

Southern Horizons (UK) LTD



Buckman Associates Ltd

Developing Skills for Business SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

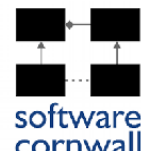
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Context

This report provides a summative assessment of the Developing Skills for Business Project (DS4B). DS4B was part-funded through the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (C&IoS) European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) under Priority Axis 2: Skills for Growth through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It was one of the first projects of its kind within the C&IoS allocation of ESIF Priority Axis 2 as it focused on businesses rather than individuals.

Its purpose was to provide a strategic approach to developing employer-led skills with businesses across C&IoS. It aimed to strengthen the vocational educational and training system in C&IoS through active engagement of employers, providers and relevant institutions in the co-development of labour market relevant skills provision. Although initially expected to be a longer project, DS4B was delivered over a compressed 21 month timeframe. When the project was in development the partners had expected a complementary call to be released for a large employer-led skills delivery project, to allow the identified needs of businesses articulated through DS4B to be delivered. However, there were delays with releasing this call and, as DS4B is drawing to a close, the 'follow on' project has yet to be approved.

The Cornwall College Group (TCCG) acted as Fund Manager and Accountable Body for DS4B on behalf of a collaborative partnership of sector based/thematic delivery leads. They also held responsibility for an Apprenticeship Development Fund (ADF) which covered all sectors.

TCCG commissioned an independent evaluation to deliver insights into the project's design, delivery and processes; performance against targets; and, outcomes and impacts. This work was carried out by external consultants Southern Horizons (UK) Ltd and Buckman Associates Ltd in three stages. Research for this final summative assessment took place between January and March 2020 and included a desk based review of key documentation and an online survey of participating businesses, alongside engagement with the delivery partners, the central co-ordination team and a small set of strategic stakeholders.

Headline Findings

Project Design - the summative assessment has shown that the focus on businesses (as opposed to individuals) was important for C&IoS, as was the developmental focus of DS4B. A number of design features were also singled out as enablers for the project including:

- The role of the nine sector based delivery partners that were much closer to their constituent businesses than a central delivery body would have been;
- Their ability to develop discrete projects, tailored to the needs of the sector/delivery theme;
- The innovative nature of the match funding model which used the wages of apprentices recruited to the new standards as match; and,
- The availability of Employer Voucher funding to unlock conversations and support delivery.

There were, however, some design challenges within DS4B. Although the partnership model was an enabler, it also created some logistical difficulties around outputs as multiple partners could be unknowingly working with the same businesses even though they could only be 'counted' once. Evidence also suggests that the competing pressures of 'chasing outputs' whilst delivering a developmental project like this could be challenging at times. Further, the bold and innovative nature of the project itself added

complications. Given that this type of project was entirely new for C&IoS, not all of the definitions, expectations and eligibility requirements were clearly understood at the outset and some activities that partners had expected to deliver were found to be ineligible which required plans to be changed. The processes and systems surrounding the ADF model in particular had to be developed on the ground from working with the first few businesses that took the opportunity to get involved and the lead time for taking businesses through the whole process was longer than had been anticipated.

Governance and Management - internally, DS4B had a clear governance and management structure in place. As a key feature of this, the Programme Management Group was seen as a useful forum for helping partners to understand and learn from each other as well as for understanding how the project as a whole was performing. However, it could potentially have been more beneficial had partners been able to discuss particular businesses to avoid chasing the same outputs, though it was a partnership decision not to do so.

The level of support provided by the central team was described as 'excellent.' The only critical feedback about TCCG's co-ordination of the project revolved around some of its strategic level decisions that were felt to have been taken without partner input. Several partners also mentioned DWP's slow (and in some cases partial) payments which created a number of significant cash-flow problems.

In terms of day-to-day management, efforts were made across the delivery period to improve data quality, however, these could have been further tightened, potentially through investment in a CRM system.

Externally, as one of four sector based ESF projects commissioned at the same time, care had to be taken to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication. Efforts were made to achieve this but there was some suggestion that a shared Steering Group may have been useful to aid that process.

Delivery - it was expected that the DS4B would focus on four themes: sector co-ordination; programme development and delivery models (focusing primarily on the curriculum development of existing courses); new business models (focusing on completely new course development in terms of content or delivery); and, the creation of placements (supporting businesses to create collaborative projects, work experience placements, internships and apprenticeships). Although not every partner was able to achieve all of these, as a whole, there is evidence that DS4B delivered activities against each of its core project themes.

A broad cross-section of business types were supported through these activities and the geographic spread was excellent. There was also clear evidence of the partnership's commitment to horizontal principles within various aspects of its delivery, although potentially more could have been achieved with a longer time frame.

Performance and Value for Money - as of the end of Quarter 4 2019, the project was slightly behind its financial profile, although the ESF output performance was broadly on track and aspects of the project's added value indicators were actually ahead of profile. The exception here is the added value apprenticeships which were behind at that point. Although progress against targets varied slightly across the partnership it is expected that all of the output targets will be achieved by project closure. Considering the delivery challenges faced by the project, including the fact that one delivery partner ceased trading and others have faced staffing shortages, the expected achievement of all the outputs is a considerable success.

Furthermore, whilst DS4B's unit costs are expected to be slightly higher than forecast in the application by project closure, they will be considerably lower than the unit costs calculated from the call for projects. The project therefore offers DWP excellent Value for Money.

Outcome and Impacts - there is also evidence that a range of business level and sectoral/thematic outcomes are emerging from DS4B to date. Business survey respondents reported a greater likelihood of engaging with training providers after their involvement in the project as well as a greater likelihood of identifying the skills needed in their business. Overall, 75% of survey respondents felt that DS4B had positively impacted on their skills development which is an excellent outcome. Further, 65% indicated that it had made a positive impact on their business productivity.

At a strategic level DS4B provided visibility and momentum for some existing initiatives which will be used as a springboard for further developments. It created some brand new initiatives and supported the development of others. On a practical level, new training products have been developed and new apprenticeship standards have been brought to market. The partners also reflected on the positive collaboration between participating businesses.

There was overwhelming evidence that, despite its challenges, DS4B had been a positive experience for the partners themselves. Importantly, it has given partners a much better understanding of local skills needs, which, it is hoped, will be used to inform future developments. The collaboration between the partners has also been very valuable and should strengthen the business/skills support landscape in the future.

Legacy - the extent to which it will leave a lasting legacy is more questionable. There are certainly some tangible outcomes that will endure beyond the lifetime of the project such as curriculum changes, training products, websites and even relationships, however, most partners felt that there is still work to do. It appears that DS4B has been an important catalyst but not all partners have been able to deliver as fully as intended in such a short space of time and there is a fear that some of the momentum will be lost without follow-on projects to take the work forward. It is hoped that the anticipated employer-led skills delivery project will be funded, building on the foundations that DS4B has put in place.

Potential Learning Points

- Some of DS4B's innovative design features could be considered by those developing similar interventions, including the match funding model;
- There are also lessons to be learned around Management Groups, which, when used effectively such as in DS4B's case, can provide a useful forum for reflection and relationship building;
- However, evidence from the project indicates that complex multi-partnered projects like this may benefit from investment in a dedicated CRM system to ensure accurate reporting and data quality as well as helping to manage interactions with businesses;
- Overall, DS4B has shown that investing in capacity building projects like this can provide an important catalyst for improving the business/skills support landscape;
- It has also shown that skills development projects can lead to improved business productivity which has important policy implications;
- That said, evidence suggests that sustained efforts are needed to shift entrenched skills issues and continuation funding will be required for there to be an enduring legacy;
- Strategically, it is suggested that the Managing Authority could consider the establishment of a Steering Group or similar vehicle when commissioning a suite of projects with similar objectives to help ensure complementarity and avoid duplication between them; and,
- It should also consider the impact of slow payment as this can have a significant negative impact, particularly for the cash-flow of smaller project partners.

Section One: Introduction

1.1 The Developing Skills for Business Project

This report provides a summative assessment of the Developing Skills for Business Project (DS4B). DS4B was part-funded through the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (C&IoS) European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) under Priority Axis 2: Skills for Growth through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It was delivered by The Cornwall College Group (TCCG) in conjunction with Cornwall Chamber of Commerce, Cornwall Council, Cornwall Food Foundation, Cornwall Manufacturers Group, Cornwall Marine Network, Digital Peninsula Network, Pirate FM and Software Cornwall. DS4B was one of the first projects of its kind within the C&IoS allocation of ESIF Priority Axis 2 as it focused on businesses rather than individuals. It was commissioned alongside four other projects which covered aspects of the Health, Hospitality and Digital sectors. Initially expected to be a three year £5.5 million project, DS4B was reduced in length (and also budget) to align better with the expected start date of follow-on projects. It commenced activities in October 2018 and is due to close in June 2020. As a result of this compressed delivery period, the budget was reduced to £3.3m.

1.1.1 The Project Aims

The purpose of DS4B was to provide a strategic approach to developing employer-led skills with businesses across C&IoS. Its aims were to:

- Increase the capacity and capability of established sector/employer organisations and providers in all LEP priority sectors to engage with the SME businesses they represent;
- Support SMEs to identify current and emerging skills needs, ultimately leading to the development of solutions to improve labour market relevance of provision for local businesses; and,
- Promote the Return on Investment benefits to SMEs of investing in apprentices, leading to the creation of new apprenticeships.

Its overall intention was to strengthen the vocational educational and training system in C&IoS through active engagement of employers, providers and relevant institutions in the co-development of labour market relevant skills provision.

It should be noted that when the project was in development the partners had expected a complementary call to be released for a large employer-led skills delivery project, to allow the identified needs of businesses articulated through DS4B to be delivered. However, there were delays with releasing this call and, as DS4B is drawing to a close, the 'follow on' project has yet to be approved.

1.1.2 The Project Delivery Model

TCCG acted as Fund Manager and Accountable Body for the DS4B project on behalf of a collaborative employer-led partnership of delivery leads. Many of the partners had worked together before, having been involved in various skills related initiatives within C&IoS in the past. However, others were new to both the ESF funding stream and to each other. Whilst all partners had articulated what they planned to deliver as part of the project application, in reality some found that their activities had to evolve as they developed a greater appreciation of what was eligible within the parameters of the funding stream. The project covered eleven 'sectors' or thematic strands, as shown in Figure 1 overleaf, each of which had varying contractual commitments. In addition Cornwall College managed an Apprenticeship Development Fund (ADF).

Figure 1: DS4B Coverage

Partner	Thematic Strands
Cornwall Chamber of Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SME and Supply Chain
Cornwall College	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apprenticeship Development Fund (ADF)
Cornwall Council – designated as the strategic lead for the Health strand given the complex and fragmented nature of the sector and their limited ESF experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Construction• Health covering:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Adult Social Care○ Primary Care○ Workplace Health
Cornwall Food Foundation (CFF)¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agrifood• Hospitality
Cornwall Manufacturers Group (CMG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manufacturing
Cornwall Marine Network (CMN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marine• Retail
Digital Peninsula Network (DPN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital (Wider)
Pirate FM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital Media
Software Cornwall	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital Software

Each of the delivery leads was tasked with co-ordinating the co-design, development and delivery of a broad spectrum of employer centred activities for sectors/collectives as well as in-company skills development. DS4B was intentionally designed as a very flexible project which enabled each partner to carry out activities that were best suited to their sector/thematic strand. However, each was expected to demonstrate both 'breadth and depth' in their approach and, according to the project application form, activities should have delivered against the following themes:

Theme 1 – Sector Co-ordination

This involved working with employers, including supply chains, to identify current and emerging skills needs to inform the development of innovative, collaborative and labour market relevant solutions which would increase the participation of businesses in skills development.

Theme 2 – Programme Development and Delivery Models

Theme 2 was based on developing creative approaches to engage businesses in the design and development of skills programmes, including Apprenticeship Standards, to meet new and emerging gaps in provision. Existing provision would be tailored to ensure labour market relevance could be maximised through the development of flexible and innovative delivery models and trialled with beneficiary SMEs to further inform their development. This theme focused primarily on the curriculum development of existing courses.

Theme 3 – New Business Models

Employers were to be supported under Theme 3 to develop new models of skills development such as the creation of employer-led training centres and joint development/delivery partnership arrangements between employers and providers of their choice. Unlike theme 2, this theme focused on completely new course development in terms of content or delivery.

¹ Cornwall Food Foundation ceased trading in December 2019

Theme 4 – Creation of Placements

Finally, Theme 4 involved supporting businesses to create collaborative projects, work experience placements, internships and apprenticeships. It was expected that support would be provided to engage the most disadvantaged groups or those who faced local disadvantages in utilising advanced skills.

Grant funding was available within DS4B through an Employer Voucher Scheme which provided small grants (of between £200 and £2,000) for SMEs to engage in projects that directly link to DS4B outputs. As highlighted above, there was also an Apprenticeship Development Fund, managed through Cornwall College, which provided employers with a grant to cover their time to engage in apprenticeship programme trials. Match funding for DS4B was provided through apprenticeship salaries.

1.1.3 Project Targets

DS4B's original and revised outputs are shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: DS4B Intended Outputs

	Original	Revised
C023: No. SMEs starting projects	1,139	747
R9: No. SMEs successfully completing projects	911	598
No. Apprenticeships created overall (added value)	325	213
No. SMEs engaged in project activity (added value)	1,581	1,037
No. individuals engaged or supported through the project (added value)	2,550	1,672

Source: ESF application form and Feb 2020 PCR

1.2 The DS4B Evaluation

1.2.1 Overall Approach

TCCG commissioned an independent evaluation to deliver insights into the:

- **Project design and delivery processes** – including the success in attracting SMEs to engage with the project, cross agency referrals, the effectiveness of the four themes identified in section 1.1.2, the effectiveness/accuracy of data collection and recording and project management;
- **Performance against targets** – including both the contracted and added value targets, also analysing the linkages between expenditure, partner delivery activity and subsequent outputs; and,
- **Outcomes and impacts** – including qualitative reflections on the project's legacy alongside quantitative measures of success.

This work has been carried out by external consultants Southern Horizons (UK) Ltd and Buckman Associates Ltd in three stages. Stage 1 - the initial formative evaluation – was undertaken in May 2019 and involved the design of an evaluation plan and data collection methods. Stage 2 – the interim evaluation – was completed in August 2019 and involved a 'light touch' assessment to support continuous improvement for the project team. It focused primarily on an assessment of the project's early performance and lessons from delivery, with particular attention paid to data collection and recording. Stage 3 – the summative assessment – is presented within this report and has a more substantial focus on outcomes and impacts as well as lessons learned.

1.2.2 Summative Assessment Research Methods

Drawing on the findings of the interim evaluation, research for the summative assessment took place between January and March 2020 and included:

- **A desk based review of key documentation** – to understand any changes in processes since the interim evaluation;
- **A quantitative review of monitoring data** – to assess performance, profile activity and measure Value for Money in terms of unit costs;
- **An online survey of participating businesses** – to explore their views on the project and its impact. A total of 83 businesses participated in the survey. Whilst this response is sufficient to be representative of the project overall, it is not large enough to disaggregate the findings by sector. For a breakdown by sector, please see Appendix 1;
- **Individual telephone interviews with the delivery partners** – to explore their experiences of delivering the project²;
- **Individual telephone interviews with a small set of strategic stakeholders** – to understand the project within its wider context; and,
- **Conversations with the central team** – to contextualise the findings.

1.3 Structure of the Report

The remainder of this summative assessment report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2:** Project Design and Delivery;
- **Section 3:** Performance against Targets;
- **Section 4:** Outcomes and Impacts; and,
- **Section 5:** Final Reflections.

