected, the most commonly accessed types of support through the Birmingham Innovation Hub project include Innovation workshop & webinar and supply chain resilience. each cited by 11.94% of respondents.

Figure 15: Single most useful services rated by beneficiaries

What was the single most useful service?

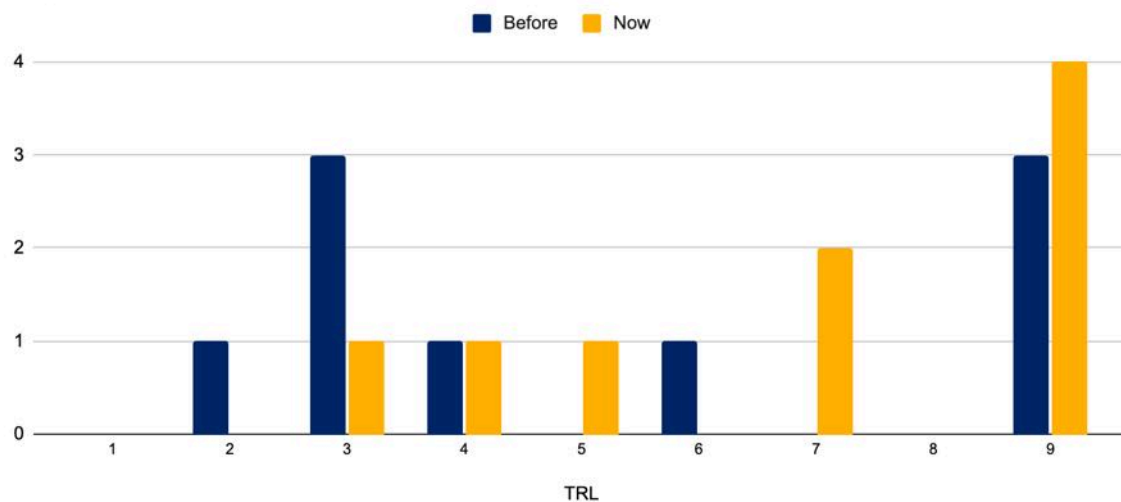


When survey respondents were prompted to select the one single most useful support to them, the ONA scored the highest with 12.82%, then followed by SMEs visiting Colleges Campus at 10.26%.

4.3.6 Product and service market readiness

Figure 16: Progression of Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs)

Progression of TRL levels

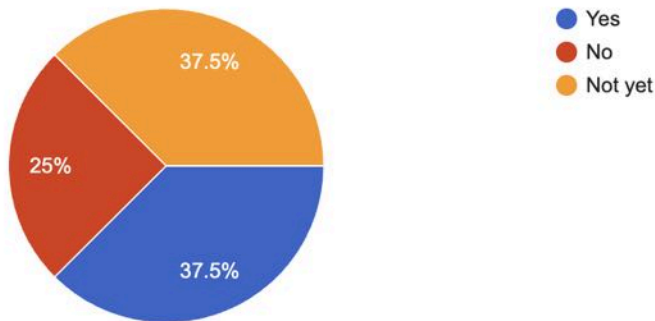


37.5% of survey respondents have tried to make progress towards new-to-firm products or services. The survey respondents reported that, on a scale of 1 to 10, their product/service was on average at 5.30 ± 2.95 close to market when they first engaged with the Birmingham Innovation Hub project. These same products/services are now 6.88 ± 2.36 closer to market.

The average increase of TRL across the survey respondents is **+1.55** (and 51% due to the Birmingham Innovation Hub project intervention). This is a good progression in TRL for a pilot project.

4.3.7 Organisational Needs Assessment (ONA)

Figure 17: Implementation of innovative measures following the ONA



37.5% of respondents had implemented the innovative measures identified through the ONA at the time of this evaluation.

When prompted to explain their most useful piece of advice/learning/knowledge that they gained through the process,, notable answers included:

“Risk management and improving compliance.”

“Accessing low cost high value information due to free facilities was an amazing opportunity for the care sector’

“Using the co-working space, as well as another room for our event days, has helped our start-up overcome some financial challenge in short term”

“Great info about dental scanners and nice Team”

“It gave us confidence to try new things”

4.3.7 Jobs created and safeguarded

Across all beneficiaries respondents, **13 FTE jobs** have been created across 5 companies and **53 FTE jobs safeguarded** across 7 companies.

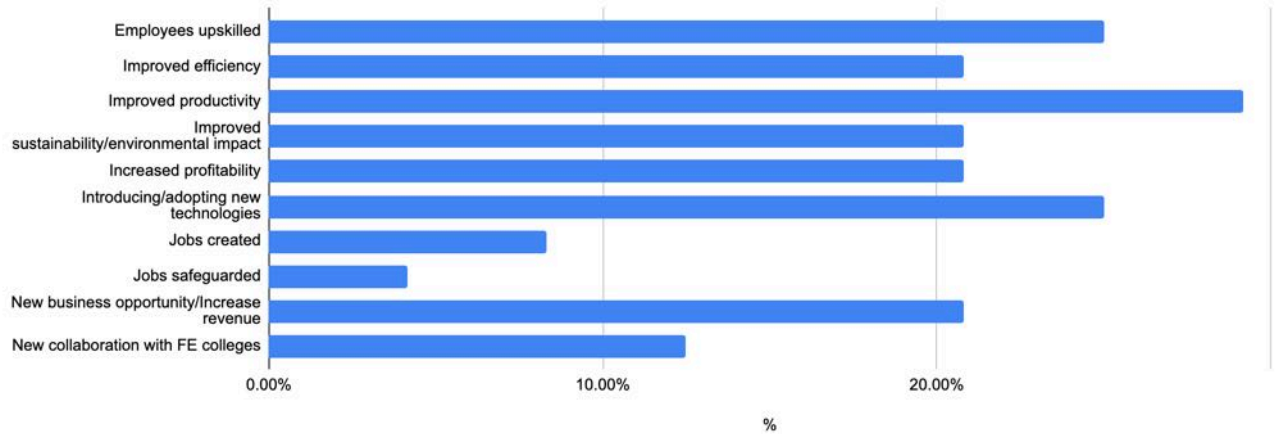
In addition, **15 paid students/interns** were hired across 6 companies.

50% of companies made an attempt to hire students from under-represented groups (e.g. women in STEM, racial/ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities).

4.3.8 Productivity

Figure 18: Impact of the Birmingham Innovation Hub on productivity

Impact of the Birmingham Innovation Hub Services on productivity

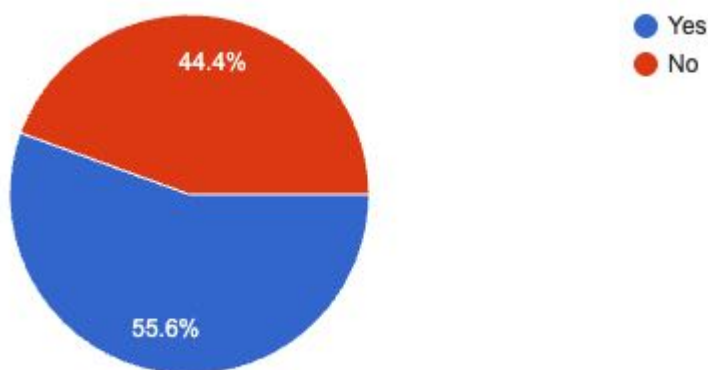


- 25.00% of survey respondents reported an improvement in employee upskilling.
- 20.83% reported improved efficiency.
- 29.17% reported increased productivity.
- 20.83% reported improved sustainability/environmental impact
- 20.83% reported increased profitability
- 8.33% introducing/adopting new technologies
- 8.33% reported jobs creation
- 4.17% reported jobs safeguarded
- 20.83% highlighted new business opportunities and increased revenue.
- 29.17% reported forming new collaborations with FE colleges.

Overall impacts are expected to increase over time.

4.3.9 Environmental impact and sustainable practices

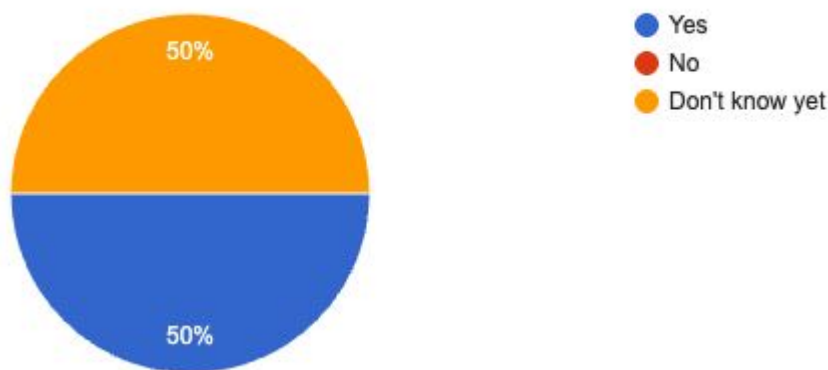
Figure 19: Businesses implementing environmentally sustainable practices



As a result of participating in the project 55.6% of survey respondents have adopted environmentally sustainable practices.

Reported areas of green improvement include: issues addressed in implementing a support system, energy efficient furnaces and electric submetering, creation of an upcycled denim collection.

Figure 20: Environmental impact on customers

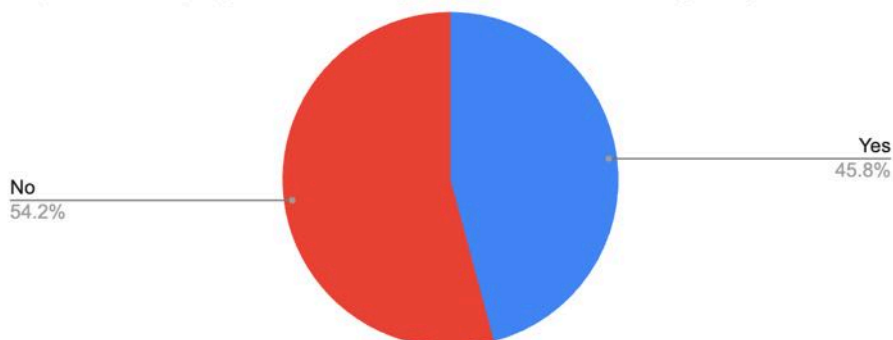


Half of those who adopted environmentally sustainable practices reported an improvement in their reputation with customers or stakeholders, while the other half are not yet aware of any impact.

4.3.11 Social benefits

Figure 21: Social benefits

Has your participation in the project led to any social benefits (e.g improved employee well-being, more inclusive hiring etc.)?



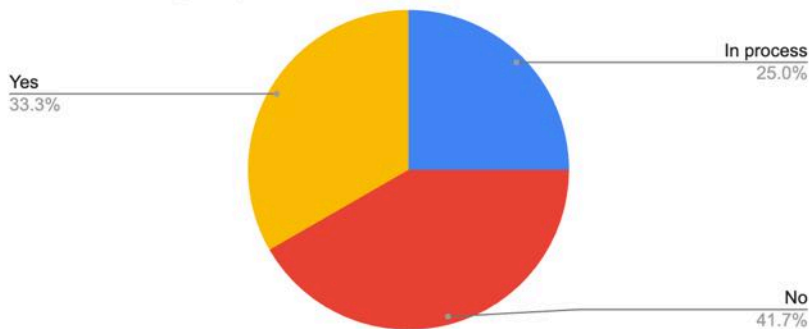
45.8% of survey respondents reported experiencing social benefits as a result of their participation in the Birmingham Innovation Hub project.