² All except one of the partners (Digital Peninsula Network) engaged with this process and most of them took part in a telephone interview, however, one partner provided a written submission

Section Two: Project Design and Delivery

DS4B was one of the first projects of its kind within the C&IoS allocation of ESIF Priority Axis 2 as it focused on businesses rather than individuals. It was therefore important to capture the learning from both the design and delivery of this innovative project. This section of the report discusses the effectiveness of the project design, its governance and management arrangements, methods of delivery and support for horizontal principles. It concludes with an overview of SME satisfaction with the project.

2.1 Effectiveness of the Project Design

Overall it was felt that the focus on businesses (as opposed to individuals) was really important and in the words of one external stakeholder, provided a 'useful counterpoint' for the whole ESF programme in C&IoS. Likewise, the developmental focus of DS4B was identified as being crucial, reflecting a view that training alone is not enough to deliver productivity improvements. There was an identified need to better understand business skill requirements.

2.1.1 Enabling Features

Four features of the project design were singled out as key enablers for its delivery:

- **The role of the sector based delivery partners.** The inclusion of nine different delivery partners within the project was undoubtedly one of the keys to its success. Although in many ways a logistical challenge to manage, the partners were much closer to, and trusted by, their respective constituents than a central delivery body would have been which contributed to the project's achievements. Additionally this approach afforded them with an opportunity to build their own capacity to support future sector skills development. One external stakeholder highlighted how the range of delivery partners also helped to spread project risks, avoiding over reliance on one or two organisations. It was also seen externally as helping to integrate delivery into the wider skills support landscape;
- **Flexibility to develop discrete projects.** It was important that each partner was able to take a different approach to their role in the project in line with the needs of their sector/theme. Their activities varied considerably, ranging from the development of an entire workforce development strategy to the creation of a sector based self-help group through which training could be delivered (individual approaches are discussed more fully in section 2.3). In some cases the approaches also evolved over time. This partly reflected the development of greater understanding about what could and could not be delivered within the funding stream but it also reflected partners knowledge of what worked as activities were trialled and success was evaluated. This flexibility to respond to identified needs and changing circumstances was considered to be a highly important feature of the project design;
- **The match funding model.** The project took an innovative approach to match funding in the form of the apprenticeship wage paid by employers for apprenticeships created on the new standards developed by the project. The business was granted a £3,000 ESF Voucher towards their costs for participating in the new apprenticeship development. This is thought to be the first time, at least in C&IoS, that such an approach had been used for an ESF project. It meant that, with the exception of TCCG and CMN (who were delivering the apprenticeships) the partners were unencumbered by the usual logistical challenges of ESF match funding requirements. The evaluators understand that there

were some practical challenges in the execution of this model (described in more detail below) and the process has not yet been audited but the project did prove that the concept could work. As at the end of Quarter 4 2019, the project had delivered 88 Apprenticeship Development Fund Vouchers, equating to £264,000. This had levered £248,629 in match funding by that point, with more to follow;

- **The availability of Employer Voucher funding.** The Employer Voucher Scheme (of between £200 and £2,000) had delivered 87 Vouchers by the end of Quarter 4 2019, equating to £73,342, with an average grant value of £843 per business. Not all partners opted to access the Employer Voucher funding and some were unable to fully use it but several partners spoke of how important it was both for ‘unlocking conversations’ with businesses and also for practically supporting project delivery. The Vouchers were used to support a variety of activities such as developing promotional materials, designing short courses and covering ‘release time’ for businesses to attend training, through to the facilitation of internships and work placements. This was particularly important for the small and micro businesses where the costs would have been prohibitive. However, Vouchers were also used to support some very specific developments such as:

Examples of Voucher Funding

- ✓ Enabling a community centre to develop a safeguarding training pilot for supporting pet therapy projects, having identified a correlation between animal neglect and domestic abuse in the home (Adult Social Care strand);
- ✓ Providing investment to help kick-start an innovative Farming Health Hub which provides confidential advice and guidance around physical health, mental health and business health to farmers and their families in their day to day lives (Agrifood and Workplace Health strand);
- ✓ Providing resource for the School for Social Entrepreneurs to develop the capacity of its Board to better support social entrepreneurs as part of the C&IoS Social Enterprise Zone (Workplace Health Strand);
- ✓ Supporting another ESF community health and well-being project with coaching and mentoring for the voluntary and community sector (Workplace Health Strand);
- ✓ Providing investment to support a fisheries co-operative with a new hatchery as part of a new Masters programme development (Agrifood strand);
- ✓ Supporting a local business to host and run an ‘Agile Huddle’ event aimed at getting degree students in into the software industry (Digital Software strand);
- ✓ Engaging businesses in hardware development to support a ‘Mission to Mars’ work experience opportunity (Digital Software strand); and,
- ✓ Enabling businesses to support T-level placements being delivered by Truro and Penwith College (Construction strand).

The quality and dedication of some of the individuals involved and the collegiate nature of the partnership were also singled out as a critical success factors for this project, along with the supportive role of Cornwall College as the Fund Holder. For organisations such as the Council, their ability to integrate this work with other strategic developments was also an advantage.

2.1.2 Design Challenges

The evaluation process also revealed some design challenges stemming from:

- **Competing pressures.** Although DS4B was primarily a developmental project it also had delivery components with associated output targets and these competing pressures created challenges for some sectors within the overall project design. Feedback suggests that in some cases the developmental work was not as fully delivered as the partners had expected due to the pressure of 'chasing' outputs. The evaluators also understand that, for others, priorities shifted because the anticipated follow-on delivery project was not commissioned in time to overlap with DS4B and there was a need to focus more heavily on delivery to avoid losing momentum;
- **The partnership delivery model.** The role of the delivery partners was highlighted as an enabler above but it also created some logistical challenges around outputs. Because of the diversity of the sectors and their offerings the evaluation team is aware that some businesses engaged with more than one delivery strand but could only be 'counted' as an ESF output once. Although this was in many ways a monitoring challenge for the central team, it also had practical implications for both businesses and partners in some cases where they did not know that one of their beneficiaries was also working with another strand of the project. It is understood that this could result in multiple partners chasing the same business for paperwork unnecessarily. From an external perspective there was also some suggestion that it could be challenging to understand the breadth of the DS4B offer with such a diversity of partners involved;
- **Its innovative, bold and ambitious nature.** As highlighted above, DS4B was one of the first of its kind within C&IoS meaning that the eligibility definitions and evidence requirements were not well understood at the outset. The partners had to learn by experience and feedback indicates that the situation was compounded by resource constraints within DWP as the Managing Authority, often resulting in delayed and/or inconsistent feedback on queries that were raised. As a result it took time to understand what could and could not be delivered and this presented particular challenges for delivery within the context of a compressed project; and,
- **The length of time required to generate match through the ADF.** As highlighted above, match funding was generated through apprenticeship salaries. This required a business to have engaged in the development process, taken on the apprentice, paid the salary and completed the necessary paperwork. The lead time for this journey was longer than initially anticipated and, related to the point above, was compounded by the fact that there were no clear systems or paperwork in place at the outset because they were charting new territory. The team learned on the ground from working with the first few businesses that took up the opportunity and developed the systems accordingly. Initially TCCG retained all of the ADF funds internally whilst they put the systems and processes in place to support delivery but, over time, let a contract for other delivery partners to come forward to engage in this aspect of the project. CMN was the only delivery partner to be awarded a contract for ADF delivery and, it was suggested that this came too late in the project timetable given the long lead time of this activity. The evaluators understand that this may have delayed the accumulation of the match, however, from TCCG's perspective, the match funding model had been identified as the biggest risk to the project and an earlier contract would not have been possible given the complications of getting the model right.

THE APPRENTICESHIP DEVELOPMENT FUND

A key part of the DS4B project was the trialling of new apprenticeship models and content. The ADF offered employers a grant of £3,000 to provide them with the capacity and time to engage in the trial and further inform the development of the programme. The ADF strand crossed all sectors and level of apprenticeship. DS4B delivery partners were able to engage with businesses about their apprenticeship needs and the business was then passed to TCCG or, more latterly, CMN to take them through the ADF process. In return for the grant employers were required to provide feedback on how relevant the knowledge, skills and behaviours elements of the apprenticeship course had been to their business and, more generally, how responsive it was to their business needs.

ADF was an important aspect of the project. Each year TCCG undertakes a curriculum planning process to determine what will be run in the next year and what will be run differently. It was expected that the ADF feedback would feed into that process but this aspect of the project was particularly driven by the move from frameworks to standards, some of which had no embedded qualifications. It was essential to work with employers to understand what they needed. From a TCCG perspective, the fact that the feedback was generated as part of an externally funded project was really important as they found that employers gave very honest account of what worked and what did not work for them. This has been used to develop the curriculum, sometimes in very small ways and sometimes more substantially. One of the biggest surprises was around the sequencing of the curriculum where very specific feedback enabled them to consider the order of the content to ensure that it provided apprentices with the right input at the right time for the business.

Although not a design feature as such, the compressed delivery period itself presented a number of challenges. The output targets were scaled back to reflect the reduced timeframe of the project, but, given the lead time necessary for recruitment and gaining an understanding of what activities could and could not be supported, the delivery period was unusually short. Some partners also found the short term nature of the project a challenge for staff recruitment and retention.

It is also worth highlighting that DS4B was one of four sector based ESF projects commissioned at the same time which required careful planning to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication. Evidence suggests that the team worked hard to engage with the other projects. There were some areas of good practice here, for example, in the relationship between the DS4B Health strand and the project being delivered by Truro and Penwith College which aimed to **Raise Excellence and Aspiration in Care and Health (REACH)** across C&IoS. Evidence suggests that the two project teams worked well together and developed a mutually beneficial relationship. However, it was also suggested this suite of business-facing ESF projects would have benefitted from greater co-ordination, perhaps through a shared steering group or a similar vehicle in order to have a greater understanding of each other's offers and learn from each other's practice and challenges. This could also have enabled providers across C&IoS to identify and respond strategically to any generic skills development requirements that crossed sectors. Further, it was pointed out that greater co-ordination could have enabled clearer messages to be developed for the business community which did not always know which project would suit their needs. Although this is not necessarily a design consideration for DS4B itself, it could be a consideration for the design of future programmes such as this.

2.2 The Governance and Management Arrangements

2.2.1 Supporting Structures

DS4B had a clear governance and management structure in place which included:

- **A Strategic Steering Group** – which met quarterly and was made up of representatives from TCCG as the Fund Holder along with the partners, the Employment and Skills Board and the Skills Hub;
- **A Programme Management Group** – which met on a monthly basis and was made up of representatives from the delivery partners; and,
- **A Central Programme Management Team** – to fulfil the contract with the funding body.

Feedback on the effectiveness of the structure was largely positive. The only reflection from the central team was that the frequency of the Strategic Steering Group meetings could have been reduced and the evaluators understand that this will be considered for the follow-on delivery project if successful.

In particular it was noted that the Programme Management Group was a useful forum:

“It was a useful group on many levels. It helped us to develop relationships and have a better understanding of the different partners and what they could bring to the table. Partners shared openly about their experiences and we could take ideas back to try in our own context”

“It was a good forum for sharing ideas and concerns and I developed good relationships with the other partners through those meetings which also led to some cross referrals”

“The meetings were really useful and I was able to refer some businesses to other partners if I was unable to support them”

It was also praised as an effective space for understanding how the project as a whole was performing and for collectively deciding how to maximise outputs and tackle areas of under-performance when required. However, some partners felt that the meetings would have been better had they been able to discuss particular businesses to avoid overlap and chasing the same outputs, though the evaluators understand that it was a partnership decision not to do so because some of the partners did not want to share details of their customers with ‘competitors.’ Others felt that there should have been more discussion in the meetings around specific issues such as the project’s match funding challenges, how partners had used their Voucher Funding or how they had secured outcomes. A more general observation was that the first meeting of the group could have taken place sooner in order to familiarise the partners with the project and each other an earlier stage.

The level of support provided by the central team was also described as ‘excellent’ (and better than other projects that some of the partners have been involved with) as illustrated by the following quotes:

“[The Project Manager] was exceptional. She has done an amazing job and I can’t stress enough how supportive and helpful she has been”

“I felt really out of my depth at the start of the project but [the Project Manager] helped me to work through what I could and couldn’t do. We had a lot of meetings at the start and she was really supportive”

“I can’t fault the project management. Communications are always prompt and the paperwork they put in place has worked well”

“They have done a first class job. They respond very quickly and are always efficient and helpful”

“When we get the paperwork wrong they very calmly explain what we need to do and support us to put it right!”

However, there was some suggestion that, whilst very helpful and supportive as individuals, the central co-ordination team took a little while to ‘find its feet.’ Evidently there was a lack of clarity initially about delivery expectations and individual output targets but this may have been a feature of the complexity of the project, as highlighted above. Likewise, some of the partners struggled to understand and comply with the required paperwork, in the words of one partner ‘finding an awkward fit between what the project wanted to achieve and the type of outputs to be evidenced.’ It is clear that the team worked hard to overcome this. They continued to refine the guidance and streamline paperwork as much as possible, putting a number of processes in place to support partners with their understanding of the requirements. Several partners singled out the sharepoint portal that was put in place as an especially useful resource for the project.

The only critical feedback about TCCG’s co-ordination of the project revolved around some of its strategic level decisions that were felt to have been taken without partner input. A partnership decision was initially made to compress the delivery period so that the end of the DS4B project better aligned with the expected start date of the follow-on project. This decision reduced the amount of ESF funding that could be drawn down. Whilst initially agreed in partnership, this decision has since been questioned, but, due to TCCG’s changing circumstances, the evaluators understand that the debate was not re-opened. However, it was also recognised by partners that TCCG was in a challenging position in carrying the project’s risk.

Additionally, several partners mentioned DWP’s slow (and in some cases partial) payments which created a number of significant cash-flow problems, particularly for some of the smaller partners, in some cases forcing them to take out loans or borrow money to cover the shortfall. The evaluators understand that this was a problem across many of the ESF and ERDF projects, not just DS4B, and Cornwall Council supported some of the partners to manage the situation. Partners acknowledged that this was not the fault of TCCG who were actually praised for trying to manage that relationship to the best of their ability. The evaluators understand that it reflects austerity cuts at DWP which DS4B partners have found typically results in ESF payments being several months in arrears.

2.2.2 Data Collection and Recording

Methods of data collection and recording were discussed as part of the initial formative assessment and were covered in some detail during the interim evaluation³. The central team had put in place a clear delivery manual with a range of supporting data capture tools for various steps in the journey (from initial project proposal forms through to grant funding paperwork and the evaluation of outcomes). However, the evaluators observed that not all of the relevant data from the individual forms were being recorded within the overarching project tracker. This meant that the team was missing an opportunity to capture some of the key performance related intelligence. Changes have subsequently been made to the systems to fill some of the data gaps. However, it is suggested that for future projects involving multiple delivery partners, investment in a CRM tool may help to overcome some of the monitoring and delivery challenges experienced within DS4B.

More generally, the interim evaluation revealed inconsistencies in the recording and reporting of data relating to businesses and participants. Of particular concern was the inconsistent reporting of data fields that are essential to verifying ESF eligibility, such as company size and the evaluators recommended that these were tightened up over the remainder of the project. However, the monitoring spreadsheets continue to contain multiple inconsistencies in terms of data entry which complicate analysis. This could also potentially be overcome with a CRM tool or better utilisation of the functions available in Excel.

Finally, at the interim evaluation stage the evaluators observed a great deal of variability in the completion of progress reports by the partners. Each of them was provided with a dedicated (private) space within the sharepoint portal for uploading quarterly claims along with evidence and narrative on project progress. A spot check of these indicated that not all partners consistently completed the required paperwork and the evaluators identified this as an area to be tightened up in order to provide the central team with accurate management data. Additionally, it was suggested that whilst the paperwork was modelled on DWP requirements, the forms could have been broadened to capture data in support of local intelligence. For example, if the partners were required to report their activity under the sector co-ordination; programme development; new business models; and, creation of placements themes it would be possible to assess the effectiveness of delivery on this basis in future. The evaluators note that some changes were introduced following the interim review and there has been a greater focus on providing local intelligence in the later stages of the project.

2.3 Delivery Methods

2.3.1 SME Engagement

As will be discussed more fully in Section Three, a total of 657 SMEs had formally engaged with the project by the end of Quarter 4 2019 which is 88% of the final C023 target. Evidence suggests that partners had differing experiences with SME engagement. Whilst some found engagement to be strong from the outset, others found this to be more of a challenge which may reflect the nature of the business base in particular sectors or indeed the extent of the business databases held by partners. It was pointed out, for example, that the size of some of the Digital companies made it difficult for them to engage in a project like this and also limited their capacity to consider options such as apprenticeships. Additionally, even where interest

³ This was not a full audit of DS4B's systems and processes which would be beyond the scope of the evaluation. The review was designed to support the central team in capturing key information to understand project performance

was strong and training had been developed to meet specific needs it could be challenging to get businesses to take it up – often for very legitimate reasons such as changing circumstances or budgetary pressures. One partner in particular talked about the challenge of keeping people enthused along the journey and keeping it fresh in people’s minds which was seen as crucial for a developmental project like this.

Marketing and Promotion

DS4B did not have a central marketing budget, although the central team did support the marketing effort with some promotional activities, including hosting a ‘holding page’ on the Cornwall College website, press releases and the promotion of DS4B at events such as the Cornwall Skills Show. Beyond this it was the responsibility of each partner to develop their own approach to marketing and promotion which the evaluators agree was a sensible decision, given the complexity of the project and the need for targeted sector-based messaging. At the interim stage the evaluators noted that some partners had expended more efforts on marketing and promotion than others and this appeared to remain the case during the later stages of delivery. Some of the membership groups were able to utilise their regular communication channels for reaching businesses with targeted messages and this appeared to be particularly effective.

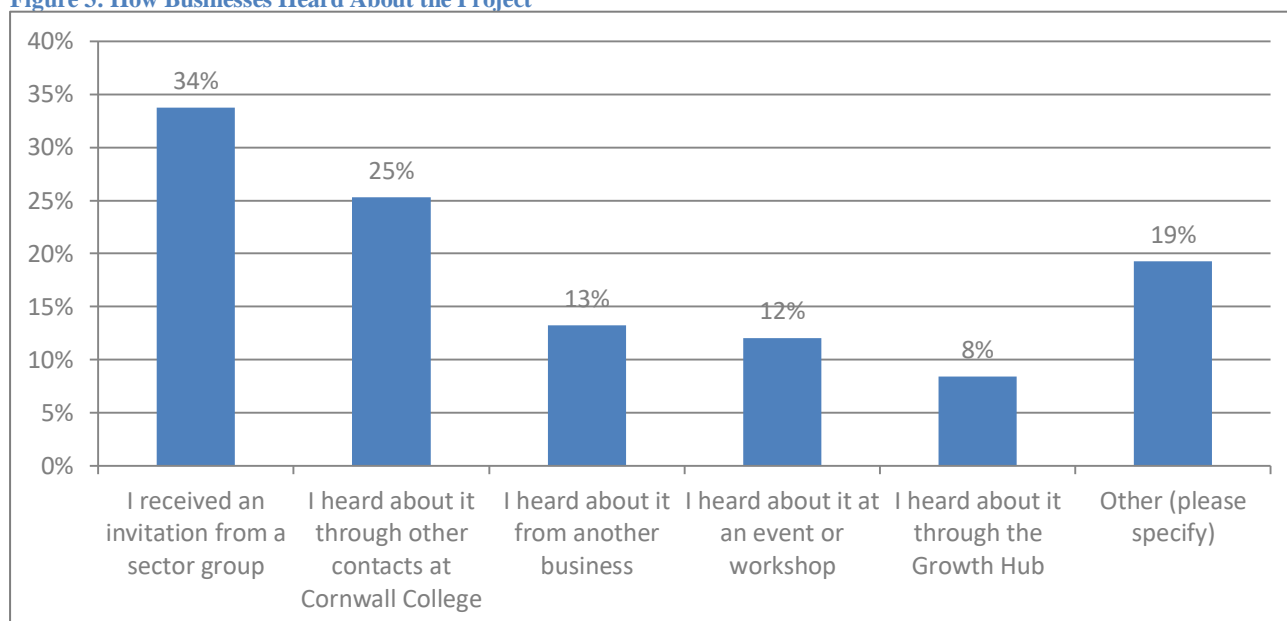
Referrals

The project application indicated that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) would be put in place with the C&IoS Skills Hub (which forms part of the Growth Hub). The evaluators understand that the MOU was not developed but a member of the Skills Hub was invited to sit on the project’s Strategic Steering Group. Whilst initially the Skills Hub found it hard to refer to the project, given its multiple partners, it was quickly agreed that they would refer to the central team, who were better placed to decide which partner would be best suited to supporting the business. There was some suggestion that cross referrals between the project and its external environment could be challenging, however, several partners spoke positively about the level of referrals across the DS4B partnership itself, which reflects the collaborative nature of the arrangement. Indeed, it was pointed out that when some sectors were behind in their output targets other partners offered support to help them with their delivery.

How Businesses Heard about the Project

Figure 3 overleaf shows that 34% of business respondents heard about the project via an invitation from the sector group. A quarter of respondents heard about the project from Cornwall College, 13% from another business and 12% at an event or workshop. Just 8% heard about it through the Growth Hub. The most significant number of respondents within the ‘other’ category actually said they heard about it ‘through the sector group,’ as well as social media/internet, colleagues and the media. Some respondents said they ‘had not heard about it.’

Figure 3: How Businesses Heard About the Project



Source: Summative Assessment Business Survey, March 2020. N = 83. Note, respondents could select more than 1 option and therefore totals do not add up 100%

2.3.2 Delivering Breadth and Depth

As highlighted above, it was expected that each partner would demonstrate both ‘breadth and depth’ in their approach to delivery. The evaluators understand this to mean that they would:

- a) Operate strategically at a sector level and also work with individual businesses; and,
- b) Contribute to each of the four project themes (sector co-ordination; programme development and delivery models; new business models; and, the creation of placements).

An assessment of the project’s breadth and depth proved difficult at the interim stage. A workshop with the partners undertaken as part of the interim evaluation indicated that they did not relate to the four project themes; neither did they report their activity on that basis. However, the evaluators understand that there has been a greater focus on capturing this information in the latter stages of the project.

The central team devised an interpretive analysis of each partner’s approach, drawing on information provided in the business engagement forms. Each form was coded according to:

- Whether the activity would benefit the sector or business; and,
- The type of activity undertaken.

Figure 4 shows the proportion of forms classified as sector/business focused. This shows that six partners could be described as delivering activity across both the sector and business themes. Of the remainder, Digital (wider), Marine, SME and Retail were delivering activity almost exclusively under the ‘business only’ theme. In contrast, the reverse is true of Digital Media.

Figure 4: Activity Analysis (Sector/Business)

Sector	Number of Businesses	Proportion of Forms Coded as Sector	Proportion of Forms Coded as Business
Agri-food	34	15%	85%
Construction	39	64%	36%
Digital Media	10	90%	10%
Digital Software	35	74%	26%
Digital Wider	87	0%	100%
Health	80	33%	68%
Hospitality	20	10%	90%
Manufacturing	43	86%	14%
Marine	53	0%	100%
Retail	116	1%	99%
SME/Supply Chain	21	0%	100%

Source: Internal Project Monitoring Data

Figure 5 shows how the business engagement forms have been classified by the central team to help understand the type of activities that each partner has been focusing on. Although this analysis is subjective and does not quite map onto the four delivery themes mentioned above, it does provide some insight into the scope of delivery. The analysis indicates that, with the exception of Construction and Health, the partners were not delivering across all project themes, although the breadth of activity had increased since the interim report. Since the interim report, there continued to be a focus on the development of training but more partners had started to deliver activity that contributed to the apprenticeship pipeline as well as work placement trials. However, the number of partners delivering apprenticeship development remained at just four according to this analysis.

Figure 5: Activity Analysis (Type of Activity)

	Sector co-ordination	Development of training delivered in-house	Development of training delivered by provider	Work placement/trials	Apprenticeship pipeline	Apprenticeship development	N/A
ADF							100%
Agri-food	26%	38%	32%	3%			
Construction	18%	8%	23%	21%	10%	21%	
Digital Media			90%	10%			
Digital Software	9%		57%	3%	3%	29%	
Digital Wider			69%	29%	2%		
Health	25%	20%	9%	3%	43%	1%	
Hospitality	15%	70%	5%	10%			
Manufacturing			100%				
Marine		75%	25%				
Retail		53%	41%		1%	5%	
SME/Supply Chain		71%	29%				
Grand Total	6%	25%	35%	6%	6%	4%	17%

Source: Internal Project Monitoring Data

Contribution to the delivery themes was also explored in more depth with the partners during the interviews undertaken as part of the final evaluation and showed a more varied picture as described in Figure 6. Whereas the central team's interpretive analysis relied on a binary process – i.e. allocating each engagement form to a single 'best fit' theme – the evaluation interviews were able to explore how some activities contributed to a number of different themes which provides a richer, contextual analysis of the above. It shows that all of the sectors/strands were underpinned by sector co-ordination in varying forms and, with the exception of Primary Care and Workplace Health, each of them also contributed either directly or indirectly to at least two of the other themes. The Figure also shows the diversity of activities that were actually undertaken in relation to each theme and it is the considered view of the evaluators that the areas of focus were appropriate to the needs of the individual sectors and/or the circumstances of the delivery partners. Whilst 'depth and breadth' were not evident for every partner individually, it was certainly evident across the partnership as a whole.

Figure 6: Overview of Approaches Taken

Primary focus	Key activities
Agrifood – Cornwall Food Foundation	
✓ Sector co-ordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with businesses on a one-to-one basis (undertaken as a business review) to identify skills needs
✓ Programme development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation of collaborative workshops around identified needs – some generic, e.g. finance for non-finance people; and some sector specific – e.g. creating cocktails from Cornish produce
✓ New business models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouragement of collective marketing
✓ Placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of an Agrifood entrepreneurs group – ‘Experts Grow’ – as a collaborative sector self-help group Support for other, smaller sector based co-ordination groups to come together such as oysters and fishers in the Fal estuary Curriculum development to plug skills gaps, delivered through Experts Grow (all unaccredited currently but looking to accredit in future) Collaboration with the Workplace Health strand to set up the Farmers Health Hub Facilitation of work experience placements for young people and unemployed people Training of work experience ambassadors
Hospitality – Cornwall Food Foundation	
✓ Sector co-ordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extension of a previous UKCES funded project to roll out training tools and templates that had been developed for the sector
✓ Programme development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-shaping of the tools in response to sector feedback – some accredited/others not
✓ Placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigation of alternative delivery models (e.g. incorporation of the tools into an existing HR apprenticeship programme) Co-ordination with other hospitality training providers such as Truro and Penwith College and Newquay for Excellence to understand needs and provide a coherent/collaborative response across the different strands of work Delivery of short, sharp hospitality focused workshops, usually in conjunction with the other providers Facilitation of work experience placements for young people and unemployed people Training of work experience ambassadors
Construction – Cornwall Council	
✓ Sector co-ordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with a small number of businesses on a one-to-one basis (through a training needs analysis) to identify skills gaps across all trades
✓ Programme development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broader engagement with the industry and other representative bodies through events
✓ New business models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitation of the Building Cornwall website, designed to support the local industry to attract and retain its workforce as well as providing a forum for sharing good practice
✓ Placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of case studies and campaigns to promote opportunities within the industry, including for women Organisation of career development days Facilitation of local delivery for nationally accredited training (e.g. for floorers) to plug a local gap in provision Development of a new social media workshop tailored specifically for the Construction industry Facilitation of work experience and placement opportunities – both as a one-off for specific people and as an on-going commitment (e.g. companies taking 1-2 per year)

Digital Media		
✓ Sector co-ordination	•	Engagement with business on a one-to-one basis to understand training needs across the sector
✓ Programme development	•	Research to map the availability and content of training at secondary school, Levels 2 & 3 and HE, plus apprenticeships throughout the UK
✓ Placements	•	Production of a report with recommendations for use by curriculum teams that identifies skills needs and gaps in training
	•	Consideration of how to develop a flexible apprenticeship that would work across different digital media disciplines (not taken forward due to insufficient demand)
	•	Work with a local college to extend its existing Film School course – trialled on a bigger scale across two campuses
	•	Inclusion of work placements for participants as part of the Film School trial (see above)
	•	Facilitation of two freelancers to take on work experience placements on a one-to-one basis
	•	Work with young people (as added value)
Digital Software		
✓ Sector co-ordination	•	Engagement with Software Cornwall members on a one-to-one basis to identify training needs across the sector
✓ Programme development	•	Broader engagement with businesses through a Tech Connect event to consider apprenticeship requirements
✓ New business models	•	Development of workshops/short CPD courses (in conjunction with industry professionals) around identified training needs – specifically focusing on test driven development, continuous delivery and agile leadership
✓ Placements	•	Engagement with Cornwall College staff to embed all learning from the above into curriculum development
	•	Development of a new Level 3 extended diploma (recruitment for 2020/21 academic year)
	•	Development of a new Level 4 software development apprenticeship (unsuccessful recruitment for 2019/20 but will launch again for 2020/21)
	•	Started discussions around the development of a Level 6 apprenticeship based on business need
	•	Facilitation of a significant recruitment event for businesses and potential apprentices
	•	Provision of additional support to consider cross skilling opportunities as part of the above
	•	Development of a new delivery model using an existing Foundation Degree as content for an educational experience (day release) to support new trainees recruited in Software Cornwall companies
	•	Support for Software Cornwall members to facilitate internships and work experience opportunities
	•	Engagement with schools to enhance the curriculum (e.g. facilitating business guest lectures)
	•	Delivery of a work experience opportunity for teams of GCSE students – Mission to Mars – in conjunction with Software Cornwall members
Digital Wider		
✓ Sector co-ordination	•	Research to identify specific training needs and skills gaps amongst the workforce
✓ Programme development	•	Use of a training needs analysis to help prioritise
✓ New business models	•	Use of business focus groups to support the process
✓ Placements	•	Trialling and amending existing content such as: Social Media Marketing, Photoshop, tailored to identified needs
	•	Development of a new course - SEO and Analytics Workshop
	•	Advertising trial apprenticeships