4.3.12 R&D collaborations

46.6% of companies reported initiating new R&D collaborations, leading to a total increase of **£8,117.10 in R&D and innovation expenditure** and **cost savings of £5,037.02** as a result of their participation in the Birmingham Innovation Hub programme.

Figure 22: Adoption of new technology to move from manual to digital processes

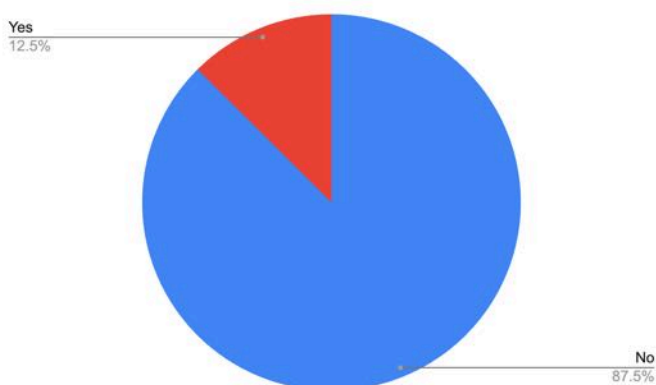
Have you adopted any new technology to move from manual to digital processes?



One-third of respondents have already adopted digital technologies to replace manual processes, while a further 25% are in the process of transitioning.

Figure 23: Creation of new patents, designs, trademarks or copyrights

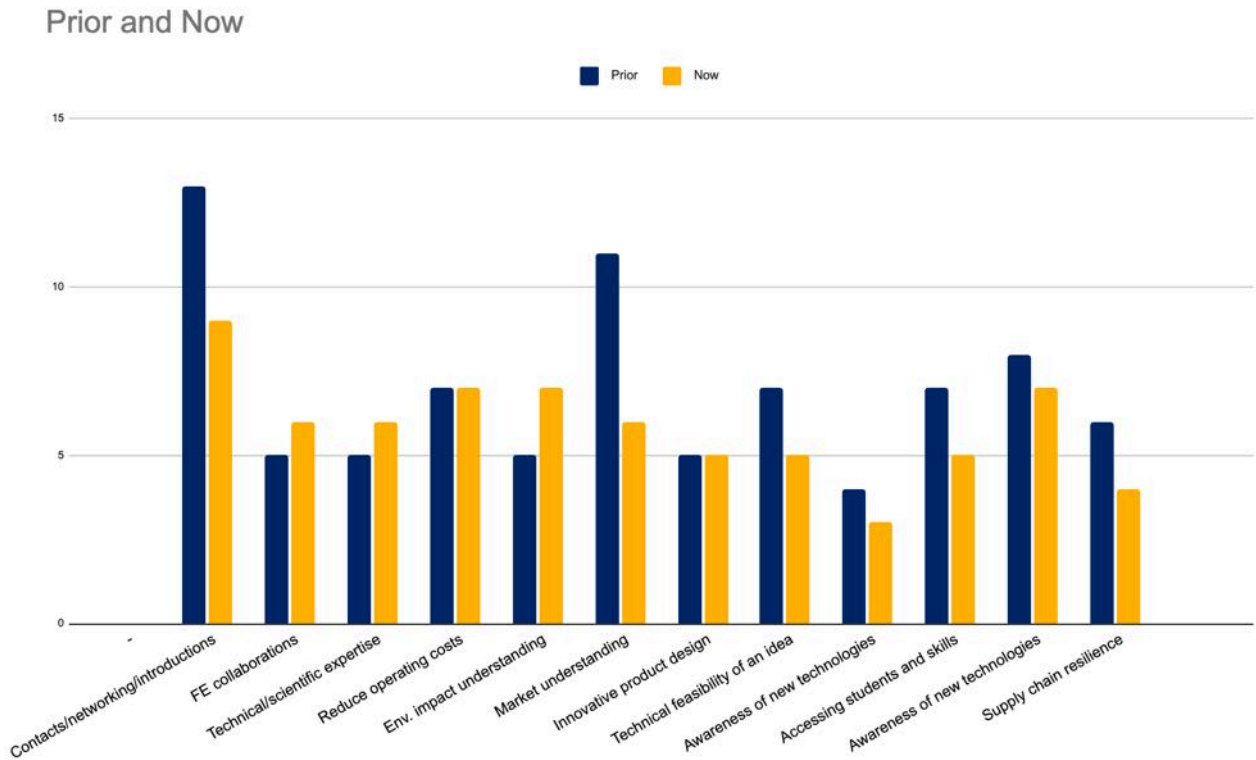
Have you created any new patents, designs, trademarks or copyrights as a result of your participation in the Birmingham Innovation Hub project?



Additionally, 12.5% of respondents reported creating new patents, designs, trademarks, or copyrights as a result of their involvement in the project. This is a commendable outcome for a pilot project.

4.3.11 Barriers to innovation

Figure 24: Comparison of beneficiary barriers to innovation prior to engaging with the programme and now



The top three most popular company needs prior to joining the programme were:

- 1) Contacts/networking/introductions
- 2) Market understanding
- 3) Awareness of new technologies

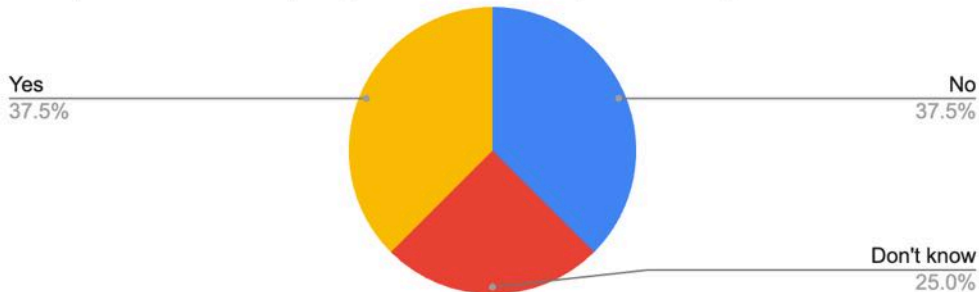
A notable decline has been observed in the demand for contacts, networking, introductions, technical feasibility of an idea and market understanding, accessing students and skills, which is a positive development.

Meanwhile, new needs have emerged, as companies now focus on progressing from concept to market.

4.3.12 Satisfaction and expectations

Figure 25: Specific expectations

Did you enter the programme with specific expectations?



37.5% of beneficiaries joined the programme with prior expectations; this suggests that many participants had heard about the project's potential impact from peers before enrolling.

When prompted to explain their expectations while enrolling in the Birmingham Innovation Hub project, notable answers included:

"To get suggestions on using AI for tendering and procurement process"

"To make energy savings"

"To gain practical support to strengthen our sustainability and innovation approach"

"For networking opportunities"

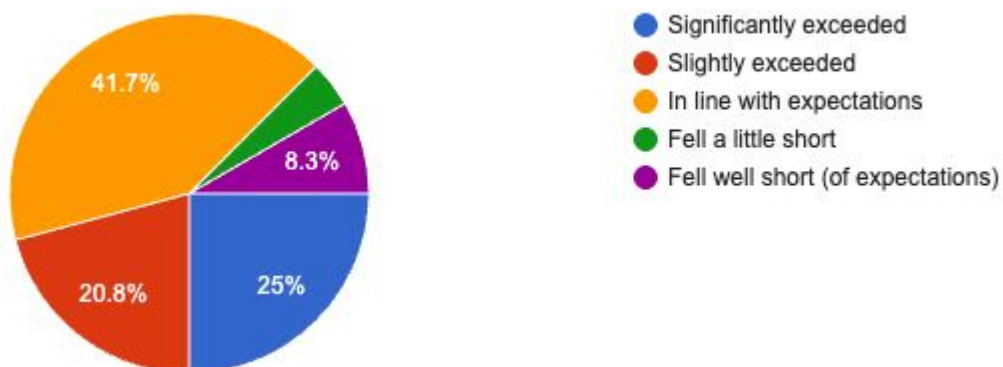
"To learn about regenerative practice"

"To have greater insight, training and support towards digital dentures"

"To increase awareness for other projects/development in my sector"

"To access event space"

Figure 26: Achievement of beneficiary expectations of the programme



87.5% of survey respondents indicated that the services provided through the Birmingham Innovation Hub project met or exceeded their expectations. This represents a very high satisfaction rate for a programme of this type.

When prompted to explain their level of satisfaction in the programme, notable answers included:

"Our participation increased our awareness and confidence in AI"

"It increased awareness of sustainable practices"

"It has increased our business reputation"

"Our participation has led to positive changes both within our immediate creative community and the wider fashion ecosystem we engage with. Through showcasing our upcycled denim collection and discussing our sustainability journey, we observed increased awareness and interest in circular fashion practices among designers, students, and emerging creatives, particularly around textile reuse and low-waste design."

"It was great working with practitioners for dental."

"The staff and team are knowledgeable, helpful, and demonstrate great communication, showing a desire for the businesses to succeed and offering many options to help"

"The programme offered a valuable space for reflection, learning, and collaboration, and has strengthened our confidence in developing sustainable, socially impactful creative practice."

"The support met our expectations by providing practical guidance, mentoring, and peer learning that helped us strengthen our sustainability approach and innovation practices"

"The opportunities given were backed up by professionals"

"The training workshops I attended were excellent, and the support from the students and design team is helping us move past a barrier."

"The team are great"

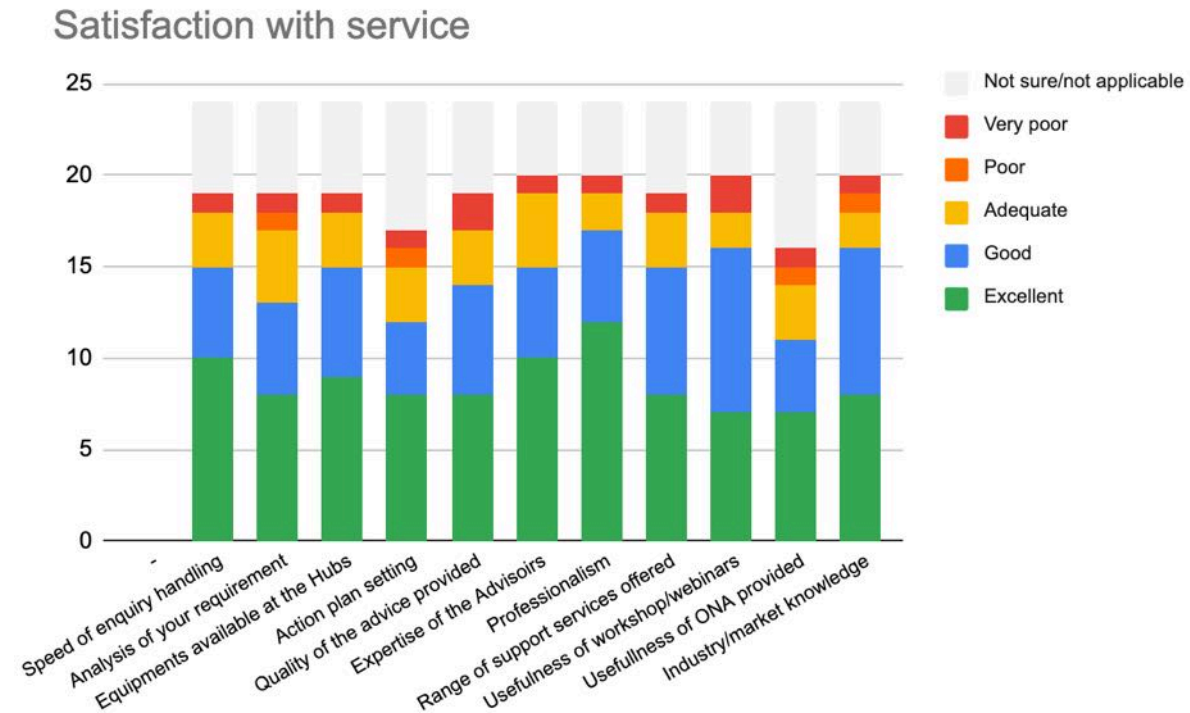
"Gyte was amazing"

Some suggestions for improvements:

"Clarify better from the outset the objectives and all the services available"

"I could have had a better introduction/onboarding"

Figure 27: Beneficiary ratings of different aspects of the service



The aspects of the Birmingham Innovation Hub Services that survey respondents most frequently rated highly were: the expertise of the Advisors, the thorough analysis of requirements, the quality of advice provided, and the overall professionalism of the project staff.