Health – Adult Social Care – Cornwall Council		
✓ Sector co-ordination	✓ New business models (in development)	✓ Placements
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Momentum for the Proud to Care initiative (all activities were undertaken under that brand) with a focus on promoting the adult care sector as a valid career opportunity • Development of a website, steering group and ambassadors network as part of the above • Engagement with businesses through the development of a workforce development strategy, including consultation • Development of specific projects falling out of the strategy but with any programme development passed to 'Reach' (a complementary ESF project being delivered by Truro and Penwith College) • Work with Early Years practitioners to identify skills gaps • Evaluation of NCFE distance learning courses (with Cornwall College) to inform future curriculum developments • Work with Kernow Health CIC through funding from Health Education England to develop paid internship programmes in Care and Nursing Homes to engage businesses • Development of a funding bid for a pilot project around running micro enterprises in Community Care • Maximising opportunities arising from Cornwall Council's decision to allocate their apprenticeship levy funding solely for Social Care • Promotion of internships and apprenticeships as alternative recruitment methods for the sector • Exploration, with the Education Business Partnership, of teacher placements in the care sector – in development
Health – Primary Care – Cornwall Council		
✓ Sector-co-ordination	✓ Placements	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based within Kernow Health CIC which focuses on securing the future of Cornish General Practice • Engagement with GP practices and clusters on a one-to-one basis to identify their most pressing skills needs • Support for the recruitment of nurses in surgeries (identified as the biggest need) • Support for embedding the cluster approach, from which other training needs have been identified • Promotion and awareness raising of primary care opportunities as a career option • Concentrated and targeted promotion of apprenticeships as a solution for the sector - with excellent uptake • Exploration of structured work experience placements for young people in surgeries – in development
Health – Workplace Health – Cornwall Council		
✓ Sector co-ordination	✓ New business models	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with businesses on a one-to-one basis using a needs analysis to identify health and well-being issues within the workforce – not sector specific • Co-design of solutions with the business, resulting in a bespoke action plan, covering issues such as mental health/support for an ageing workforce • Use of train the trainer approaches to embed health and well-being priorities within the business • Support for the development of a Farming Health Hub (with CFF) as an entirely new model for addressing needs whilst supporting farmers with their physical, mental and business health • Exploration of targeted work with Seafarers UK to support the Fishing Sector – in development

Manufacturing – Cornwall Manufacturers Group		
✓ Sector co-ordination	• Engagement with CMG members and also some non-members, initially through a focus group and then through 38 company visits to identify skills needs	
✓ Programme development	• Prioritisation of skills needs into three 'tiers.' Programme development through re-designing existing course content (addressing 'Tier Two' priorities). For example, working with CMG to tailor one of their existing Finance for Non-Finance People courses for a Manufacturing audience	
✓ New business models	• Identification of clear gaps where no suitable training was available (addressing 'Tier One' priorities)	
	• Development of eight new modules covering Levels 1 and 2 in Leadership & Management; Supply Chain & Procurement; Train the Trainer; and, Continuous Improvement all with extensive input from Chief Execs	
	• Procurement of training providers to deliver the modules, also with Chief Exec input	
	• Development of 'taster sessions' on the above	
	• Recruitment of businesses and trialling of new courses – initially Level 1	
Marine – Cornwall Marine Network		
✓ Sector co-ordination	• Engagement with businesses on a one-to-one basis through CMN's 'skills broker' model to co-design personalised development plans	
✓ Curriculum development	• Working together with businesses on developing and trialling bite-sized learning on a range of topics including generic content such as Finance for Business through to sector specific content such as Boat Wash. Delivered on the terms that small businesses could engage with (e.g. venue, time of day, delivery at the company premises)	
✓ New business models	• Creation of new apprenticeships standards with the delivery model tailored to meet the needs of the employer (contributing to both the new business model and placement themes)	
✓ Placements	• Adding value to existing apprenticeship frameworks where a standard is not yet ready	
Retail – Cornwall Marine Network		
✓ Sector co-ordination	• Engagement with Bid and Retail employers on a one-to-one basis through CMN's 'skills broker' model to co-design personalised development plans	
✓ Curriculum development	• Working together with businesses on developing and trialling bite-sized learning on a range of topics from Content Marketing to Customer Service. Delivered on the terms that small businesses could engage with (e.g. venue, time of day, delivery at the company premises)	
✓ New business models	• Co-development and delivery of bespoke workshops – for example a marketing workshop, tailored for a group of companies in Bude, North Cornwall, in partnership with Acceleration Through Innovation (ATI)	
✓ Placements	• Creation of new apprenticeships standards with the delivery model tailored to meet the needs of the employer (as above)	
SME/Supply Chain – Cornwall Chamber of Commerce		
✓ Sector co-ordination	• Engagement with SMEs on a one-to-one basis to understand training needs, across all sectors but with a specific focus on supply chains	
✓ Indirect contribution to all other themes	• Identification of potential solutions and undertaking work with other training providers, particularly CMN, to develop the training. Some of the training was 'off the shelf' and some involved making modifications to existing course content	
	• Development, through CMN, of some entirely new models, for example, a bespoke Level 4 Management course for a housing company (this was a brand new course tailored to the company's specifications)	
	• Identification of companies that had apprenticeship requirements – passed on to CMN for development	

CASE STUDY: DIGITAL SOFTWARE



Digital Academy Cornwall is a partnership between Software Cornwall, one of the fastest growing tech clusters in the UK, and Cornwall College designed to help build curriculum to meet the needs of the county's Software businesses. With a national shortage of digital skills the Academy developed from a meeting of minds and ideas from software companies, creative thinkers and the College to challenge how we think about skills training and education for digital industries. DS4B provided dedicated funding to enable the Academy concept to become a reality.

The DS4B activity started with a period of sector consultation. This was undertaken on a one-to-one basis with Software companies to identify skills needs and also through a Tech Connect event to specifically consider apprenticeships as a delivery option. This resulted in the development of:

- A series of bite-sized workshops for local companies, in areas of identified need, delivered in conjunction with leading industry professionals;
- Curriculum changes to Cornwall College content;
- A new Level 3 extended diploma in Digital Technologies (available from September 2020 and offering bursaries from Software Cornwall members); and,
- A new Level 4 software development apprenticeship with mentoring from industry experts.

The Level 4 apprenticeship was designed with extensive input from local businesses and includes some innovative features such as a week-long 'bootcamp' at the start of the programme. Initially intended for recruitment in 2019, it was advertised through a highly successful recruitment event and attracted over 100 applicants including some older candidates that were looking to 'cross-skill.' Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons including budgetary pressures, a number of the hosting companies had to withdraw meaning that the cohort was too small to run the programme. However, the recruitment campaign led to a number of positive outcomes: some candidates were employed directly by the businesses and others went on to take up other forms of training. Cornwall College are also trialling an entirely different model whereby some companies have recruited the individuals as a trainee, rather than an apprentice, and the College has provided an educational component through adapting its existing Foundation Degree for use on a day release basis.

In the words of Nathan Jeffery, Head of the Digital Academy:

"It was disappointing that the 2019 apprenticeship cohort was too small to run but the work has not been wasted. So much has been learned through the process. The curriculum has all been developed based on what businesses need and we've been able to think on our feet and trial the Foundation Degree model as an alternative in the short term. We've also seen other positive outcomes stemming from our recruitment campaign and will look to recruit again in 2020."

In addition to the above, the project has also been able to support a number of internships and work experience opportunities as well as industry events. Importantly, the Cornwall College curriculum teams have been involved at every step of the way and have been able to introduce the learning from all of these experiences into their curriculum development, helping to ensure sure that the next generation of employees have the skills and experiences that local Software businesses need.

2.4 Support for Horizontal Principles

The partnership has been committed to embedding horizontal principles within project delivery. There have been conscious efforts made to minimise negative environment impacts where possible in the consideration of transport choices and venues. For example, some partners have intentionally used St Austell Printing Company (SAPC) as a location for meetings and training. Not only does it provide a central location, thus cutting down on travel when participants come from all over Cornwall, but SAPC's sustainability principles and BREEAM Excellent rating are integral to its professional activities and the management of the company. There have also been some very specific environmentally focused actions undertaken within the Agrifood strand whereby business collaboration has enabled waste products from some companies to be effectively re-used by others. Additionally, the British Ports Association has upheld the CMN / Environment Agency and Cornwall Council initiative on Boatwash as a national best practice as part of national guidance they have issued to members regarding improving the environment.

On Equality and Diversity, accessibility to all customers formed a core part of CFF's 'every customer counts' programme. Partners have also been attempting to address gender imbalances through their work. In Health, for example, efforts have been made to encourage more men into the sector. In Digital industries which are typically male-dominated, courses have been piloted with female tutors to help them appeal to women and Building Cornwall has been promoting Construction careers for women. There has been some specific work through the Digital Software strand to engage with young people who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). Likewise, a number of recruitment campaigns have been used to encourage under-represented groups into different sectors including people with long-term disabilities and health issues as well as people who are over 50 years old and returners to work. Some of the partners have been able to tap into wider and complementary initiatives such as Disability Cornwall and the ESF funded Inclusivity Project being led by the University of Exeter in developing this work.

The partners have also identified some cross-cutting themes of their own, for example around mental health, which emerged as a critical issue across several of the sectors. This has formed a particular focus of the emerging Farmers Health Hub but has also been addressed in different ways across the partnership. Reflections suggest that more could have been achieved around this with greater time and less pressure to deliver outputs but the fact that these issues have been brought to the fore is in itself a positive outcome.

2.5 SME Satisfaction with DS4B

2.5.1 Business Aspirations for Involvement

The business survey asked participants what they wanted to achieve by getting involved for a) their business and b) their sector. These were open text questions and their responses have been grouped into the categories shown in Figure 7 and 8 overleaf. Figure 7 shows that just over a quarter of businesses thought that involvement in DS4B would improve staff training and development within their business as the following comments illustrate:

"Sector specific staff development"

"Better trained employees"

"To develop training and access to learning for our staff"

18% indicated that it would improve workforce skills and 15% commented that they hoped involvement with the project would improve their productivity and help to grow their business. Some of these expected this growth to occur through improved skills but others expected to receive business advice to help them solve a problem, set up their business or grow an idea. 10% felt that involvement would help them to recruit new members of staff/volunteers as well as improving retention as the following comments illustrate:

“Recruitment into the health and social care setting and an active role for some of our staff”

“Easier and more effective recruitment and retention”

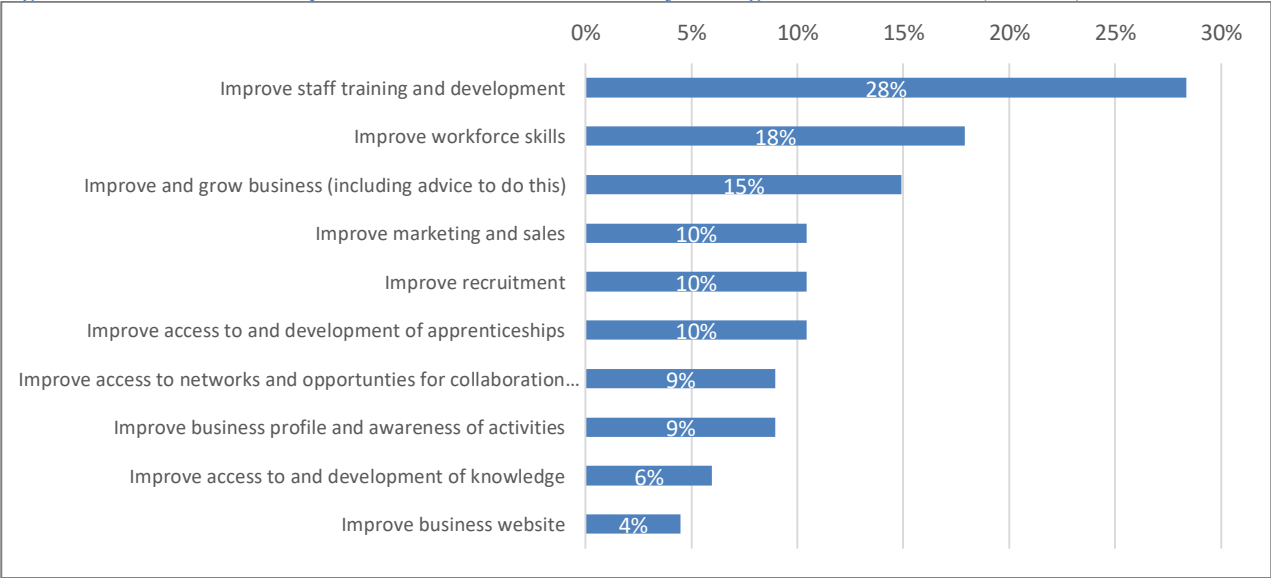
A further 10% were hopeful that DS4B would help to improve their access to and the development of apprenticeship opportunities as the comments below illustrate:

“I work in offsite construction and there are no relevant apprenticeships or training courses for young people”

“Improve my team by recruiting more apprentices and being able to pass my knowledge on”

10% thought that involvement in the project would improve their marketing and sales, potentially by helping them move into new areas, developing their competitive advantage and/or improving marketing and promotional skills. Other reasons included: improving access to networks and collaboration opportunities (9%), improving their business profile and awareness of their activities (9%), improving access to and development of knowledge (6%) and improving the business website by developing the skills to do this (4%), although only one of these respondents was a involved with the digital strand.

Figure 7: What Businesses Hoped to Achieve for their Business by Getting Involved with DS4B (re-coded)

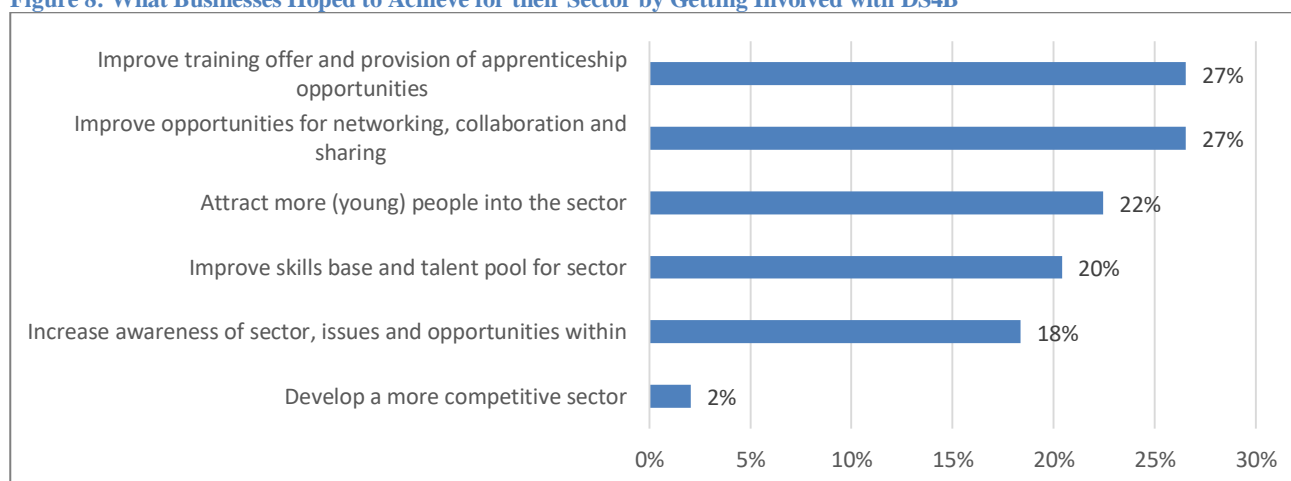


Source: Summative Assessment Business Survey, March 2020. n = 67. Note: responses sometimes covered more than 1 category and therefore the totals do not add up to 100%

Figure 8 summarises what businesses hoped to achieve for their sector by getting involved with DS4B. This shows that 27% hoped that involvement would improve the training offer, including provision of

apprenticeships. This included provision of new services, development of industry led training, input into training standards and improving the college's offer. A further 27% hoped that involvement would provide greater opportunities for networking, collaboration and sharing of knowledge. 22% hoped it would attract more people into the sector, many highlighting the possibility of attracting young people specifically. 20% hoped that it would improve the skills base for their sector by widening the talent pool and availability of relevant skills locally. Finally, 18% hoped that DS4B would raise the profile and increase awareness of the issues and opportunities within their sector.