Assessors note that the overall satisfaction rate is good.

4.3.13 Future Directions and Themes

Beneficiary survey respondents requested support along the 6 following themes, which are aligned with their future business ambitions.

These themes are listed below from most frequently mentioned to least frequently mentioned:

1. Technology and Digital Transformation, Automation
2. Talent and Skills Development
3. Mentoring
4. Navigating the funding landscape and help with accessing Grants
5. Sustainable products and services
6. Sales and marketing strategies

**5: STAKEHOLDER
FEEDBACK**



5 STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

5.1 Feedback from Governance and Delivery Team

The workshop with the project management and delivery team took place on 24th March 2026. In attendance were:

- Andy Gazey, Assistant Principal – Business Support & Development, Fircroft College
- Matt Beck, Director of Blended and Online Learning, Heart of Worcestershire College
- Darran Marks, Operations Director, Greater Birmingham & Solihull Institute of Technology
- Mani Dhillon, Business Innovation Practitioner, Solihull College and University Centre
- Jessica Shuker, Innovation Practitioner, South City College Birmingham
- Oyeronke Sule, Innovation Practitioner, South City College Birmingham
- Kulthum Jawad, Innovation Operations Manager, BMet College
- Gyte Petrauskaite, Innovation Practitioner, BMet College
- Shamim Ara Rajput, Innovation Practitioner, BMet College

Following is a summary of the insights gained in this workshop.

Q1. PROGRAMME RATIONALE AND RELEVANCE

To what extent does the Birmingham Innovation Hub programme continue to meet the innovation and technical support needs of local SMEs?

*“Support SMEs to leverage new technology within their industry
Foster collaborations with FE colleges for knowledge, skills and productivity
Primary focus on Digital Technologies in the following sectors: engineering, dental, constructions and business support services
Business Broker of wider support services”*

Participants largely confirmed the enduring validity of the original BMet programme rationale. The core objectives of supporting SMEs to leverage new technology within their industries and focusing on digital technologies in sectors like engineering, dental, construction, and business support services were seen as well-delivered.

However, it was noted that the construction sector, in particular, often required more varied and nuanced approaches. The Birmingham Innovation Hub effectively fostered collaborations with FE colleges to enhance knowledge, skills, and productivity amongst local SMEs, and provided essential networking opportunities. The fourth point of the rationale, acting as a "Business Broker of wider support services," was clarified to mean signposting businesses to other support organisations, a role often assumed by colleges due to resource limitations. A consistent constraint highlighted was the issue SMEs face when looking for funding.

Q2 ECONOMIC AND POLICY CONTEXT

What was the economic and policy context at the time the Birmingham Innovation Hub Programme was designed?

At the time of design, the West Midlands Combined Authority had an established growth strategy, though there was a perceived gap in the Authority's initial understanding of how to effectively engage businesses for this specific opportunity.

The priority sectors identified during the bid remain consistent with current college focuses, and SME statistics in the region have stayed relatively stable since the project's inception. A notable shift in the landscape includes an increased focus on AI and efficiency in technology implementation. Organisations have grown more confident regarding AI, and SMEs are now more interested in how to best utilise these tools seeking answers to questions like, "How can I do it better, how can I do it faster?" rather than just what is available.

Demonstrating adaptability to these shifts, the dental sector has successfully integrated digital technology to upskill teams and align with General Dental Council standards and scope of practice.

Q3. CONTEXT AND MARKET NEEDS

Have the needs or market failures met by the Birmingham Innovation Hub? (e.g, digitalisation SMEs, greening SMEs, getting new products to market, retaining in the Birmingham area etc.).

The Birmingham Innovation Hub successfully addressed several identified needs and market failures. It significantly increased awareness of available innovation opportunities and provided crucial signposting to other schemes. A key market failure it tackled was the prevailing perception among businesses, especially in the construction sector, that colleges were exclusively for academic studies (A-levels) rather than sources of business support (unlike universities).

The Birmingham Innovation Hub actively worked to change this through events and networking. The pilot project also effectively penetrated the micro-business sector, engaging businesses that had historically been hesitant to interact with higher education institutions for innovation guidance. Specific needs addressed included filling the shrinking talent pool in dental technology due to expert retirements, addressing the reluctance of employers to take on apprentices due to associated costs, and providing critical support for growth-focused SMEs often overlooked compared to new startups.

Q4.MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

How effective have marketing, communicating and networking activities been for raising awareness of project activities and achievements?

Marketing, communication, and networking activities, while effective over time, faced significant initial challenges. The first six months to a year were particularly difficult as the project was new and its infrastructure was being established, making it hard to disseminate information.

However, momentum grew, and the pilot project gained recognition, though participants noted it was unfortunate the project was coming to an end just as this awareness peaked. A crucial lesson learned was the ineffectiveness of a generic communication strategy; a more impactful approach **required tailoring messages** to the specific needs and language of different sectors, such as dental versus construction. The absence of a sector-specific "playbook" or clear marketing strategy limited early impact, but things really came together in the second year of implementation. Additionally, several participants reported a disconnection with external partners like Innovate UK, which led to an under-promotion of valuable resources. The opportunity to better valorise the **Heart of Worcestershire**

College's resource platform was also highlighted.

Q5. HUB NETWORK AND DELIVERY

How has been the take-up for the different colleges? Have there been any improvements, learning or adjustments made? Is the network of colleges working successfully?

The take-up among different colleges saw significant improvements over the pilot project's duration. Initially, colleges experienced siloed working. However, in the second year, the network flourished through joint events and shared activities. A key adjustment involved shifting from largely unsuccessful one-to-one business engagement in sectors like construction, where 'time is money,' to more effectively tailored group learning events that gathered feedback collectively.

The college network was highly praised as a 'great idea' for its success in bringing SMEs together through networking, which also created beneficial connections between students and employers.

Showcasing college facilities during events proved to be a major advantage, demonstrating seriousness and generating potential referrals. Furthermore, there was a strong consensus that the network should continue beyond the conclusion of the funding period.

Q6. PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

How have project management, internal communication, data collection and recording, governance, administration and financial management been?

Project management processes showed significant improvement over time, moving from paper-based to digital forms, which enhanced efficiency. Internal communication was generally effective, with weekly meetings keeping team members updated. However, data collection and reporting presented challenges in the first year due to colleges using diverse methods and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) being overly broad. Efforts were subsequently made to streamline and align data collection using a common questionnaire, which improved consistency.

Administrative challenges included difficulties with finance management, particularly resubmitting backdated timesheets due to staff turnover, highlighting the need for a standardised proforma across all partners.

There was also a perceived lack of clarity regarding deliverables and the quantity of data needed for final review, suggesting that future projects require better operational support and clear definitions of impact evidence from the outset, such as for the ONA.

Q7. BENEFICIARY SEGMENTATION

Have you noticed any difference in services delivered to early SMEs versus more established SMES?

Yes, a distinct difference was observed and acknowledged in the service delivery approaches for early-stage micro-businesses compared to more established SMEs. Micro-businesses typically require support for fundamental needs, such as securing funding,

accessing student assistance for new projects like website development, or basic digital integration.

In contrast, established organisations generally sought more advanced support, focusing on strategies for scaling their existing growth, taking on apprentices, or adopting complex new technologies. This disparity was also evident in communication, as established business owners often demonstrated a higher level of financial and skills-related knowledge compared to new entrants, necessitating tailored language and support strategies.

Q8. EDI AND SUSTAINABILITY

How did you address the EDI and sustainability in your implementation?

The project integrated Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and sustainability through several deliberate actions. For EDI, a successful networking group named 'Shebuilds Birmingham' was established for women in construction, with events strategically scheduled at 10:00 AM to accommodate working mothers dropping off children.

Sustainability efforts were supported by forming intentional partnerships with organisations that shared common values, with a particular focus on areas like retrofit. The Birmingham Innovation Hub also delivered sessions on design thinking, AI, and data for non-profit organisations. Furthermore, resources, including materials from editors' interviews, were developed to meet all accessibility standards. To ensure user-friendliness, participants were allowed to use their preferred tools in events and workshops, communicated via email. The team also focused on creating AI-related resources for sustainability education.

Q9. PROCUREMENT

What did you procure and how did you do it?

The project successfully procured both internal staffing resources and external expertise. For external expertise, the Birmingham Innovation Hub engaged various subcontractors, including Civic Square, Dark Matter Labs, and Material Cultures, to provide specialised services.

These procurement activities were conducted strictly following the college's standard procurement processes, ensuring compliance and due diligence in securing necessary resources for the project's operation and delivery.

Q10. OUTPUTS, IMPACT AND TARGETS

What are your observations related to the project targets and spend? Please comment on beneficiary profile, industry sectors, geography etc.

The project targets were considered reasonable and were often exceeded, specifically moving from 90 to 120 SMEs but the infrastructure to record these achievements was sometimes lacking. The Governance team felt they could have increased targets by a further 30–40% if the project had a third year, though the short timescale made it difficult to fully evidence the final adoption of technology by some beneficiaries.

The ONA process, initially seen as a simple tick-box exercise, was found to require a more intensive one-to-one approach to ensure meaningful impact, eventually being streamlined

from over an hour to 10-15 minutes per organisation. The beneficiary profile included a diverse range of SMEs across identified high-priority industry sectors such as engineering, dental, construction, and business support services, primarily within the Birmingham region, all focused on leveraging new digital technologies.

Q11. BENEFICIARY RECRUITMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

How effective has beneficiary recruitment been? What and who have been the major referral channels?

Recruitment was highly effective, with referrals from other groups being the top source of leads, a sign that the Birmingham Innovation Hub is well-established in the ecosystem.

Direct outreach via LinkedIn, Eventbrite, and word-of-mouth were the most successful internal channels. While large events drew over 50 attendees, the team noted that high attendance did not always translate directly into long-term beneficiaries, suggesting a need for deeper engagement strategies beyond initial awareness.

Q12. MUTUAL BENEFITS

How has the Birmingham Innovation Hub benefited from and in turn benefited other local innovation projects?

The Birmingham Innovation Hub reported very limited direct engagement and collaboration with other local innovation projects throughout much of its operational period. The primary instances of inter-project collaboration, such as monthly meetings with the Coventry Innovation Hub and the Black Country Innovation Hub, only began in the later stages (November/December 2025).

Despite this, the project has inadvertently laid groundwork for future cooperation, opening avenues for potential collaboration with other institutions like the University of Wolverhampton. This suggests that while direct reciprocal benefits with existing projects were minimal, the Birmingham Innovation Hub's presence and activities have **enhanced the broader regional innovation ecosystem** by creating future partnership opportunities.

Q13. REGIONAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

How is the project perceived by wider stakeholders and the regional innovation ecosystem?

The project is viewed positively by stakeholders like the West Midlands Combined Authority, who were impressed by the Birmingham Innovation Hub's achievements and case studies. The Hub has successfully established itself as a recognised part of the regional innovation ecosystem, successfully bridging the gap for the education and training sector which had been late to the innovation space.

Q14. EXTERNAL FACTORS

How have the rising of interest rates, post-Brexit Trade arrangements and armed conflicts affected the delivery of the Birmingham Innovation Hub?

The Birmingham Innovation Hub's delivery was influenced by several wider economic

factors. Rising interest rates, coupled with soaring costs for essentials like fuel, electricity, and gas, substantially impacted SMEs, severely limiting their capacity to invest in innovation and automation.

Brexit led to the cessation of the European Union Structural Funds, making it considerably harder for the Birmingham Innovation Hub and its beneficiaries to secure crucial funding, often forcing startups to rely on self-financing.

Additionally, banks showed reluctance to issue business loans to SMEs, causing long delays in financing that affected their ability to afford rent and essential equipment. Supply chain issues, particularly high prices for European products, prompted some sectors such as healthcare organisations to source internationally, creating further challenges in monitoring compliance with regulatory bodies.

Q15. LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

a) What has worked well overall? What have the successes been? Where are there transferable good practices?

The pilot project's overall success was driven by a collaborative "college network" model that effectively broke down institutional silos and prevented the duplication of effort. A major highlight was the "**curriculum-led**" **engagement strategy**, particularly in the dental sector, where existing relationships between faculty and employers were leveraged to drive participation.

Furthermore, the project successfully reached the "hard-to-reach" micro-business sector, which historically avoided higher education institutions.

b) What barriers and constraints do you feel the pilot project has faced? How were they overcome? How well did this go?

Early data collection and reporting were challenging due to varied college methods and broad KPIs, along with administrative difficulties stemming from staff turnover impacting finance. Additionally, the definition of deliverables was not always clear, and quantifying impact proved hard. These challenges were largely overcome through trial and error, continuous learning, streamlining data collection with a common questionnaire, and adapting engagement strategies. While these efforts improved project execution, the short project timescale made it difficult to fully evidence complete technology adoption by SMEs.

c) What are your recommendations for the legacy of the pilot?

- **Proactive Staffing Planning:** Any future projects should anticipate and account for significant delays in staff hiring within the college sector due to lengthy recruitment processes.
- **Establish Clear Frameworks:** New projects should commence with a robust framework outlining clear parameters and recommendations from the outset, to prevent initial ambiguities and provide a defined path forward, minimising the challenges of figuring out processes during implementation.
- **Sustain the Birmingham Innovation Hub's Operation:** The Hub should continue operating in some capacity to build upon its established presence and successful

collaborative synergy among colleges. The successful college network, which proved vital in bringing SMEs together and fostering student-employer connections, should be sustained and expanded beyond the current funding period to prevent a return to siloed working.

- **Maintain Engagement & Outreach:** Sustain efforts to showcase resources, actively engage local SMEs (e.g., through industry association meetings), and leverage the alumni network to foster continued innovation and future projects collaboratively. Continue to address beneficiaries' expressed needs for advice on technology, digital transformation, AI, mentoring, accessing student talent, and navigating the complex funding landscape

5.2 Feedback from wider stakeholders

3 wider stakeholders interviews took place with:

- Ade Humphrey from Business Growth West Midlands
- Daniel Gregory from Birmingham City Council
- Suzie Branch from Skills West Midlands and Warwickshire

5.2.1 Cross-referrals and the wider innovation ecosystem

The Birmingham Innovation Hub has established itself as a distinctive and much-needed offer within the regional innovation landscape. A significant achievement was the unification of Further Education (FE) services under a single recognisable brand, which provided an effective point of contact for business advisors across seven local authorities and Business Growth West Midlands.

By fostering these connections, the Birmingham Innovation Hub project enabled local businesses to quickly locate specific information and support they needed, making the regional support function more effectively.

Stakeholders consistently describe the Birmingham Innovation Hub as an excellent and timely initiative that facilitates collaboration across FE providers and makes specialised knowledge more easily accessible to businesses that may not otherwise engage with innovation support. This integrated approach helped position FE colleges as a legitimate route for innovation support, bridging a gap for businesses that might otherwise only look toward universities for such expertise.

Regarding the construction sector, feedback suggested that while initial connections were formed, there is further potential to deepen integration across complementary building programmes, particularly those focused on sustainability, skills, and sector-specific innovation. Time constraints limited the extent to which these synergies could be fully realised. With a longer delivery period, there is a clear opportunity to create a more cohesive and interconnected innovation ecosystem, strengthening cross-referrals and shared learning across initiatives.

5.2.2 Process

What has worked well?

The Birmingham Innovation Hub is widely regarded as accessible, responsive, and easy for businesses to engage with. The breadth and quality of services offered, spanning technical support, skills development, specialist diagnostics, and access to expert facilities are considered a major asset.

Businesses consistently highlight the value of being able to tour and utilise the physical facilities across the Colleges. This hands-on exposure not only demystifies innovation processes but also inspires SMEs to explore new approaches and technologies. Many businesses also valued the opportunity to access free venues for hosting events.

Flexibility is another core strength. The programme has proven capable of tailoring its support to SMEs at a variety of stages from early-stage innovators exploring new ideas to more established companies looking to adopt advanced technologies. This adaptability has been extremely well received and helps ensure that support remains relevant and impactful.

Stakeholders also praised the shift in dialogue; by focusing on "growth and productivity" instead of just "qualifications," the Hub fostered more impactful engagement with local employers.

What could be improved?

The primary area for improvement is the project's short duration. The two-year pilot was considered insufficient to achieve full sustainability and long-term momentum. Stakeholders noted that "classic government" short-termism can be detrimental to initiatives like this, which require time to fully understand business goals, suggesting that future timelines should align with the five-year planning cycles typical in most businesses.

Recruitment and onboarding processes, including DBS checks required for the education sector can take up to four months, significantly reducing the time available within a limited funding window. Effective innovation support depends on time to build relationships, raise awareness, and deliver measurable impact. Consequently, a longer and more stable delivery period would substantially enhance the programme's ability to generate lasting value for the region.

To further increase impact, it is recommended to involve an innovation expert from the outset to better leverage various specialisms, and to move away from "broad brushstroke" training in favor of more precise support that aligns closely with real-world business challenges.

In the construction sector, stakeholder feedback highlighted additional areas for improvement related to accessibility. Eligibility criteria such as requiring businesses to be registered as limited companies initially restricted engagement in the first cohort, particularly excluding sole traders, who represent a critical part of the construction ecosystem. Relaxing these criteria in later cohorts, through the inclusion of sole traders and students, improved participation and enabled more diverse, cross-generational engagement. This suggests that a more inclusive approach would further increase both reach and impact.

Time commitment was also identified as a barrier within construction-focused training, with some employers finding it difficult to release staff for extended periods. As a result, more flexible delivery models such as shorter, intensive “burst” sessions are recommended. Aligning programme delivery with sector-specific cycles (e.g. seasonal activity from Spring to Autumn) could further support participation.

Overall, while the Birmingham Innovation Hub demonstrates strong foundations in delivery and engagement, extending programme duration, increasing flexibility, and broadening accessibility will be critical to maximising future impact.

6: PROJECT PROGRESS



6 PROJECT PROGRESS

6.1 Project context; relevance and consistency

- **What was the project seeking to do?**

The mission of the **Birmingham Innovation Hub** project is to work closely with local employers in the Birmingham area to identify barriers to growth, uncover innovation opportunities, and provide tailored support that equips business representatives with the knowledge and skills to implement innovative ideas. By supporting businesses to explore innovation in a safe and collaborative environment, and through participation in innovation workshops delivered by one of the six partner colleges, the project aims to facilitate business growth and ensure that businesses are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to operate efficiently, effectively, and resiliently in a constantly changing environment.

The Birmingham Innovation Hub project focuses on sharing best practice across the FE College network and aligning business needs with the most appropriate college service offers. It is delivered by six colleges:

- **BMet College** (Lead Partner)
- **Fircroft College**
- **Heart of Worcestershire College**
- **South and City College Birmingham**
- **University College Birmingham**
- **Solihull College & University Centre, supported by Greater Birmingham & Solihull Institute of Technology Hub**
- **University College Birmingham**

Each college brings its own specialist expertise to provide technical guidance and practical support to local SMEs. Teams of Innovation Practitioners, Technicians, and other college staff work directly with businesses to identify technical needs related to new technologies, processes, and business models. This approach helps diffuse innovation through:

- Access to college facilities supporting product development
- Delivery of innovation-focused workshops
- Access to expert staff and knowledge for product design
- Bespoke innovation analysis tailored to each SME

The network of colleges ensures that local businesses have timely access to state-of-the-art facilities and expert guidance in areas such as:

- Artificial Intelligence
- Digital technologies
- Dental Technology
- Data analytics
- Construction
- Engineering & Manufacturing
- Robotics
- Internet of Things
- Women in Trades

- Social Media

Each college delivers a series of fully funded innovation-focused workshops, providing SMEs with practical support in these areas.

The programme initially aimed to engage 120 SMEs for an ONA, with 90–120 SMEs expected to access innovation services, participate in workshops, and embed their ONA over the project's lifetime.

Following the completion of the first year of pilot delivery, the funder approved a 12-month extension, allowing the network of hubs to continue delivering similar services.

- **What was the economic and policy context at the time that the project was designed?**

At the time of the project's design, the West Midlands Combined Authority had an established growth strategy, though there was a perceived gap in how the Authority initially engaged businesses for this specific type of innovation opportunity.

SMEs are the backbone of the Birmingham economy with manufacturing companies representing 5% of the total workforce. The construction sector accounts for approximately 16% of all businesses in Birmingham City, though it saw a 4.5% decline in business numbers between 2023 and 2024. The West Midlands was one of the hardest hit regions by the pandemic due to its high concentration of manufacturing and exporting businesses.

There is a productivity gap. In 2022, Birmingham's average Gross Value Added (GVA) per job filled stood at £52,848. While this is higher than the Black Country's GVA, it remains lower than the England average in terms of median gross annual pay (£33,952 vs. £37,617).

In addition, there was an emerging and urgent need for businesses to understand how to better utilise AI and digital tools to improve speed and efficiency.

Additionally, the policy environment was shaped by the transition away from European grants following Brexit, which created a more challenging funding environment for startups and SMEs.

- **What were the specific market failures that the project was seeking to address? Was there a strong rationale for the project?**

The project sought to address several critical market failures, most notably the "university-centric" perception of innovation, where businesses viewed colleges only as academic institutions rather than sources of technical business support. There was also a significant talent gap in specialised sectors like **dental technology** and **engineering** due to expert retirements and a general reluctance among employers to take on the costs of apprentices.

The rationale for the project was strong and the project addressed what were, and what remain, key market failures and areas of underperformance in Birmingham city.

- **Was it appropriately designed to achieve its objectives? Was the delivery model appropriate?**

The project utilised a "college network" model that broke down institutional silos particularly in the second year of cooperation, by allowing each partner college to specialise in a specific area, such as AI, Robotics, Dental, or Construction. This delivery model was considered appropriate because it leveraged existing faculty-employer relationships and provided hands-on access to physical facilities, which businesses found more impactful than generic training. While the "curriculum-led" engagement was successful, the delivery team noted that the project's initial generic communication strategy was a weakness. They eventually adapted by developing more sector-specific "playbooks" to effectively engage different industries.