Figure 8: What Businesses Hoped to Achieve for their Sector by Getting Involved with DS4B



Source: Summative Assessment Business Survey, March 2020. n = 49. Note: responses sometimes covered more than 1 category and therefore the totals do not add up to 100%

2.5.2 Participation in Project Activities

Figure 9 shows the percentage of survey respondents that had participated in each of the main DS4B activities. The most frequently selected option was 'activities to understand business/sector skills gaps and training needs' with 38% indicating that they had participated in this. This was followed by 'activities to design bespoke training provision' (30%) and 'activities to facilitate knowledge exchange' (27%). A small number of other respondents (5 respondents, 7%) indicated that they did not undertake any of these activities or only had a minimal involvement in the project. Other responses included attending events.

Figure 9: Business Participation by Type of Activity

DS4B Project Activities	%
Activities to understand business/sector skills gaps and training needs (e.g. employer forums, surveys, training needs analysis etc.)	38%
Activities to design (sustainable) bespoke training provision (e.g. new training courses, digital courses, toolkits etc.)	30%
Activities to facilitate knowledge exchange (e.g. best practice sharing, peer to peer mentoring, placements, secondments etc.)	27%
Activities to facilitate work trials and apprenticeships (e.g. creating apprenticeship opportunities, finding apprentices, sharing apprentices etc.)	25%
Activities to develop Apprenticeship Standards (e.g. forums, surveys, feedback on standards etc.)	15%
Activities to develop curriculum through accredited courses (feeding into development processes, trialling courses etc.)	14%
Activities to support Equal Opportunities in skills development for your business or sector	4%
Other (please specify)	25%

Source: Summative Assessment Business Survey, March 2020. n = 71. Note: responses sometimes covered more than 1 category and therefore the totals do not add up to 100%

For each option selected, respondents were asked to assess how effective the activity was in meeting its objectives using a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 was 'very ineffective' and 5 was 'very effective'. Figure 10 shows the results of this assessment as a weighted average. Overall, across all activities the weighted average was 4.02, showing good levels of satisfaction overall. Feedback indicates that the most effective ones were 'activities to facilitate knowledge exchange...' with a weighted average of 4.39, followed by 'activities to support Equal Opportunities...' with a weighted average of 4.33, although the sample size of this activity was very small with just three respondents selecting it. The least effective were 'activities to develop curriculum through accredited courses...' with a weighted average of 3.70 and 'activities to develop apprenticeship standards...' with a weighted average of 3.73.

Figure 10: Effectiveness of Activities in Meeting their Objectives - Weighted Averages

DS4B Project Activities	No.	Weighted Average
Activities to understand business/sector skills gaps and training needs (e.g. employer forums, surveys, training needs analysis etc.)	27	4.04
Activities to design (sustainable) bespoke training provision (e.g. new training courses, digital courses, toolkits etc.)	21	4.29
Activities to facilitate knowledge exchange (e.g. best practice sharing, peer to peer mentoring, placements, secondments etc.)	18	4.39
Activities to facilitate work trials and apprenticeships (e.g. creating apprenticeship opportunities, finding apprentices, sharing apprentices etc.)	17	4.00
Activities to develop Apprenticeship Standards (e.g. forums, surveys, feedback on standards etc.)	11	3.73
Activities to develop curriculum through accredited courses (feeding into development processes, trialling courses etc.)	10	3.70
Activities to support Equal Opportunities in skills development for your business or sector	3	4.33
Other (please specify)	18	3.67
All	125	4.02

Source: Summative Assessment Business Survey, March 2020. n = 70. Note: responses sometimes covered more than 1 category and therefore the totals do not add up to 100%

When asked why they provided their scores, a variety of responses were given. A selection of the positive comments are shown below:

"The process to develop the skills gap and develop suitable training was very thorough, inclusive and professional. We are pleased with the range of skills training and development now available for our staff. The staff who have attended sessions have given good feedback on content of training and peer to peer learning opportunities"

"A course was undertaken (ISO 27001 implementation) and we are now starting the process of implementing it"

"Because the activities successfully created opportunities for candidates to learn and take on a work trail/ training opportunity"

"Hands-on experience and qualified supervision on a daily basis"

"In our experience the set up in creating an appropriate apprenticeship for our business was proactive and achieved the aim very satisfactorily"

“I found that they were very all extremely helpful and provided me with many answers on taking on an apprentice and the best ways to guide an apprentice though the years of the course”

“A useful standard was developed”

“Positive input from Cornwall Marine Network helped to identify our needs and facilitate introductory training around the areas that were required”

“Excellent approach to understanding what the CMG group needed. Four industry focused training developed and delivered on the back of the funding”

However, some more negative comments included:

“The programme folded before we got started”

“I understand people are doing their best to find solutions and adapt to new ways and methods. But it is not helping our business or the sector yet”

“No new digital courses are being run at the college as a result of the programme”

“We have found it difficult to understand how it is possible to benefit from the healthy workforce project - it can't refer, it doesn't actively promote or provide a voice, we can sit in a list in a website they provide and hope someone notices us. We prefer to be more pro-active”

2.5.4 Satisfaction with the Employer Voucher Scheme

22 of the business surveyed had participated in the Employer Voucher Scheme. The majority (57%) used the voucher to pay for training/development or equipment/resources (43%). A smaller proportion used it to cover marketing/promotional material (3%), conference costs (3%), mentor time (2%) or travel costs (2%)⁴. These businesses were asked how far they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about the Employer Voucher Scheme, scoring each statement on a scale of 1 – 5, where 1 is ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 is ‘strongly agree’. Figure 11 below shows the weighted average for each statement, with higher weighted averages indicating a greater proportion of businesses agreeing with the statement. The highest weighted averages were found for ‘I would participate in a voucher scheme like this one again’ which achieved a weighted average of 4.1 and ‘the conditions attached to the voucher were reasonable’ which achieved a weighted average of 3.91. The lowest scoring statement was ‘the payment process was quick, which achieved a weighted average of 3.19. This low weighted average is driven by a relatively sizable proportion (24%) of respondents indicating that they either strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement.

⁴ Note respondents could select more than 1 option, therefore the total does not add up to 100%

Figure 11: Extent of Agreement with Statements about the Employer Voucher Scheme - Weighted Averages

Weighted Average	
The size of the voucher was appropriate for the work involved	3.73
The conditions attached to the voucher were reasonable	3.91
The evidence required to make a claim was reasonable	3.82
The payment process was quick	3.19
I would participate in a voucher scheme like this one again	4.1

Source: Summative Assessment Business Survey, March 2020. N = 22

2.5.5 Satisfaction with the Apprenticeship Development Fund

Just 13 of the businesses surveyed had participated in the Apprenticeship Development Fund (ADF). The majority (58%) used this to pay for training/development (excluding apprenticeship fees) and mentor time (50%) as well as equipment and resources (17%).⁴ Figure 12 shows the weighted average for a series of statements about the ADF. It shows slightly lower levels of satisfaction than with the Employer Voucher scheme (above). The highest levels of satisfaction were with the statement 'the evidence required to make a claim was reasonable' with a weighted average of 3.83. The statement receiving the lowest score was 'the size of the voucher was appropriate for the work involved' which received a weighted average of just 3.0.

In an open comment question, one business suggested that the apprenticeship payment benefit for the first year should be extended for a second year to cover the full training period.

Figure 12: Extent of Agreement with Statements about the Apprenticeship Development Fund - Weighted Averages

Weighted Average	
The voucher helped me to take on an apprentice	3.54
The voucher made it easier for me to contribute to the design and development of apprenticeship curriculum	3.25
The size of the voucher was appropriate for the work involved	3.00
The conditions attached to the voucher were reasonable	3.67
The evidence required to make a claim was reasonable	3.83
The payment process was quick	3.25
I would participate in a voucher scheme like this one again	3.58

Source: Summative Assessment Business Survey, March 2020. N = 13

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Evidence suggests that DS4B's focus on businesses (as opposed to individuals) was really important for C&IoS, as was its developmental focus.
- A number of enabling design features were also identified including the role of the sector based delivery partners, their ability to develop discrete projects, the innovative match funding model (using apprenticeship wages) and the availability of Employer Voucher Funding.
- However, there were also some design challenges. Although the partnership model was an enabler, it also created some logistical challenges around the possible duplication of outputs as did the competing pressure of 'chasing outputs' whilst delivering a developmental project.
- It's bold and innovative nature also created challenges as not all of the definitions, expectations and eligibility requirements were clearly understood at the outset. Although the team worked their way through this, these challenges impacted on what could be achieved within a compressed delivery timeframe.
- The lead time required for generating match through apprenticeship salaries is also a learning point.
- It is also worth noting that, as one of four sector based ESF projects commissioned at the same time, care had to be taken to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication. Efforts were made to achieve this but there was some suggestion that a shared steering group may have been useful here. This could also have enabled providers across C&IoS to identify and respond strategically to any generic skills development requirements that crossed sectors.
- Internally DS4B had a clear governance and management structure in place. As a key feature of this, the Programme Management Group was seen as a useful forum for helping partners to understand and learn from each other as well as for understanding how the project as a whole was performing. However, it could potentially have been more beneficial had partners been able to discuss particular businesses to avoid overlap and chasing the same outputs.
- The level of support provided by the central team was also described as 'excellent.' The only critical feedback about TCCG's co-ordination of the project revolved around some of its strategic level decisions that were felt to have been taken without partner input.
- Several partners also mentioned DWP's slow (and in some cases partial) payments which created a number of significant cash-flow problems across the partnership.
- In terms of day-to-day management, a number of recommendations were made within the interim evaluation relating to data collection and recording. Changes have since been made to the systems which improved data quality but the evaluators note that some aspects could still be tightened further. A CRM tool could potentially be considered for complex projects such as this in the future.
- As a whole, DS4B has delivered activities against each of its core themes. Whilst not all partners were able to deliver the full 'depth and breadth' of activities, all of them contributed to at least two delivery themes and it is the considered view of the evaluators that the areas of focus were appropriate to the needs of the individual sectors and their particular circumstances.
- There was clear evidence of the partnership's commitment to horizontal principles within various aspects of delivery although potentially more could have been achieved over a longer timeframe.
- Businesses had varying expectations around what DS4B would achieve and had engaged in the project in differing ways. The majority were satisfied with their engagement, although feedback indicates that some activities were more effective than others from a business perspective. Satisfaction with the ADF tended to be lower but only a small number of businesses had actually engaged with that element.

Section Three: Performance Against Targets

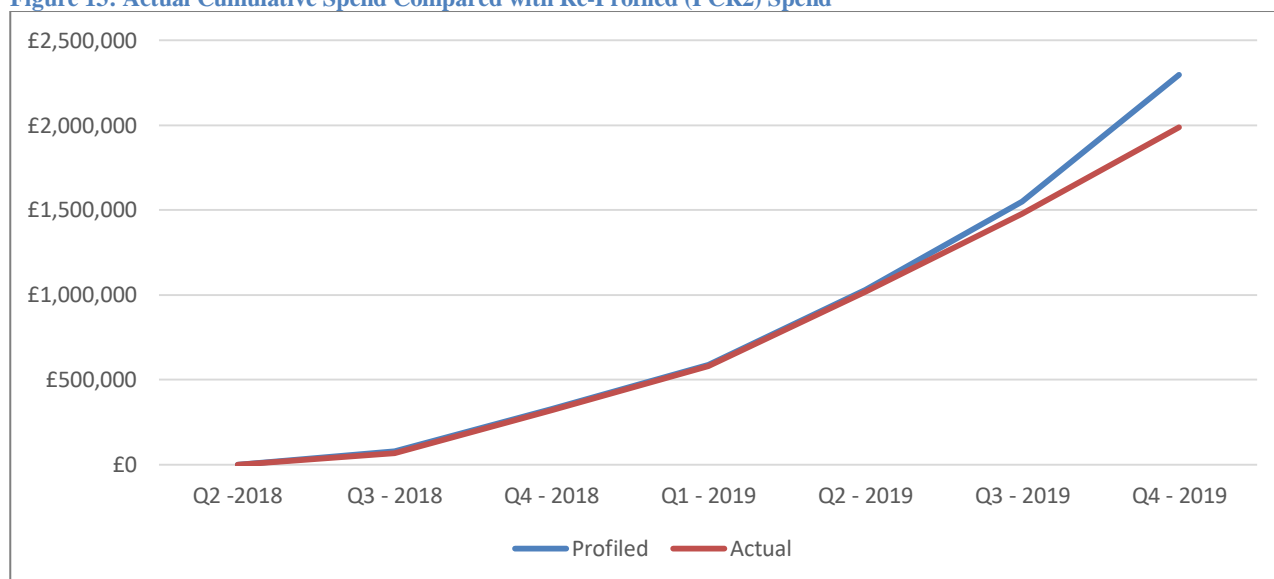
This section of the report provides a commentary on DS4B's performance up to the end of December 2019. It should be noted that the project started later than planned due to a time delay in approving the contract. Additionally, some of the partners experienced capacity issues over the lifetime of the project and some members of staff left their roles as late as the summer 2019 meaning that like-for-like replacements were not viable. Further, it should be noted that the Agri-food and Hospitality sectors were being managed by Cornwall Food Foundation which ceased trading in December 2019. Steps have been put in place to ensure that evidence of their activity can be fully captured and that their outstanding outputs can be absorbed elsewhere within the project. These contextual factors should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings in this section.

3.1 Financial Performance

The original application set out plans for a project worth £5.5m, spending £4.4m of ESF with £1.1m private match. The project has since been re-profiled through the PCR process twice, with a further PCR awaiting a decision. The current contracted project value (as per the most recently agreed PCR) is £3,404,111 with a total match of £680,822. The reduction in funding reflected the shorter delivery period for the project.

Figure 13 below shows the actual spend, relative to the contracted spend profile (PCR2), up to the end of Quarter 4 2019 (the last complete quarter for which data are available). It shows that the project was behind profile by £310,117 (13% under).

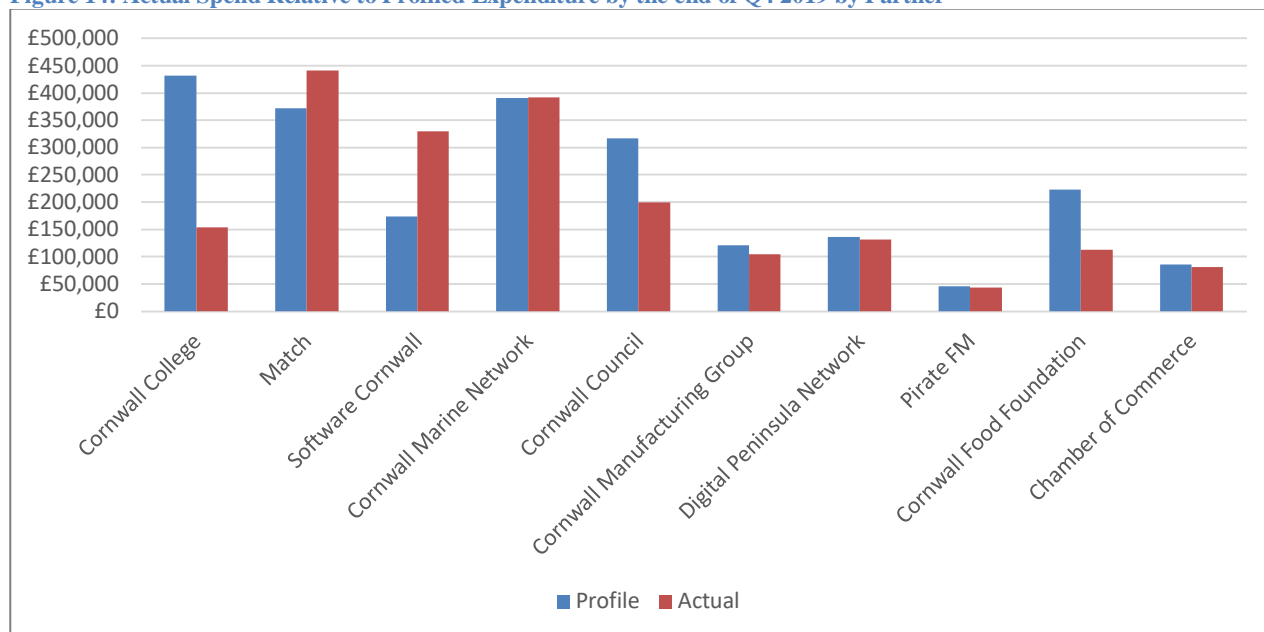
Figure 13: Actual Cumulative Spend Compared with Re-Profiled (PCR2) Spend



Source: Project Monitoring Data

Figure 14 (overleaf) shows the actual spend versus profiled spend by delivery partner. This shows significant (>15%) underspend for the Cornwall College core team, Cornwall Council, and Cornwall Food Foundation which reflected their organisational and staffing changes. Significant (>15%) overspend has been seen for Software Cornwall as well as the match funding that has been generated. The remaining partners (CMN, CMG, DPN, Pirate FM and the Chamber of Commerce) were within 15% of their profile for the end of Quarter 4 2019.