Finally, the online AI platform developed as part of the project is a valuable resource of best practices but would benefit from additional marketing efforts.

- **Were the targets set for the Birmingham Innovation Hub project realistic and achievable?**

The targets for SMEs undertaking an ONA, accessing innovation services, and participating in innovation workshops were realistic and achievable, and all are expected to be fully met.

The target for SMEs embedding their ONA was the most challenging, though it is still expected to be achieved. Progress depends on companies moving from assessment to action, which often requires allocating resources and waiting for budgets to be set in a new financial year.

- **How did the context change as the project was delivered and did this exert any particular pressures on project delivery?**

The context has evolved due to changes in government in 2024 and the introduction of the West Midlands Growth Plan and Industrial Strategy (IS8). These policies place a strong emphasis on AI and green technologies, aligning well with the aims of the Birmingham Innovation Hub programme.

In addition, during delivery, the project faced significant external pressures, including rising interest rates and soaring costs for fuel and electricity, which limited the capacity of SMEs to invest in new automation. The post-Brexit cessation of ESF grants made it harder for beneficiaries to secure funding, often forcing them to rely on self-financing. Furthermore, a notable shift toward AI-centric inquiries required the project to adapt its resources rapidly to answer "how to use" tools rather than just "what is available".

- **Bearing in mind any changes in context or weaknesses in the project design / logic model, can the project reasonably be expected to perform well against its targets?**

The project is on track to achieve all its targets.

This is a very positive achievement given the economic context and delays in recruiting staff which in turn delayed the start of the overall project.

6.2 Progress to date

Table 1 presents the current and expected project-end attainment of the UKRI Birmingham Innovation Hub project at completion date.

These figures have been gathered from the latest project claims document and projected with due consideration to the beneficiary survey responses, management team workshop discussions and overall project context as summarised in the column titled 'Notes'.

Table 1: UKRI targets

Indicator	Original Targets	Projected performance at Project Closure on 31/03/2026		Notes
		Number	% of target	
Total Expenditure	£997,932 Revenue	£997,932	>100%	Providing all the invoices and receipts can be gathered by project end, the project is on track to spend most of its allocation.
Innovation Organisational Needs Analysis (ONAs)	120 (20 per partner)	182 (across all colleges)	>151%	The target is already achieved at the time of the evaluation
SMEs accessing innovation services	90-120	>650	>541%	The target is already achieved at the time of the evaluation.
SMEs accessing Innovation workshops	90-120	>1400	>1162%	The target is already achieved at the time of the evaluation.
SMEs embedding ONAs over lifetime of project	90-120	102	100%	While it takes time for SMEs to fully implement recommendations, our survey reveals that only 37.5% of the beneficiaries have done so at the time of the interim evaluation. This output will increase over time.

Overall achieved outputs by the project by 31/03/2026:



182 ONAs



650 SMEs accessing innovation services



1400 accessing innovation workshops



102 SMEs embedding ONAs

The project is on track not only to meet but potentially exceed its four primary targets, reflecting a strong level of performance and effective delivery across its key activities.

The Birmingham Innovation Hub pilot is now firmly embedded within the broader innovation ecosystem, having established valuable partnerships, networks, and support mechanisms that position it as a lasting asset. As a result, its long-term impact is expected to extend well beyond the formal conclusion of the project, contributing to sustained innovation, business growth, and regional development.

The Governance and Delivery teams deserve particular recognition for the high standard of work demonstrated throughout the pilot. Their strategic oversight, coordination, and commitment have been instrumental in ensuring the project's success, enabling it to adapt to challenges while maintaining focus on its objectives.

Furthermore, the reported outcomes and impacts show a clear and consistent alignment with the Logic Model. The strong levels of business engagement and the effective provision of support services have translated into the successful achievement of key targets, as outlined above. This provides clear evidence that the pilot project's tangible outputs and results closely reflect its original rationale, confirming both its relevance and the effectiveness of its design and implementation.

6.3 Project management and delivery

- **Was the project well managed? Were the right governance and management structures in place and did they operate in the way they were expected to?**

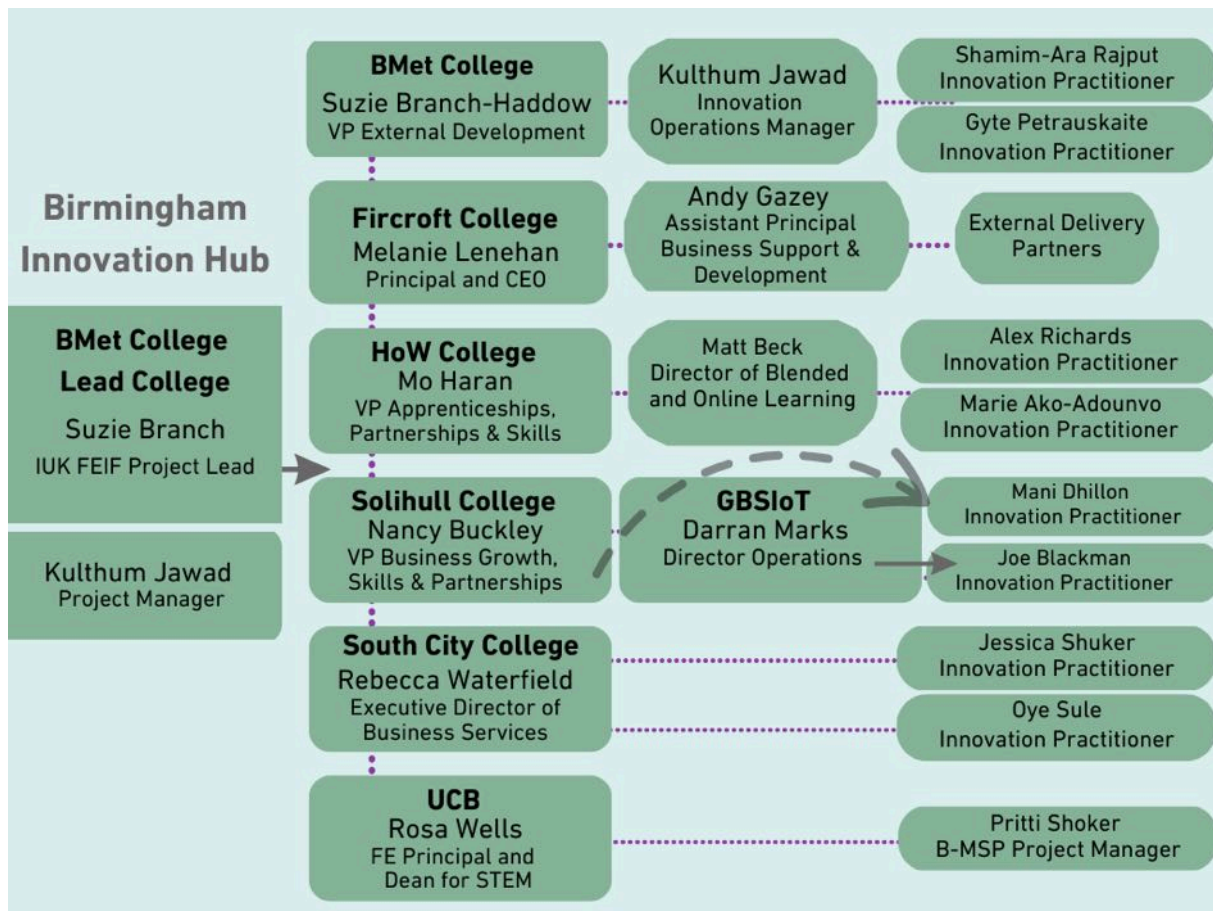
During the first year, delivery of the pilot project was developed independently by each college, with each institution establishing its own model and approach. Communication between project leads took place monthly, but engagement among practitioners was inconsistent and attendance was often low. Onboarding of project staff was gradual, with teams only fully in place after four to six months. Innovation Practitioners managed day-to-day delivery within each college, supported by oversight from leadership teams.

Following staffing changes at the end of Year 1, central communication was strengthened under a new project manager, particularly in relation to aligning expectations and standardising data collection. From Year 2 onwards, the project evolved into a more collaborative and centrally coordinated model. This included greater awareness of partner college provision, adoption of a single ONA, shared events calendars, some joint delivery activity, and increased cross-college support. Regular governance meetings every three weeks, involving college leads and updates from the project manager, ensured consistent oversight.

Early challenges included limited practitioner engagement and, consequently, inconsistent qualitative data capture. These issues were addressed through focused efforts to build a shared vision for collaborative working, alongside targeted one-to-one support for teams and clearer guidance on reporting outputs.

Diagram 3, below, presents the organogram for the Birmingham Innovation Hub pilot project Management and Governance structure.

Diagram 3: Birmingham Innovation Hub Project Organogram



- **Has the project delivered its intended activities to a high standard?**

Despite the delays at the start in appointing the full Governance Team, the overall delivery has been high quality. The overwhelming majority of beneficiaries felt that the service had been good or excellent.

All four project target performance indicators will be met or exceeded.

The programme services found most useful by beneficiaries were AI and digital solutions, dental technologies and construction.

An impressive 87.5% of beneficiaries reported that the programme met or exceeded their expectations, reflecting high satisfaction with the support and facilities provided at the Birmingham Innovation hub. Site visits organised by the Colleges were also consistently praised.

- **Could delivery of the project have been improved in any way? How were project activities perceived by beneficiaries and other stakeholders?**

Very few beneficiaries reported dissatisfaction with their experience on the project, significantly fewer than on many similar initiatives. This suggests that the programme's services are widely regarded as useful and of high quality.

External perceptions of the project have also been very positive, with good engagement from stakeholders who see the programme as addressing a gap in provision in Birmingham City. By its second year, the Birmingham Innovation Hub programme had firmly established its brand and secured a position within the region's innovation ecosystem.

- **Did the project engage with and select the right beneficiaries? Were the right procedures and criteria in place to ensure the project focused on the right beneficiaries?**

The challenge is always to find new businesses to whom to market the project services. This requires innovative approaches for finding these businesses, such as working with intermediary organisations, showcasing the facilities available at the Hub and a lot of effort in networking and outreach.

Colleges have found that as they move beyond those businesses with which they are already engaged, uptake has increased and this has meant that word of mouth has been important as the hub has gained momentum

- **How were procurement activities delivered?**

The procurement processes used by the Birmingham Innovation Hub partners followed the relevant individual college requirements, ensuring compliance with established guidelines and regulations which are in line with the Public Contracts Regulations. The project benefitted from the support of the individual colleges' procurement teams.

Several key items were procured across various partner colleges to support the initiative, this included the evaluators for the programme, Civic Square, Dark Matter Labs or Material Cultures.

- **How were EDI and sustainability incorporated into the delivery of the Birmingham Innovation Hub programme?**

The breakdown of survey respondents shows a notable proportion of female-led businesses at 27.84%, well above the national average. This indicates that the Women in Trades in construction focus of one strand of the programme has been particularly effective. A legacy of the programme is the successful networking group named 'She Builds Birmingham', established to support women in construction.

6.4 Project net economic impact

Ideally, project impacts would be calculated by subtracting the impacts experienced by counterfactuals from those experienced by beneficiaries between the times that they start receiving Birmingham Innovation Hub services and afterwards. However, as no counterfactual completed the survey, the economic deadweight component of the economic impact will instead be calculated by subtracting the percentage that beneficiaries attribute their impacts to factors other than the Birmingham Innovation Hub Services.

The methodology employed for calculating the net Gross Value Added (GVA) impact of the Birmingham Innovation Hub Services is the following:

- A. The number of barriers to doing innovation/business that beneficiaries have overcome since joining the Birmingham innovation Hub programme, as reported by each beneficiary in their survey responses, was counted and multiplied by the percentage to which those same beneficiaries attribute overcoming those barriers to the Birmingham Innovation Hub services. In this way, the GVA deadweight of the reported reductions in number of barriers was subtracted from the gross direct effects. (Deadweight = the outcomes that would have occurred even if the Birmingham Innovation Hub project had not taken place). The average number of barriers that survey respondents indicated had been overcome during their time on the project was 1.42. Once deadweight was removed, this became 0.87 barriers on average.
- B. The GVA gross direct effects were calculated by assigning an economic value to a beneficiary overcoming one barrier. This was done using the mean 3-year economic value of incremental product or service innovation calculated in “Innovation types and performance in growing UK SMEs” Oke et al. (2007), uplifted to 2026 figures (2% compounded annual inflation was assumed) and divided by 13, which is the number of barriers to innovation on which our survey focused. The uplifted mean 3-year economic value of the Birmingham Innovation Hub project helping a beneficiary to overcome a barrier was calculated to be £48,532.
- C. Evidence of GVA leakage, displacement and substitution was searched for amongst all the survey responses and phone calls from all the stakeholder groups and among the responses from the management and delivery team workshop. (Leakage = % of intervention benefiting individuals or organisations outside the target beneficiary group, at the expense of potential additional benefits to the target beneficiary group. Displacement = % of outcomes and outputs generated at the expense of outcomes or outputs elsewhere in the target beneficiary group. Substitution effects = activities undertaken in order to benefit from project services at the expense of another resource).

The eligibility check carried out during registration of prospective beneficiaries ensured that none of the beneficiaries were outside of the target beneficiary group (SME based in the relevant UK eligible areas and seeking support for digital technology adoption within SMEs in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, construction, dental, digital, and engineering). Hence, the GVA leakage of the Birmingham Innovation Hub project outcomes to out-of-target beneficiaries is £0.

The evaluators could not find any instances of displacement arising from the Birmingham Innovation Hub project.. For example, they could not find any instances of a business receiving free Birmingham Innovation Hub services when they would otherwise have paid for them had project support not been available. Similarly, the assessors were reassured that the unique capabilities of the Birmingham Innovation

Hub Services compared to other facilities meant that there was little possibility for this project to displace services offered at other facilities too. Therefore, we consider that the project has catalysed innovation that probably would not have taken place had the project not been available and we consider the GVA displacement to be £0.

As there were no criteria for beneficiaries and counterfactuals to meet in order to benefit from Birmingham Innovation Hub (e.g. they did not need to make a capital purchase in order to be eligible), the GVA substitution effects of the project is £0.

- D. The SIC codes of the beneficiaries were translated into Office for National Statistics Input-Output Analytical tables industries (updated data - April 2023) by matching the industry most closely related to each SIC code. The GVA multipliers for these industries were identified. For example, the GVA multiplier for the “Dental Practices activities” is 1.399. This means that for every £1 increase in GVA in that industry, there is 0.399p additionally created down the GVA supply chain (i.e. multiplier effects). These multiplier effects encompass both Type I multiplier effects (direct effects to the beneficiary companies, their employees and their supply chain companies and employees), as well as Type II multiplier effects (benefits resulting as a consequence of the Type I effects, e.g. increased disposable income of beneficiary and supply chain employees results in greater spending elsewhere in the economy).
- E. Finally, for each beneficiary who completed the survey, the number of barriers that they have overcome since joining Birmingham Innovation Hub (bullet point A above) was multiplied by the 3-year economic value of overcoming one barrier for that same beneficiary (bullet point B above). Any instances of leakage, substitution or displacement relating to that beneficiary (bullet point C above) were subtracted from this amount. The resulting amount was then multiplied by the GVA multiplier (bullet point D above) to give the fully corrected 3-year GVA impact estimate for each beneficiary. These individual GVA impacts were then summed and extrapolated to estimate the fully corrected GVA impact for all 245 beneficiaries, i.e. it is assumed that the GVA benefits of Birmingham Innovation Hub participation for all 245 beneficiaries is represented by the GVA benefits reported by the subset of beneficiaries who completed the survey.

As explained in bullet point E, the net impact is the following calculation:

Net impact = (Gross direct effects - Deadweight - Leakage - Displacement - Substitution) x Multiplier effects.

3-year net GVA impact = £20,919,224. This is a non-negligible GVA impact for Birmingham City. According to the Birmingham City Observatory’s balanced GVA estimates for 2022, the total Gross Value Added (GVA) for Birmingham City at current prices was approximately £32.0 billion.

The Birmingham Innovation Hub project will have been one of the important steps taken to realise this GVA.

In the process of creating this GVA impact, employment impact was also created. This employment benefit was calculated as follows:

- F. The number of FTE jobs created in beneficiary companies since they joined Birmingham Innovation Hub Services, as reported by each beneficiary in their survey responses, was counted to give an estimate of employment gross direct effects. The employment deadweight was subtracted from this number by multiplying these same number of FTE jobs per beneficiary by the extent to which the beneficiaries attributed creation of these jobs to sources other than Birmingham Innovation Hub.
- G. Any employment displacement, substitution or leakage that occurred in the creation of jobs attributed to Birmingham Innovation Hub Services, as indicated by beneficiaries in their phone calls or surveys or by the Birmingham Innovation Hub management and delivery team in the workshop discussions, were then also subtracted. These corrections were all deemed to be 0, for the same reasons as those described in bullet point C.
- H. The process described in bullet point D was repeated but this time to calculate employment multipliers for each beneficiary. For example, the employment multiplier for the “Dental Practice Activities” industry is 1.314. This means that for every 1 FTE increase in employment in that industry, there is 0.314 FTE additionally created down the employment supply chain.
- I. Finally, for each beneficiary who completed the survey, the deadweight was subtracted from the gross direct effects for each survey respondent (bullet point F). Any leakage, substitution and displacement (bullet point G) was subtracted from this amount. This amount was then multiplied by the employment multiplier effect (bullet point H) for each beneficiary. These amounts were then summed and extrapolated over all 245 beneficiaries to give the fully corrected employment impact.

Net employment impact = 10.8 FTE.

The steps leading to calculation of net GVA impact and net employment impact for Birmingham Innovation Hub are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Gross and Net Additional Impact for Employment and GVA (full project lifetime). All figures include Multiplier Effects as these are applied at the individual beneficiary level

Impacts		Measure	Adjustment
GVA (£)	Gross direct effects	£11.890m	-
	Minus Deadweight	£7.274m	38%
	Minus Displacement and Substitution	£7.274m	0%
	Minus Leakage	£7.274m	0%
	Net Additional	£12.797m	1.76 average Multiplier across beneficiaries
Employment (FTE)	Gross direct effects	110	-
	Minus Deadweight	91	22%
	Minus Displacement and Substitution	91	0%
	Minus Leakage	91	0%
	Net Additional	162	1.78 average Multiplier across all beneficiaries

The net economic impact is the sum of the GVA impact and economic employment impact. We assume the economic impact of the job creation outlined in Table 2 is £75,000 per job. This is the average 3-year salary for an assistant innovation technician in the UK (Source Glassdoor website, March 2026).

Thus, the economic impact of the 162 jobs created with Birmingham Innovation Hub help is £12.15m.

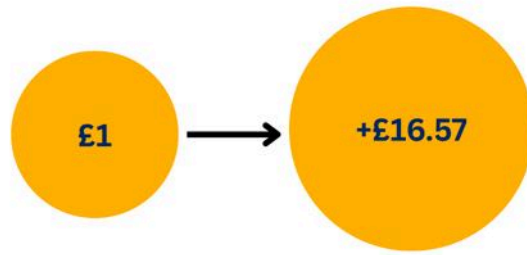
Finally, by averaging the GVA and employment impacts, the **total net economic impact is estimated at £16.534 million.**

6.5 Project value for money

Total funds to deliver the Birmingham Innovation Hub project was £997,932. Balancing this total delivery cost against the 3-year net economic impact, we calculate the project value for money to be:

→ **Output/input unit cost: £16.57**

This means that for every £1 spent in delivering this project, £16.57 was created



The net economic impact was achieved with £997,932 cost to UKRI.

6.6 Benchmarking

Table 3 compares the value for money of the Birmingham Innovation Hub against comparable projects. The comparator projects were chosen either because they also had an innovation support element or business support available to companies and therefore offering a similar combination of services (innovation and business support).

Table 3: Benchmarking against comparable grant-funded projects

Project name	Lead partner	Funders	Focus / sector	Total project value	Expected beneficiaries	Value for Money
Birmingham Innovation Hub	BMet College	UKRI	Innovation Hubs	£997k	246 businesses	£16.57
RADAR	AMRC North West	ERDF	Advanced manufacturing	£3.86m	200 businesses	£15.90
STAR	University of Leicester	ERDF	Advanced manufacturing	£4.6m	77 businesses	£0.24
ISfB	OxLEP	ERDF	Engineering	£7.9m	155 businesses	£11.72
CIAMM	University of Birmingham	ERDF	Quantum innovation	£1.2m	40 businesses	£3.40
ARLI	University of Birmingham	ERDF	Low carbon, Innovation	£3.4m	125 businesses	£5.49
Smart Factory Hub (AMTECAA)	University of Birmingham	ERDF	Advanced manufacturing	£11.1m	265 businesses	£4.87
Low Carbon Solent (LCS)	University of Portsmouth	ERDF	Low Carbon	£1.8m	200 businesses	£11.94

The Birmingham Innovation Hub Programme when benchmark to other funded initiatives in the UK is delivering a very good return on investment of £16.57 per £1 invested, given that this project is a pilot with a short delivery timeline, this is a significant achievement.

6.7 Sustainability Return of impact of the Birmingham Innovation Hub

6.7.1 Social Impact

The Social Impact has been assessed by estimating the social value generated through the safeguarding of 53 jobs and the successful placement of 15 students or interns into employment following the completion of their internships with companies participating in the Birmingham Innovation Hub Programme.

A deadweight factor of 29% was applied, based on survey responses. No multiplier effects were included in the Social Impact calculation. Any potential employment displacement, substitution, or leakage associated with job creation from the internships was considered to be zero, as outlined in bullet point C.

A graduate starting salary in the manufacturing sector in Birmingham was estimated at £25,000 (source: Glassdoor, March 2026).

In accordance with HM Treasury Green Book, the social value of a safeguarded job is not equivalent to its full GVA. The Fiscal Value per Safeguarded= $\text{Gross Salary} \times 45\%$ (where $45\% = 15\% \text{ Avoided benefits} + 30\% \text{ Maintained Tax Yield}$).

Based on these assumptions, the 1-year social impact of the project is estimated at **£5,989,926**.

6.7.2 Environmental Impact

The environmental impact was assessed using an input-output model to estimate changes in key metrics such as CO2 emissions, electricity savings, and waste reduction.

A total of 101 tonnes of CO2 savings was reported in the survey. Based on survey data, no deadweight was applied. No displacement, substitution, or leakage related to environmental impact was identified, in line with bullet point C.

Assessors are applying an optimistic bias of 35%. When scaled to the entire cohort, the official figure of 670 tCO2 has been used in the environmental impact calculations for the Birmingham Innovation Hub. Using the HM Treasury Green Book supplementary guidance on carbon valuation, this equates to a monetary value of around £171,500 (central estimate).