Figure 14: Actual Spend Relative to Profiled Expenditure by the end of Q4 2019 by Partner



Source: Project Monitoring Data

3.2 Output Performance

Figure 15 (overleaf) shows that the ESF output performance at the end of Quarter 4 was broadly on profile, with the number of SMEs starting projects (C23) exactly matching the profiled position for the end of 2019. Similarly, the number of SMEs completing projects was very close (97%) to the profiled target, only slightly lower due to a longer than forecast period of time between engagement and completion of projects. Feedback suggests that this time lag also reflects the difficulty in obtaining wet signatures from some businesses for completion of their second output.⁵ The team has forecast that both of these ESF outputs will be achieved by project closure. In terms of added value indicators, the project was ahead of profile for the number of individuals and SMEs engaged at that stage (122% and 129% respectively). However, there was some lag in the number of added value apprenticeships by the end of Quarter 4 2019, with only 49% of this target having been reached. Please note that the added value apprenticeships indicator relates to any activity which helps to fill the apprenticeship pipeline. The evaluators understand that the reasons for this lag were twofold:

- Activity focused in the first instance on achieving the volume of ADF grants required to deliver the project's match funding contribution; and,
- A number of staffing changes amongst the partners affected the project's capacity for apprenticeship development.

Now that the ADF targets have been achieved, activity is focusing on reaching the added value apprenticeship targets.

⁵ The evaluators are aware that as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic some projects are currently using alternative electronic systems to collect signatures such as 'eversign' and this is reported to have been much more efficient

Figure 15: Output Performance

	Actual achieved by end Q4 2019	Target for end Q4 2019	Target for end of project	% of Q4 target	RAG
C023: No. SMEs starting projects	657	657	747	100%	
R9: No. SMEs successfully completing projects	388	399	598	97%	
No. Apprenticeships created overall (added value)	98	199	213	49%	
No. SMEs engaged in project activity (added value)	855	661	1,037	129%	
No. individuals engaged or supported through the project (added value)	1,761	1,447	1,672	122%	

Source: Internal Project Monitoring Data. Note: Red less than 85%, Orange, between 85% and 95%, Green greater than 95%, as per ESIF Summative Assessment guidance

3.2.1 ESF Output Performance by Sector/Theme

Figure 16 shows the ESF output performance by sector/theme up to the end of Quarter 4 2019. It should be noted that each partner took a different approach to profiling their outputs over the project's lifespan, with some forecasting achievements in 2020 and others expecting to have achieved all of their outputs by the end of 2019. This makes comparisons very difficult.

By the end of Quarter 4 2019, eight sectors/themes were ahead of their profiled target for SMEs engaged (C23), some by a considerable margin (e.g. Digital Software and Retail). One was slightly behind profile (SME and Supply Chain at 88%) and three were significantly behind profile (<85% of profile): Agri-food, Health and Hospitality. However, it is expected that these output targets will be made up by project closure. Plans are in place to redistribute some of the Agri-food and Hospitality outputs following the closure of CFF and the Health strands are now gaining momentum. There has been some internal re-balancing between the three Health strands to maximise delivery in certain areas and to reflect staffing challenges in others. The team is confident that targets will be achieved and potentially even exceeded within the remaining months of the project.

Moving on to the number of SMEs completing projects (R9), the monitoring data show that seven sectors/themes were ahead of profile for this indicator, again some by a significant margin (e.g. Health and Marine). One was slightly behind profile and four were significantly behind profile (<85%). Of particular note is the very low performance against targets for both the ADF and the SME/Supply Chain sectors, where performance was 8% and 23% of target respectively. For the ADF strand, the project is signed as complete at the point where the employer provides a review/feedback and the low conversion rate reflects the long lead time as highlighted earlier in the report. For the SME/Supply Chain sector, it was noted that, because the Chamber of Commerce do not deliver training, there was also a longer than expected time lag between identification of need and the provision being ready for delivery. However, it is expected that both the ADF and SME/Supply Chain projects will be completed before DS4B closure.

As R9 and C23 indicators are related it is not surprising that sectors which were ahead of profile for C23 performance were also head of profile for R9 performance (e.g. Construction, Digital Media, Digital Software, Manufacturing, Marine and Retail). Equally three of those that were behind profile with engagement (C23) were also behind profile with completion (R9) (Agri-food, Health and SMEs). However, the pattern does not hold true for all. Some sectors, whilst being ahead of profile for engagement (C23)

were behind profile for completion (R9) performance (ADF and Digital Wider) and vice versa (Hospitality). The relationship can be expressed as a 'conversion rate' between the number of SMEs engaged (C23) and the number completing projects (R9). This is shown in Figure 17 below.

Figure 16: ESF Output Performance by Sector

	SMEs Engaged (C23)		SMEs Completing Projects (R9)	
	Actual achieved by end Q4 2019	% of Q4 Target	Actual achieved by end Q4 2019	% of Q4 Target
ADF	109	107%	2	8%
Agri-food	35	70%	18	64%
Construction	39	98%	20	125%
Digital Media	11	122%	10	143%
Digital Software	35	135%	27	129%
Digital Wider	87	107%	60	87%
Health	86	70%	77	77%
Hospitality	21	81%	13	163%
Manufacturing	43	113%	38	131%
Marine	53	104%	45	150%
Retail	117	133%	75	139%
SME/Supply Chain	21	88%	3	23%
Grand Total	657	100%	388	97%

Source: Internal Project Monitoring Data. Note: Red less than 85%, Orange, between 85% and 95%, Green greater than 95%, as per ESIF Summative Assessment guidance

By the end of Quarter 4 2019 conversion rates varied significantly, with two projects achieving conversion rates in excess of 90% (Digital Media and Health), but others achieving much lower rates. Overall the conversation rate stood at 59%, which was lower than the target set out in the application. However, as the project expects to achieve both its R9 and C23 targets, the target conversion rate should be achieved by project closure.

Figure 17: Conversion Rate (R9/C23)

	Actual	Target
ADF	2%	80%
Agri-food	51%	80%
Construction	51%	81%
Digital Media	91%	78%
Digital Software	77%	81%
Digital Wider	69%	80%
Health	90%	80%
Hospitality	62%	81%
Manufacturing	88%	79%
Marine	85%	80%
Retail	64%	80%
SME/Supply Chain	14%	79%
Grand Total	59%	80%

Source: Internal Project Monitoring Data

3.2.2 Added Value Performance by Sector

Figure 18 below shows the performance against target by sector/theme for the added value indicators. This reveals a wide variation in performance between the different strands, with having exceeded their original targets by a considerable margin (e.g. Digital Software, Health, Manufacturing and SME/Supply Chain). However, performance for the others was more variable. As highlighted above the added value apprenticeships indicator relates to any activity which helps to fill the apprenticeship pipeline and has been extracted from the narratives provided in the business engagement forms.

Figure 18: Performance Against Added Value Indicators by Sector

	Apprenticeships Created (Added Value)		SMEs Engaged (Added Value)		Individuals Engaged (Added Value)	
	Actual achieved by end Q4 2019	% of Q4 Target	Actual achieved by end Q4 2019	% of Q4 Target	Actual achieved by end Q4 2019	% of Q4 Target
ADF	0	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a
Agri-food	2	29%	47	336%	77	138%
Construction	13	260%	37	62%	91	910%
Digital Media	0	n/a	8	28%	33	8%
Digital Software	6	150%	67	291%	296	134%
Digital Wider	3	38%	53	120%	68	106%
Health	36	1,200%	115	479%	237	212%
Hospitality	3	75%	26	325%	62	40%
Manufacturing	13	infinity	49	114%	102	785%
Marine	9	129%	39	36%	62	73%
Retail	9	69%	107	50%	122	84%
SME	4	200%	307	337%	611	4,700%
Grand Total	98	49%	855	129%	1761	122%

Source: Internal Project Monitoring Data. Note: Red less than 85%, Orange, between 85% and 95%, Green greater than 95%, as per ESIF Summative Assessment guidance

3.3 Profile of Businesses

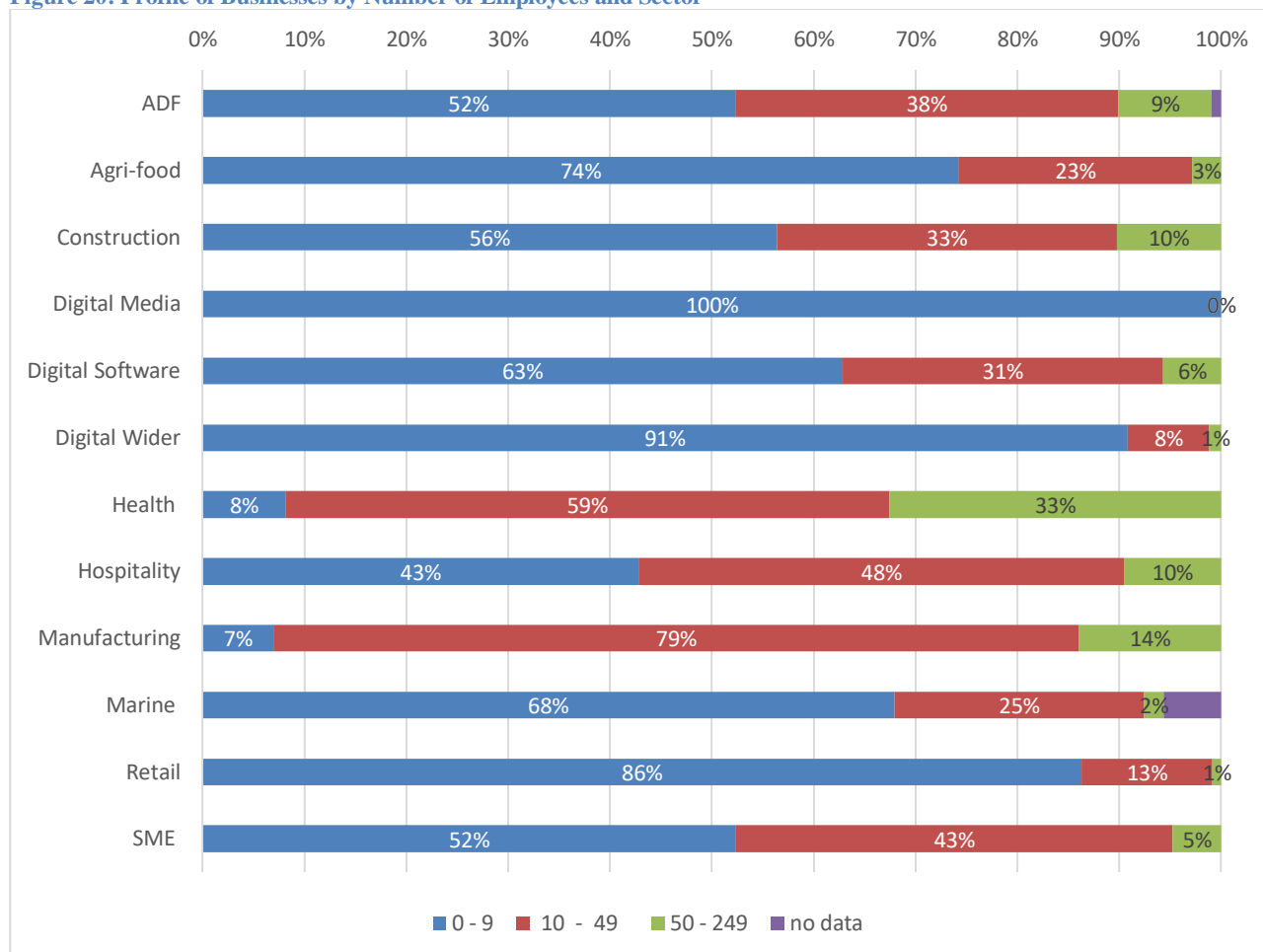
Figure 19 overleaf shows the profile of SMEs participating in projects (C23s) by the number of employees, compared with the profile of all businesses in C&IoS in 2019. This shows that the project supported a greater proportion of larger SMEs (employing between 10 and 49 and 50 – 249) than seen in the wider population. However, it is not surprising, as the project primarily aimed to support businesses that employed staff and therefore had a training need. However, this varied considerably by sector (see Figure 20 overleaf), with Digital Media and Digital Wider having a high proportion of micros; and Health and Manufacturing having a much higher proportion of larger businesses, reflecting the profile of these industries.