Survey respondents also reported a total waste reduction valued at £2,000. When scaled to the entire cohort, this equates to £20,416 over one year.

Electricity savings declared amounted to 200,001 kWh. When scaled to the entire cohort, this equates to 2,041,676 kWh, equivalent to around 476 tonnes of CO₂. Using the HM Treasury Green Book supplementary guidance, this represents a monetised value of approximately £122,000 (central estimate).

In total, the estimated environmental impact is valued at **£313,916** for the two years of delivery.

This highlights the additional environmental benefits generated by the project beyond direct business outcomes.

6.7.3 Sustainability Return of impact (SROI)

The **sustainability return of impact (SROI)** is calculated as the sum of the net economic benefits, environmental benefits and social benefits of the project.

SROI= net economic benefits+environmental benefits+social benefits



SROI for the Birmingham Innovation Hub=
£22.838m

7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions

The final evaluation of the **Birmingham Innovation Hub** pilot project reveals a highly successful initiative that has firmly established a new model for innovation support within the West Midlands.

Funded by a £997,932 Innovate UK grant, the project successfully unified a consortium of six FE colleges to provide technical expertise and digital adoption support to local SMEs. The programme addressed a critical gap in the regional ecosystem by positioning FE colleges as legitimate partners for business innovation, moving beyond their traditional role as purely academic providers.

Performance Against Targets

The project demonstrated exceptional delivery, meeting or exceeding all four of its primary performance indicators. Key achievements include:

- **Business Engagement:** The project engaged, in-depth, with 246 businesses, providing a range of services from technology demonstrations to deep-dive assessments.
- **Service Delivery:** Targets for Organisational Needs Assessments (ONAs) were exceeded by over 151%, while participation in innovation workshops exceeded original targets by a staggering 1162%.
- **Knowledge Embedding:** Despite the inherent time lag in SMEs implementing new knowledge, the project is on track to meet its target for companies fully embedding their ONAs by the formal closure date.
- **Economic impact:** The project achieved a high economic impact of £16.534 million and a value for money ratio of £16.57 for every £1 spent.

Beyond financial metrics, the Birmingham Innovation Hub project has fostered substantial behavioral changes within the SME community: 55.6% of beneficiaries adopted environmentally sustainable practices, and 46.6% initiated new R&D collaborations. While only 37.5% of businesses had fully implemented their innovative action plans at the time of evaluation, the average Technology Readiness Level (TRL) increased by +1.55, indicating that participating firms are moving significantly closer to commercialising new products and services.

Strategic Integration

By the end of the second year, the Birmingham Innovation Hub had successfully "broken down institutional silos," evolving from independent college delivery to a collaborative, centrally coordinated network.

The "curriculum-led" engagement model leveraging existing relationships between educational sector and industry proved highly effective at reaching "hard-to-reach" small businesses.

The project has laid a robust foundation for a permanent innovation infrastructure that bridges the gap between technical education and industrial productivity.

Effectiveness and Accessibility

The project proved highly effective by maintaining a responsive and user-friendly approach, allowing businesses to engage with complex innovation topics in a low-risk environment. Accessibility was a core strength, as the Hub offered a diverse range of entry points from the digital-first AI research platform at Heart of Worcestershire College to the hands-on practical build sessions at Fircroft.

By providing free access to specialist facilities, high-value equipment, and co-working spaces, the project removed significant financial barriers for startups and SMEs in the care, dental, and construction sectors. This decentralised model ensured that specialised expertise was geographically and technically reachable across the Greater Birmingham area, successfully demystifying the innovation process for local employers.

Programme Delivery and Stakeholder Engagement

The delivery of the Birmingham Innovation Hub was characterised by a high degree of professionalism and technical expertise, with **87.5%** of beneficiaries reporting that the services met or exceeded their expectations. While the project faced initial challenges in the first year due to siloed working and gradual staff onboarding, it evolved into a highly collaborative network by the second year. This shift enabled shared events calendars and cross-college support, which were praised by stakeholders for making specialised knowledge more accessible.

Engagement was further strengthened by focusing on "growth and productivity" instead of just "qualifications," successfully positioning FE colleges as a legitimate route for innovation support. The project also promoted inclusivity through initiatives like the 'SheBuilds Birmingham' networking group for women in construction.

Programme Positioning and Future Potential

By the end of the funding of the pilot period, the Birmingham Innovation Hub firmly established its brand and secured a unique position within the regional innovation ecosystem. The project demonstrated that FE colleges can effectively bridge the gap between technical education and industrial application, particularly in high-priority sectors like Advanced Manufacturing, Dental, and Construction.

There is strong consensus among stakeholders and the delivery team that the network should continue beyond the funding period to build on this momentum. The pilot has laid the groundwork for future collaborations with leading organisations who could facilitate the transfer of sector specific digital technologies to smaller businesses. It has also proven its ability to adapt to emerging technologies, such as the shift toward AI-centric inquiries. To realise its full potential, future iterations would benefit from longer delivery timelines, aligning with five-year business planning cycles to fully evidence long-term technology adoption and sustained economic growth.

7.2 Lessons learned

★ Lesson Learned 1: Collaborative Network Model

Moving from siloed institutional delivery to a 'college network' mode effectively prevented duplication of effort and allowed for specialised hubs of expertise.

★ Lesson learned 2: Sector-specific Communication

Successful engagement required developing sector-specific language to engage different industries effectively.

★ Lesson learned 3: Curriculum-Led Engagement

Utilising existing faculty-employer relationships was the most efficient way to drive participation, particularly in the dental sector.

★ Lesson learned 4: Hand-On Value

SMEs found physical visits, technology demonstrations, and access to college facilities far more impactful than 'traditional training'.

★ Lesson learned 5: Recruitment Lead Times

Recruitment in the education sector can take up from 4 to 6 months, which must be accounted for in short-term pilot timelines.

★ Lesson learned 6: Administration Standardisation

Using diverse data collection methods created early challenges; a unified digital ONA and standardised reporting are essential for multi-partner projects.

★ Lesson learned 7: Flexibility in delivery models

Physical hubs vs digital platforms increases accessibility and engagement.

★ Lesson learned 7: Addressing the Funding Gap

A recurring constraint for SMEs is the difficulty in securing capital, providing 'signposting' to funding is as critical as technical advice.

★ Lesson learned 8: The need for Longer Timelines

A two-year pilot is insufficient to witness full technology adoption; innovation support requires longer, stable delivery periods.

7.3 Recommendations

EPM provides the following recommendations for the legacy of the project:

- **Support SME implementation:** Continue to encourage SMEs to act on the recommendations from the ONAs. Where budget constraints exist, offer guidance on new potential funding sources.
- **Improve Data Capture and Longitudinal Tracking:** Develop a more structured post-support monitoring system to capture long-term outcomes (6-12 months post-intervention) to capture the embedding of ONAs into SMEs which will occur beyond the end date of the project. Implement a light-touch CRM enhancement to better track collaboration, referral pathways, and cumulative SME engagement.
- **Advocate for continued financial support:** Promote ongoing funding opportunities including grants, subsidies, and investment funds to help small organisations develop innovative products. There is scope to explore closer integration of AI technology within traditional SMEs and their supply chains, including the potential development of a funding model for a legacy project.
- **Enhance project visibility and sustainability:** Continue building the Birmingham Innovation Hub project's brand through additional marketing activities, such as case studies, videos, and podcasts, to showcase successes more widely and attract further funding. Investigate alternative funding sources beyond UKRI to sustain the services provided by the fully established network of Hubs in the City and support a broader scope of interventions.
- **Formalise Cross-Hub Collaboration and Specialisation:** Formalise a cross-college referral protocol to ensure smooth routing of SMEs to the most appropriate expertise. Pilot joint "Hub-to-Hub Innovation Clinics" that bring together multiple specialisms (e.g., combining AI, cyber and manufacturing). Promote shared case studies demonstrating how multi-hub collaboration created value for SMEs.
- **Expand Ecosystem Links with Industry, Universities, and Catapults:** Establish regular knowledge-exchange activities with the local universities, and catapults. Encourage joint events with industry clusters such as construction, advanced manufacturing, or AI/Digital. Support Sign post and support SMEs in accessing national and international R&D programmes, including Innovate UK or Eureka competitions.
- **Embed More Structured EDI and Sustainability Interventions:** Highlight case studies of SMEs who have successfully embedded inclusive or sustainable practices. Offer optional "EDI and Sustainability Clinics" to help SMEs convert knowledge into policy or operational change.
- **Enhance Skills Development and Talent Pipelines:** Explore additional opportunities linking students (particularly T-levels and apprenticeships) with innovation-active SMEs. Showcase talent pathways in marketing materials to encourage more businesses to engage with younger workers and interns. Consider building a regional "Innovation Talent Pool" platform showcasing student capabilities, final-year projects, and technical skills.

- **Prepare a Legacy and Continuity Strategy for Post-2026:** Plan a post-pilot sustainability roadmap that outlines: continuation scenarios, preferred delivery models, long-term Hub specialisms, potential funding blends, and regional strategic alignment. Include this strategy as part of the final evaluation to influence decision-makers.

8: CASE STUDIES



8 CASE STUDIES

The following 7 case studies illustrate some of the services delivered to companies through the Birmingham Innovation Hub.

Citizen CLiCK

■ Web Design ■ Social Media ■ Video Production

ROLE THAT BMet PLAYED

Citizen Click CIC reconnected with a member of the BMet team who highlighted the support available through the Innovation Hub, including training sessions and access to student support. Through BMet, the organisation was connected with Gyte Petrauskaite, who provided ongoing support throughout the process.

BMet facilitated connections with students who supported logo development and brand thinking, bringing fresh perspectives and renewed momentum to the rebrand process. This work was supported by the course tutor, Priya Walsh. In addition, Citizen Click CIC benefitted from live AI upskilling workshops delivered through the programme.

The support received through BMet enabled Citizen Click CIC to move forward with its rebrand and make decisions that had previously been holding the organisation back. Access to external perspectives reduced overthinking, freed up time, and allowed the organisation to progress with greater clarity and confidence.

INTRODUCTION

Citizen Click CIC is a digital marketing agency supporting social enterprises and mission-led organisations with websites, branding, video, and strategic communications. Based in Sandwell, the organisation works across Birmingham and nationally. While their core focus is the third sector, Citizen Click CIC also supports private-sector clients, enabling them to offset costs and reinvest in greater support for community-focussed organisations.

CHALLENGE ADDRESSED

Prior to engaging with Birmingham Innovation Hub, Citizen Click CIC was at a critical point in its development and recognised the need to move forward with a rebrand. However, progress was being held back by uncertainty around brand direction and visual identity. As the founder was closely involved in the business and highly invested in its outcomes, developing a new logo and brand identity became challenging and time-consuming, leading to creative block and slowed momentum.

The organisation required external input to break through this stage and confidently progress with its rebrand.

“It’s given us a clearer foundation to grow and communicate our mission more effectively. Birmingham Innovation Hub has helped us get unstuck at a critical point in our rebrand. The student support brought a fresh perspective that enabled us to move forward with confidence. The live AI upskilling workshops were genuinely useful. They gave me practical ways to analyse our data and improve productivity, and they opened my eyes to new possibilities for the services we deliver.”



NATE SHERIDAN
Managing Director



ROLE THAT BMet PLAYED

Sinclair Day Accountancy joined the Hub after meeting Gyte at a networking event. Through the programme, the firm was introduced to an AI automation company and received one-to-one support sessions to explore and develop ideas tailored to their business needs.

The support provided helped the team build confidence in using AI both internally and as part of their wider marketing strategy. Through practical discussions and external expertise, the firm gained fresh insight into how automation and modern marketing tools could enhance client engagement and support future growth.

The programme enabled them to think more creatively and strategically about the future of the business, equipping them with the knowledge and confidence to begin implementing new technologies within their operations.

INTRODUCTION

Sinclair Day Accountancy is a Worcester-based accountancy firm providing professional financial and advisory services to businesses and individuals. The firm supports clients across a range of sectors, offering expertise in tax, compliance, and business growth. As a growing professional services firm, Sinclair Day Accountancy is focussed on modernising its operations and strengthening its digital presence to remain competitive in an evolving marketplace.

CHALLENGE ADDRESSED

Before engaging with Birmingham Innovation Hub, Sinclair Day Accountancy was looking to automate key internal processes, increase online visibility and engagement, and better understand how artificial intelligence could be used effectively within their marketing.

While the team recognised the potential of AI and automation, they required practical guidance on how to implement these tools in a way that felt realistic and achievable for growing accountancy practice. They were seeking inspiration, clarity, and structured support around modern marketing approaches and emerging technologies.

“The Birmingham Innovation Hub inspired us with fresh ideas around new technologies and marketing strategies, helping us think more creatively and strategically about the future of our business.”

CHARLI SINCLAIR-DAY
Chief Happiness Officer



clancy
consulting

ROLE THAT BMet PLAYED

The firm connected with BMet through a referral at a Birmingham Chamber of Commerce event. Following discussions around their interest in artificial intelligence, the Birmingham Innovation Hub team proactively engaged with Clancy Consulting and outlined the support available through the programme.

Although Clancy Consulting joined at a later stage, they were matched with an experienced business professional and gained valuable insight into practical approaches for integrating AI into their operations.

The support provided helped the team better understand the potential applications of AI within a design engineering context and offered direction on how to move from exploration to implementation.

“Kulthum Jawad’s commitment and dedicated to the initial registration and client engagement were outstanding. Their support to my success was truly invaluable. Without their efforts in onboarding and client engagement, I wouldn’t have joined the program when I did. They always kept me in the loop, offered encouragement, and skilfully connected me with the right businesses to address our challenges.”

JO JONES

Client Relationship
Manager

INTRODUCTION

Clancy Consulting is a design engineering firm operating in a fast-paced and competitive industry, delivering technical expertise across a range of built environment and infrastructure projects. With growing demands for efficiency, innovation, and high-quality tender submissions, the firm is committed to exploring new technologies to strengthen its organisation and maintain a competitive edge.

CHALLENGE ADDRESSED

Clancy Consulting frequently works to tight tender deadlines, where accuracy, clarity, and the ability to quickly access historical project information are critical. Over time, the firm has accumulated extensive data and documentation, creating challenges in efficiently organising and retrieving information when preparing bids.

With increasing information demands and rapid technological change within the sector, Clancy Consulting recognised the need to explore how artificial intelligence could support improved data management, enhance tender submissions, and streamline internal processes.

Before joining Birmingham Innovation Hub, the firm was seeking guidance on AI adoption strategies, identifying opportunities for staff upskilling, gaining clearer insight into emerging technologies, and improving data collection and organisation to confidently integrate AI into day-to-day operations.

Midas Touch

ROLE THAT SOUTH AND CITY COLLEGE BIRMINGHAM PLAYED

Olabisi learned about the Birmingham Innovation Hub through a finance event advertised to local businesses. The event provided clear guidance on the types of grants and loans available to start-ups and SMEs.

Through the Hub, she gained insight into funding opportunities and the confidence that her business has the potential to grow sustainably. The support reassured her that Midas Touch can move forward with a clearer pathway to scaling.

"I am glad that I found out about the Birmingham Innovation Hub. I am confident that the Birmingham Innovation Hub will support me to take Midas Touch to the next level."

OLABISI JEBUTU
Founder/Director



INTRODUCTION

Midas Touch is a growing haircare brand offering shampoos, conditioners, oils and butters. Founded by Olabisi Jebutu, the business is driven by a passion for quality products that support healthy hair.

CHALLENGE ADDRESSED

As a stay-at-home mum building her business, Olabisi faced challenges around accessing funding and understanding how to scale. While demand for her products was growing, she lacked clarity on grants, loans, and wider financial support available to help expand operations and reach more customers.





KINGFISHER

Dental Practice

ROLE THAT BMet PLAYED

Kingfisher Dental Practice engaged with the Birmingham Innovation Hub through the College Innovation Team, who provided an initial consultation to identify key operational barriers. The team facilitated access to digital expertise, partner referrals, and specialist compliance support.

Through tailored guidance, regular check-ins, and bespoke training, the practice strengthened its compliance systems, improved digital record-keeping, and supported workforce upskilling, including assistance during the CQC registration process. Participation in digital dentistry workshops and exposure to AI-powered Dental Audio Notes (D.A.N) further enhanced their innovation capability.

As a result, the practice has improved productivity through AI and digital tools, enhanced staff and patient engagement, and is now operating with greater efficiency and confidence, with plans to further invest in in-house CAD/CAM systems.

“Working with the team was amazing. Getting introduced to their partners and being involved in events organised by BMet and Innovate UK gave us the confidence to embrace change. Seeing our dental practice logo on the innovation navigator partnership created greater awareness of the practice in the region, following our support of the D.A.N event at Matthew Boulton College.”

DR RAJPUT
Principal

INTRODUCTION

Kingfisher Dental Practice is a Redditch-based NHS and private dental practice providing comprehensive dental healthcare services to patients across the region. Operating in a highly regulated and fast-evolving sector, the practice is committed to improving compliance, embracing digital innovation, and enhancing patient care through the adoption of modern technologies.

CHALLENGE ADDRESSED

As a busy dental practice and laboratory, Kingfisher Dental Practice was managing complex compliance requirements across CQC, BDA and GDC standards. Manual processes and multiple platforms created inefficiencies, reduced productivity, and made it difficult to keep compliance documentation organised and up-to-date.

The practice recognised the growing importance of digital dentistry and AI-driven systems, including improvements to data capture, training records, workflow management, and in-house CAD/CAM manufacturing. However, there was uncertainty around identifying GDPR-compliant healthcare software, integrating updated digital tools in line with GDC standards, and implementing structured staff upskilling.

Before joining Birmingham Innovation Hub, the practice was seeking clear guidance on compliance improvements, workforce digital training, automation opportunities, and practical exposure to emerging digital dentistry technologies.



Digital dentistry hands-on workshop



ROLE THAT SOLIHULL COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY CENTRE PLAYED

Achievable Care Quality Community became aware of the opportunities available through the Birmingham Innovation Hub after seeing a social media post promoting access to a free event space within a local college.

Following an initial enquiry, Solihull College invited Paula Cashmore to an introductory meeting to discuss the facilities and support available through the Innovation Hub. The team provided guidance on the available spaces and technical equipment that could be used to support the event.

Through the Hub, they were able to host a face-to-face conference with minimal financial risk. The team also provided advice on event planning and technical set-up, including support on recording the conference so that the content could later be used on the organisation's website.

This support enabled the organisation to engage directly with its audience, promote its services, and create additional digital resources for future use.

"The Innovation Hub helped me promote my business with minimal risk. This was important for an older female entrepreneur. The conference resulted in additional customers to my online support platform and it has given me resources to use going forward. The support given to organise the event was helpful for my professional growth."

PAULA CASHMORE
Owner

INTRODUCTION

Achievable Care Quality Community provides online support, guidance, and resources for registered managers working in the social care sector. Founded by Paula Cashmore, the platform aims to help care professionals improve service quality, navigate regulatory requirements, and access practical advice to support their roles.

CHALLENGE ADDRESSED

Prior to engaging with the Birmingham Innovation Hub, Achievable Care Quality Community was primarily operating online and faced challenges in expanding its membership base. While the platform provided valuable support for registered care managers, it was difficult to grow awareness and demonstrate the value of the services offered through digital channels alone.

The organisation recognised the need to create opportunities to connect with its audience in person, built trust with potential members, and showcase the practical value of its services. However, hosting a face-to-face event involved financial risk and logistical challenges for a small business.

Access to suitable facilities and technical support was required to enable the organisation run an event that could effectively promote the platform and reach new customers.





ROLE THAT SOLIHULL COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY CENTRE PLAYED

Afro Ganza Hub Ltd engaged with the Birmingham Innovation Hub after discovering the opportunity through LinkedIn and attending a workshop delivered by partner institutions.

Through the programme, the business accessed expert-led workshops focussed on innovation and funding, alongside practical insights into grant funding landscapes and application processes. The support also provided opportunities to engage with experts and a wider network of entrepreneurs and business leaders.

This input enabled Afro Ganza Hub to better understand how to align its work in circular fashion and upcycled design with relevant funding streams and sustainability frameworks. As a result, the organisation gained greater clarity on how to strategically position itself for growth and future impact.

“The Birmingham Innovation Hub provided valuable insights into funding and sustainability and connected us with a strong network of experts and entrepreneurs. The next step for businesses like ours is structured support to translate this knowledge into tangible outcomes and growth.”

DR. ELVIS RESCUE
Founder & CEO

INTRODUCTION

Afro Ganza Hub Ltd is a UK-Ghana based fashion and creative enterprise in sustainable, culturally inspired garments that combine African heritage with contemporary design. The business focusses on circular fashion, upcycled materials, and innovative design approaches to create socially and environmentally conscious products.

CHALLENGE ADDRESSED

Prior to engaging with the Birmingham Innovation Hub, Afro Ganza Hub Ltd faced several challenges linked to scaling its innovative and sustainability-focussed business model. While the organisation had a strong creative vision, it lacked clear access to funding pathways that could support growth and development of its projects.

In addition, there was a need to integrate sustainable production methods in a way that remained cost-effective and commercially viable. The business also faced uncertainty around how emerging technologies, such as AI, could be effectively applied within garment production and design processes.

Afro Ganza Hub was seeking structured guidance, access to expert knowledge, and opportunities to connect with industry professionals to support its next stage of development.



9: GLOSSARY



9 GLOSSARY

AI	Artificial Intelligence
FE	Further Education
ONA	Organisational Needs Assessment
PCR	Project Change Request
SMEs	Small and medium sized enterprises
UKRI	UK Research and Innovation

10: APPENDICES



10 APPENDIX

10.1 Team of consultees

Name	Role	Organisation
Ade Humphrey	Business Manager	Business Growth West Midlands
Andy Gazey	Assistant Principal- Business Support & Development	Fircroft College
Daniel Blyden	Creative Producer	Civic Square
Daniel Gregory	Retrofit Programme Leader	Birmingham City Council
Darran Marks	Operations Director	Greater Birmingham & Solihull Institute of Technology
Gyte Petrauskaite	Innovation Practitioner	BMet College
Jessica Shuker	Innovation Practitioner	South City College Birmingham
Kulthum Jawad	Innovation Operations Manager	BMet College
Mani Dhillon	Business Innovation Practitioner	Solihull College and University Centre
Matt Beck	Director of Blended and Online Learning 1	Heart of Worcestershire College
Oyeronke Sule	Innovation Practitioner	South City College Birmingham
Shamim Ara Rajput	Innovation Practitioner	BMet College
Suzie Branch	Chair	Skills West Midlands & Warwickshire

10.2 Appendix to report

Beneficiary Survey Responses

Aide Memoire notes from beneficiaries and wider stakeholders