Figure 19: Profile of Businesses by Number of Employees

Company Size	Number	Percentage of C23s	Profile of businesses in C&IoS
0 - 9	384	58%	89%
10 - 49	212	32%	9%
50 - 249	57	9%	1.5%
>250	0	0%	0.3%
No data ⁶	4	1%	
Grand Total	657	100%	

Source: Internal Project Monitoring Data and IDBR data (Enterprises, 2019)

Figure 20: Profile of Businesses by Number of Employees and Sector



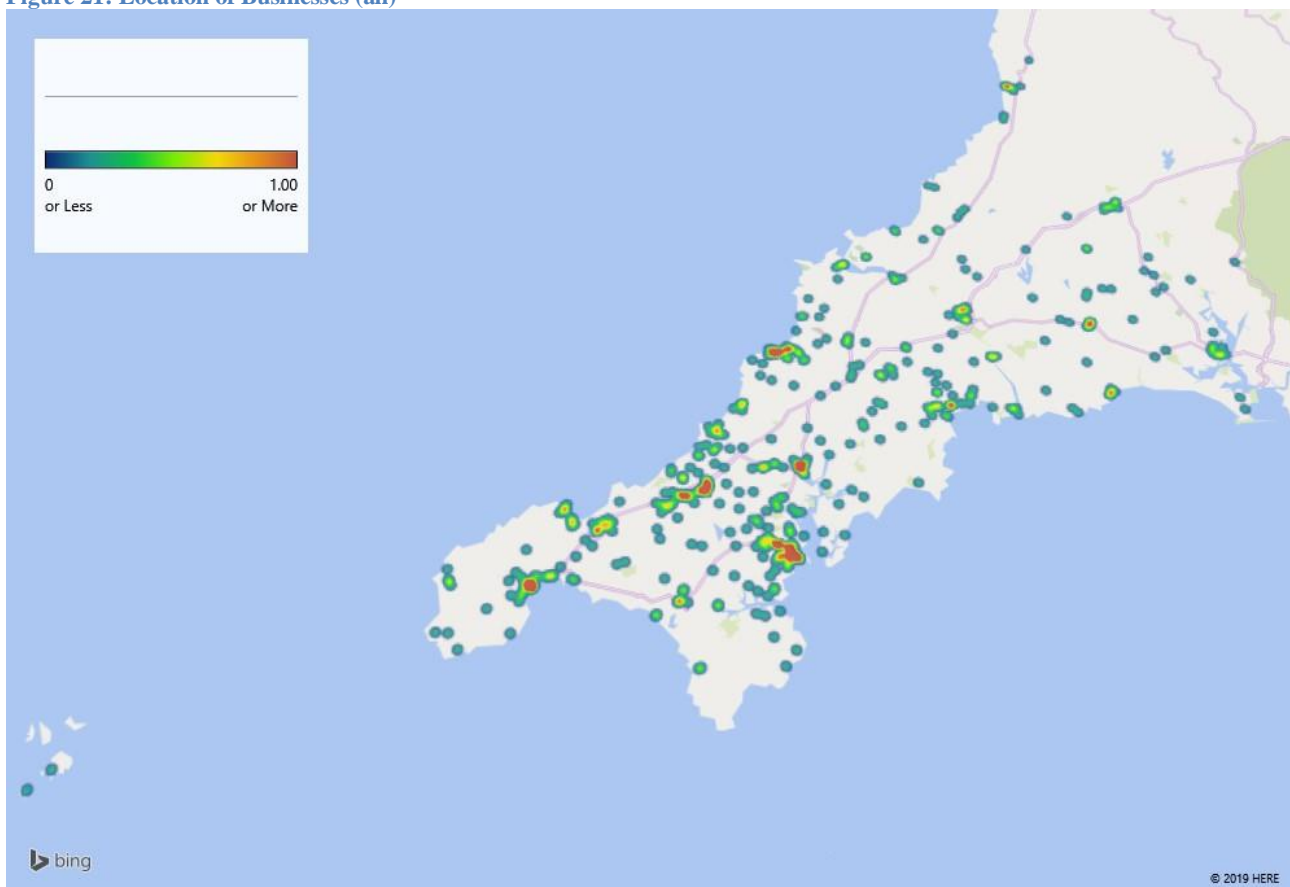
Source: Internal Project Monitoring Data

Figure 21 shows the location of businesses (based on C23 data). There has been a good distribution through C&IoS, with concentrations of businesses in the key urban areas of Falmouth/Penryn, Camborne/Redruth, Newquay, Truro, St Austell, Penzance and Hayle as well as businesses scattered throughout the more rural areas including the East and North of the county, where there are fewer businesses. The project successfully engaged with two businesses on the Isles of Scilly through the Digital (wider) project, which developed 'Photoshop Isles of Scilly' as a trial, designed to engage businesses with the photography through readily available technology. The format was reduced to suit the Isles of Scilly businesses and it was heavily focussed on product photography to suit the business base there. Whilst it

⁶ No data was provided for 2 participants and corrupted for the other two

was hoped that the Agri-food and Hospitality sectors would also be able to engage with businesses on the Isles of Scilly, this was not possible after the Cornwall Food Foundation ceased trading.

Figure 21: Location of Businesses (all)



Source: Internal Project Monitoring Data

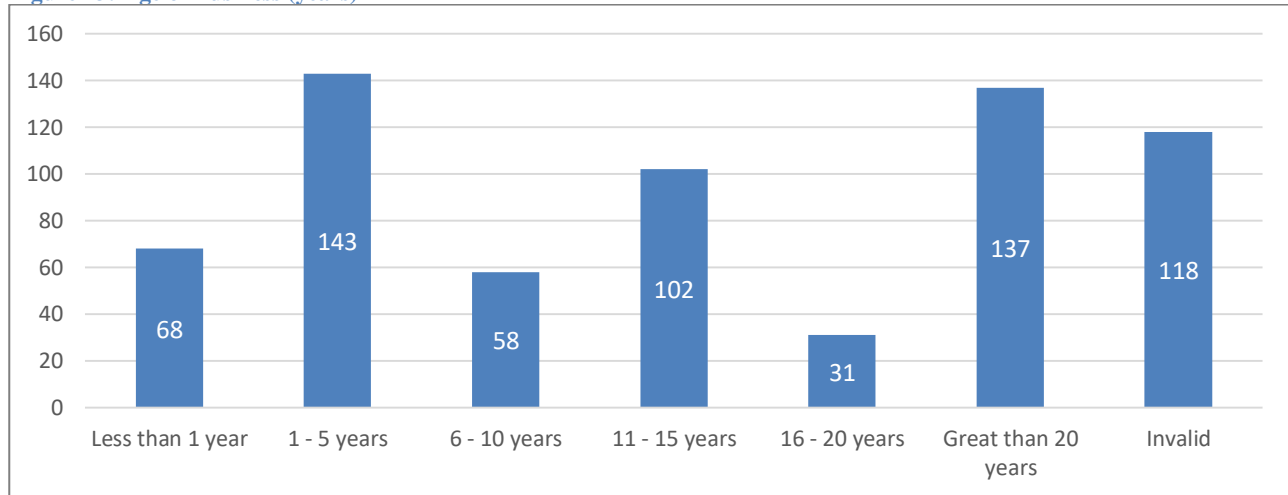
Figure 22 overleaf shows the distribution broken down by sector/theme. These maps show a fairly good distribution across the area in each case. For some sectors, the distribution reflects the business bases, for instance, the Marine sector shows a higher concentration of businesses in Falmouth and Penryn and Retail shows a natural inclination towards the urban centres. Likewise a number of Digital companies are located around the county's innovation centres. For other sectors/themes, whilst there may appear to be emerging trends, the small number of businesses participating makes it hard to tell if there is a trend or simply a small sample (e.g. Agri-food, SME/Supply Chain).

Figure 22: Sector Maps



Figure 23 below shows the distribution of the businesses in terms of age. It should be noted that a large number of businesses did not provide a start date, therefore this analysis is not fully complete. This shows that DS4B supported businesses of all ages, including new businesses (10.3%)

Figure 23: Age of Business (years)



Source: Internal Project Monitoring Data

3.4 Value for Money

Figure 24 shows the project's overall Value for Money on the basis of actual spend and actual outputs, as well as target spend and output performance (based on expected values from PCR2). In terms of actual performance, the project as a whole had achieved a unit cost of £3,026 per business engaged. However, if the project achieves its target spend and outputs by project closure the unit costs will increase to £4,557. This is slightly higher (18%) than the unit costs proposed in the application of £3,863. However, it still represents excellent Value for Money when compared with the VFM expected from the original call for proposals (£12,731⁷ per C23).

Figure 24 also shows the unit costs by delivery partner. In terms of actual performance up to the end of Quarter 4 2019, these varied significantly from approximately £1,500 per business engaged to £9,400 per business engaged. This is a much wider range than anticipated through the PCR2, with unit costs ranging from 2,243 to £6,880.

⁷ The total call value was £4.4m ESF and target outputs were 432. When match is included the unit cost is £12,731

Figure 24: Value for Money (Unit Costs)

	Actual spend to end Q4	Actual businesses engaged (C023) to end Q4	Actual VFM (£ per C023)	'Target' total spend (as per PCR2)	'Target' total businesses engaged (C023)	'Target' VFM (£ per C023)
Software Cornwall	£329,802	35	£9,422.93	£179,116	26	£6,889.08
Cornwall Marine Network	£391,384	170	£2,302.26	£465,207	179	£2,598.92
Cornwall Council	£199,420	125	£1,595.36	£464,436	207	£2,243.65
Cornwall Manufacturers Group	£104,617	43	£2,432.95	£155,628	38	£4,095.47
Digital Peninsula Network	£131,602	87	£1,512.66	£202,152	86	£2,350.60
Pirate FM	£43,506	11	£3,955.06	£48,411	9	£5,379.00
Cornwall Food Foundation	£112,220	56	£2,003.92	£310,271	76	£4,082.51
Cornwall Chamber	£80,749	21	£3,845.18	£108,242	24	£4,510.08
Total of sectors	£1,393,300	548	£2,542.52	£1,933,463	645	£2,997.62
Project total	£1,988,372	657	£3,026.44	£3,404,111	747	£4,557.04

Source: Internal Project Monitoring Data, analysis undertaken by the evaluators

However, for a developmental rather than delivery based project, unit costs may not be an appropriate measure of Value for Money, as the true value of the project is not the number of businesses engaged, but the outcome of their engagements in the form of new models of training. Section 4 of this report explores qualitative evidence of outcomes and impacts to date.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- As of the end of Quarter 4, the project was behind profile by £310,117 (13% under). The actual spend verses profiled spend varied quite considerably by delivery partner.
- The ESF output performance at the end of Quarter 4 2019 was broadly on profile, with the number of SMEs starting projects (C23) exactly matching the profiled position for the end of 2019 and the number of SMEs completing projects being very close (97%) to the profiled target.
- The project was ahead of profile for the number of individuals and SMEs engaged at the end of Quarter 4 2019. However, only 49% of the added value apprenticeships had been delivered at that point.
- Each partner took a different approach to profiling their outputs over the project's lifespan but eight sectors/themes were ahead of their profiled target for SMEs engaged at the end of Quarter 4, some by a considerable margin, one was slightly behind and three were significantly behind profile. The ESF completion rates and conversion rates also varied across the partnership. However, it is expected that all of the output targets will be achieved by project closure.
- The partnership supported a broad cross-section of business types in terms of size and age. The geographic spread was also excellent with concentrations of businesses seen in the key urban areas of Falmouth/Penryn, Camborne/Redruth, Newquay, Truro, St Austell, Penzance and Hayle as well as being scattered throughout the more rural areas including the East and North of the county. Two businesses were supported on the Isles of Scilly.
- Unit costs are expected to be slightly higher than forecast in the application by project closure, but considerably lower than the unit costs calculated from the call for projects. The project therefore continues to offer DWP excellent Value for Money.

Section Four: Outcomes, Impacts and Legacy

This section of the report focuses on the project's outcomes and impacts. It considers what has been achieved for businesses, for sectors/thematic areas and for the partnership itself, concluding with a discussion of DS4B's potential legacy.

4.1 Business Level Outcomes

Partners could point to a range of business level outcomes arising from the DS4B project, particularly around awareness raising. For example:

“So many businesses are struggling to recruit people with the right skills or have to pay a fortune for them. This has opened up their eyes to the possibility of up-skilling their own staff”

“It's raised awareness of the training available and sign-posted people to things they probably wouldn't have otherwise found”

“Businesses are now realising the importance of effective and appropriate training but also that you get what you pay for”

Interestingly, it was pointed out that not all of the training developed through this project has been delivered free of charge and that having to charge commercial rates has actually been an important part of the journey for some businesses.

Overall, partners felt that participating businesses had been helped to understand their skills needs and been signposted to solutions. As a result many will now have the wherewithal to invest in the skills they need to grow their business. The increased uptake of apprentices was noted as a key business level outcome. Additionally, some partners had already seen the impact of up-skilling employees in action.

4.1.1 Outcomes from the Employer Voucher Scheme

Results from the business survey show that for the majority (68%) of businesses participating in the Employer Voucher Scheme, the outcomes for their business were positive. This included:

- Staff trained;
- New schemes trialled;
- Businesses grown;
- Apprentices supported and encouraged;
- Apprentices employed; and,
- Business profile raised.

However, for a small number the scheme was less successful, in part because the activities 'did not run' or because the business had yet to receive the Voucher. One business felt that it involved 'endless paperwork and no results' but this was just an isolated comment.

However, evidence suggests that the additionality of the Employer Voucher Scheme was potentially limited, with 48% of participating businesses indicating that they would have incurred these costs anyway. As the primary role of the Voucher Scheme was to motivate and support business involvement, limited additionality of this element is not necessarily problematic.

4.1.2 Outcomes from the Apprenticeship Development Fund

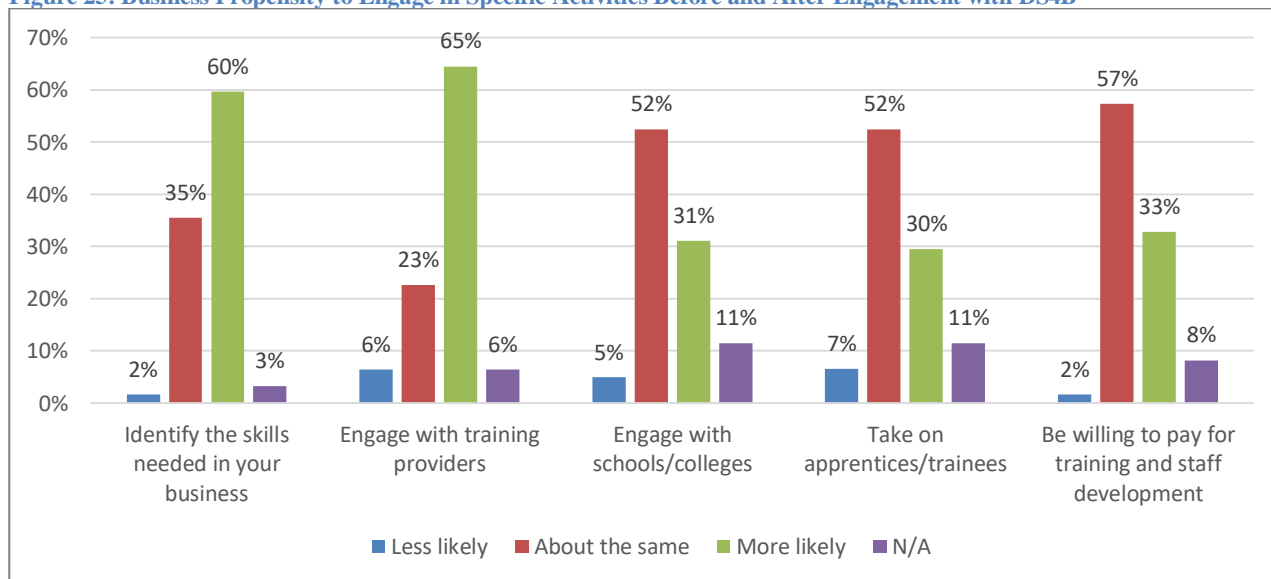
Whilst a small sub-set (13) of the business survey, the majority of businesses that participated in the ADF reported positive outcomes for their business⁸. Seven businesses reported that it made it easier or allowed them to employ or develop an apprentice, three of which had not previously employed an apprentice. However, a small number reported that the exercise had not been successful with one indicating that this was due to the course for their sector not being run.

Similarly to the Employer Voucher Scheme, the additionality of these outcomes may be limited as 50% of businesses indicated that they would have incurred these costs anyway.

4.1.3 Wider Impact on Businesses

Figure 25 overleaf shows the extent to which businesses were more or less likely to undertake specific activities since engaging with the DS4B project. This shows that when compared with their position prior to engaging with DS4B, 65% of participants were more likely to engage with training providers and 60% were more likely to identify the skills needed in their business, which is a significant shift. However, the project was less successful at motivating businesses to engage with schools/colleges, take on apprentices/trainees, or be willing to pay for training and staff development with just 31%, 30% and 33% of businesses respectively indicating that they were more likely to engage in these activities. This may be because businesses were already participating in these activities. The results also show that a small proportion of businesses reported that they were less likely to engage in some of these activities. A more detailed review of their specific survey responses suggests that some of those businesses had experienced challenges in the delivery of the project which may have negatively influenced their wider outlook.

Figure 25: Business Propensity to Engage in Specific Activities Before and After Engagement with DS4B

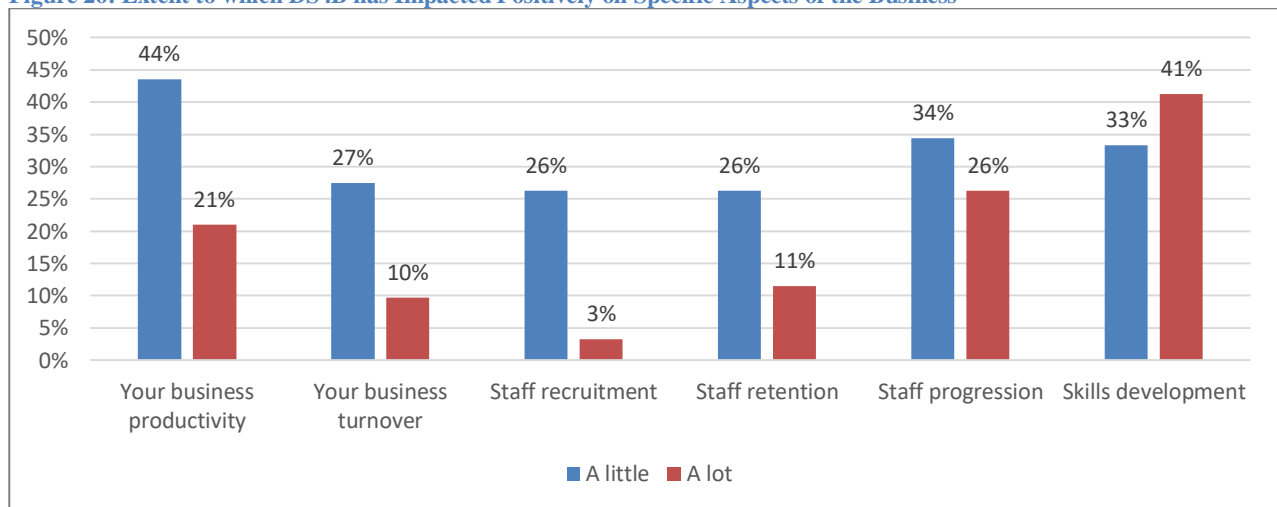


Source: Summative Assessment Business Survey, March 2020. N = 63

⁸ Note: 12 of the 13 commented on the outcome of the ADF

Figure 26 shows the extent to which the DS4B project had impacted positively either ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’ on business participants. This shows that 75% of businesses felt that DS4B had positively impacted on their skills development which is an excellent outcome. Although not specifically targeting productivity, 65% of businesses also indicated that DS4B had made a positive impact on their business productivity. However, only 37% indicated that it had positively impacted on their business turnover, suggesting the productivity improvement was a combination of improved staff efficiency and increased sales. Whilst 61% felt that it had impacted positively on staff progression only 37% felt that it had impacted positively on staff recruitment. The lower performance in respect of these indicators may, in part, reflect the fact that many participants did not employ large numbers, or indeed any staff, and therefore the questions would be less relevant to them.

Figure 26: Extent to which DS4B has Impacted Positively on Specific Aspects of the Business



Source: Summative Assessment Business Survey, March 2020. N = 63

Note, that whilst businesses were able to select ‘Not at all’ as well as ‘Not applicable’, their responses have not been shown to allow the graph to more clearly show the patterns associated with the positive responses

The business survey also provided an opportunity for participants to provide ‘other comments’ in relation to the project. Some positive examples are highlighted below:

“More of the same please”

“Many thanks for the advice given. Just to discuss about the problems I have been faced with starting a small business made me realise what I have achieved and how I could solve immediate problems. Splann! (Cornish for ‘fab!’)”

“Thank you for what you have taught me”

“The training at Digital Peninsula Network is extremely good and I have really valued the training I have received so far”

“The course was fantastic and I would love to attend more like this in the future. The impact on my business has been huge”

“The DS4B project was the major factor to increase the apprenticeship programme within our company. It has also encouraged us to help the college develop a mentoring programme which actively supports the development of students on full time plumbing courses, giving them industry information on opportunity and progression, short term work experience and guidance for interviews”

“Healthy Workplace is brilliant - fantastic initiative and resources and we really appreciate it”

“The course was excellent, really well run and covered a large variety of businesses”

Some negative comments were also received including:

“We are still yet to receive any funding or hear from anyone”

“I don't think it's the fault of XX that the scheme didn't work for us. We found the process long and ultimately expensive in time and costs and it has discouraged me from looking at apprentices in the future”

4.2 Sector Wide/Thematic Outcomes

The impact on the different delivery strands has also been wide ranging. At a strategic level DS4B has provided visibility and momentum for some existing initiatives (e.g. Proud to Care, the Digital Academy and Building Cornwall) which will be used as a springboard for further developments. It has created some brand new initiatives (e.g. Experts Grow) and supported the development of others (e.g. the Farmers Health Hub). It has also been an important springboard for Retail, in helping the sector itself to gain recognition. And in the case of Health (Adult Social Care) it has maximised opportunities arising from Cornwall Council's allocation of their apprenticeship levy funding.

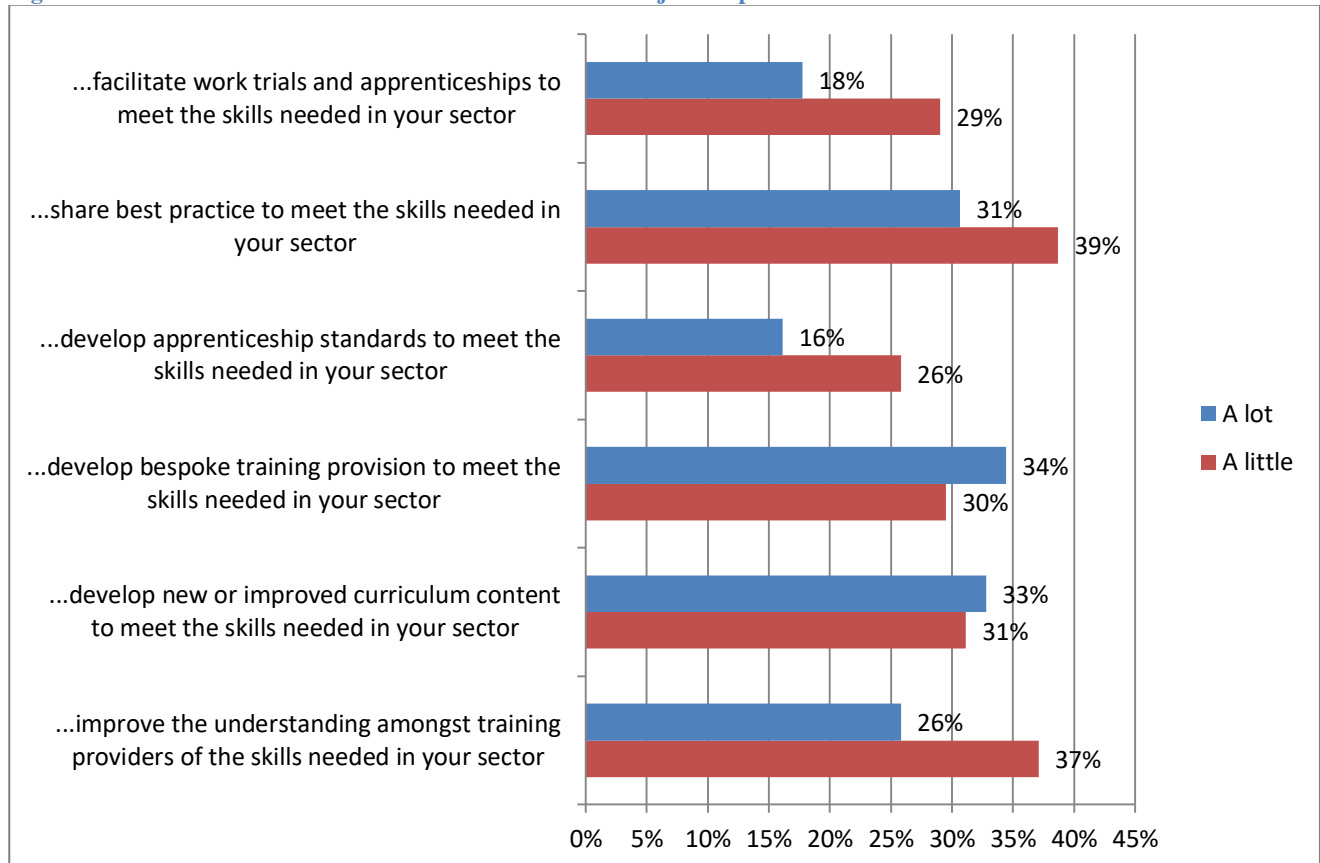
On a practical level it has meant that a number of new training products have been developed for the different sectors and new apprenticeship standards have brought to market through DS4B. The partners also reflected that the project has helped to promote collaboration between participating businesses and the establishment of some niche and small-scale co-ordination groups, which is an important outcome, especially in areas such as Agrifood where businesses are typically competitive, rather than collaborative.

In addition it was pointed out that:

“It's been important for businesses just to see that there is someone trying to help address skills gaps in their sector”

Business perspectives on key outcomes are shown in Figure 27. This shows that 69% of businesses felt that the DS4B project had helped to 'share best practice to meet the skills needed in their sector' either 'a little' or 'a lot'. This was followed by 64% indicating that DS4B had helped to 'develop new or improved curriculum content to meet the skills needed in their sector' and 'develop bespoke training provision to meet the skills needed in their sector.' At the lower end of the spectrum fewer businesses (47% and 42% respectively) thought that the project helped to 'facilitate work trials and apprenticeships to meet the skills needed in their sector' or 'develop apprenticeship standards to meet the skills needed in their sector.'

Figure 27: Business Views on the Extent to which the DS4B Project Helped to Achieve Wider Outcomes



Source: Summative Assessment Business Survey, March 2020. N = 62

Note, that whilst businesses were able to select 'Not at all' as well as 'Not applicable', there responses have not been shown below to allow the graph to more clearly show the patterns associated with the positive responses

In terms of the Employer Voucher Scheme, whilst some businesses felt that it was too early for impacts to be felt, others suggested that it had delivered positive outcomes for the sector including:

- Increased awareness and interest in their sector;
- Expanded networks; and,
- Development of sector specific training opportunities.

More generally, businesses were asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement that 'DS4B has been able to improve the labour market relevance of skills training provision in the C&IoS area.' The results showed that 59% agreed, 30% neither agreed or disagreed and 11% disagreed.

CASE STUDY: CORNWALL MANUFACTURERS GROUP



Having been involved in previous training programmes such as the Employer Ownership of Skills and the Local Response Fund, the CMG team had been aware of recurring frustrations by Manufacturers about the generic nature of most training programmes which were not tailored to their industry. The team was therefore very clear what it wanted to achieve through DS4B: to develop sector specific training that would meet the needs of local manufacturing companies and they embarked on a journey to achieve this.

Having initially convened the CMG committee as a small focus group to better understand the requirements, the DS4B journey ultimately took the team out to visit 38 different companies to better understand what training was needed. This exercise yielded a list of 36 separate topics of interest which were weighted and prioritised. Having identified the top 10 priorities the companies were consulted again to establish whether there was any existing training that could meet those needs either partially or in full and from this intelligence four 'Tier One' topics emerged where there was a need to create entirely new content:

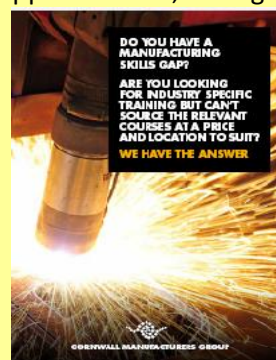
- Leadership and Management
- Train the Trainer
- Supply Chain and Procurement
- Continuous Improvement

Work then began in earnest across a series of meetings with the Chief Executives from the companies most interested in the training to scope out the basic components of each topic and how it should be delivered, which differed depending on the subject matter. Having generated this intelligence, a set of modules were created for two levels of training on each topic, with a graduated step between them, and CMG put out a tender for trainers to develop and deliver it. The Chief Executives were again fully involved in a thorough process of selecting the trainers, based on their written submissions and an interview process.

From a total of 52 tender submissions, four separate training companies were appointed and, having initially delivered some 'taster sessions,' the Level 1 training has now been fully trialled - or is in the process of being trialled - on all four topics, delivered at commercial rates. As an entirely new model, these sessions are being evaluated whilst the Level 2 training is getting underway and the early feedback has been positive. When reflecting on why the training has been successful, CMG's DS4B Project Co-ordinator Ken Martin said:

"It does what it says on the tin. The modules were designed by Manufacturers for Manufacturers based on what people actually said they want and need."

The team is currently exploring potential accreditation routes for these modules whilst also progressing with their Tier Two priorities. They have, for example, worked with fellow DS4B partner CMN, to tailor one of their existing Finance for Non-Finance People courses for a Manufacturing audience and will continue to identify where 'tweaks' to existing provision could provide solutions.



4.3 Partnership Outcomes

There was also overwhelming evidence that, despite its challenges, DS4B has been a positive experience for the partners themselves. In some cases it enabled them to reach a wider range of businesses than they would otherwise have been able to do and, as a by-product it increased their own membership base. Importantly, it has given partners a much better understanding of local skills needs, which, it is hoped, will be used to inform the imminent employer-led skills delivery project. The project has also accelerated the ability of partners to transit from apprenticeship frameworks to new standards in support of the reform agenda and the new training that has been developed can be rolled out to larger numbers of businesses in the future. For some this is expected to lead to future income streams. And, as highlighted elsewhere in the report, the collaboration between the partners has been very valuable and should strengthen the business/skills support landscape in the future:

“The personal and professional relationships we've built with other partners has been a pleasant surprise. It's really aided our understanding of what other organisations do and led to a better understanding of how we can support each other in the future”

4.4 Overall Impact and Legacy

It is clear from the above that DS4B has made considerable progress in meeting its core objectives of:

- Increasing the capacity and capability of established sector/employer organisations and providers in all LEP priority sectors to engage with the SME businesses they represent;
- Supporting SMEs to identify current and emerging skills needs, leading to the development of solutions to improve labour market relevance of provision for local businesses; and,
- Promoting the Return on Investment benefits to SMEs of investing in apprentices, leading to the creation of new apprenticeships.

There have also been some clear areas of Strategic Added Value. The collaboration between the partners in particular has been important and a valuable by-product of the delivery process and this should provide a catalyst for future joint working. Likewise, the identification of cross cutting themes such as mental health which are affecting a number of sectors will provide particular areas for future focus.

Some partners were clear that DS4B will have a lasting legacy. The local market intelligence gathered, for example, will be used to support businesses for years to come and there are certainly some tangible outcomes that will endure beyond the lifetime of the project such as curriculum changes, training products, websites and even relationships. However, two external stakeholders highlighted that to achieve maximum impact the knowledge gained about sectoral needs should be shared beyond the DS4B partners. One of them pointed to the good practice shown by Cornwall Manufacturers Group in convening a range of training providers together to discuss the results of their consultation exercise and focus on moving those agendas forward. This was felt to be a refreshing approach and the stakeholder thought that perhaps other sectors could have done the same had they not been constrained by the shortened delivery timeframe.

However, most partners felt that there is still work to do. It appears that DS4B has been an important catalyst but not all partners have been able to deliver as fully as intended in such a short space of time and the follow-on project which was designed augment the work of DS4B is yet to be commissioned. There is a fear that some of the momentum will be lost without vehicles like that to take the work forward.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Partners could point to a range of business level outcomes arising from the DS4B project.
- Results from the business survey show that for the majority of businesses participating in the Employer Voucher Scheme, the outcomes had been positive with, for example, staff trained as a result, new schemes trialled and apprentices employed.
- Only a small number of businesses had taken part in the ADF where the experience was slightly more mixed.
- However, the project has clearly had a wider impact on many participating businesses: 65% of survey respondents were more likely to engage with training providers and 60% were more likely to identify the skills needed in their business, which is a significant shift.
- Overall, 75% of survey respondents felt that DS4B had positively impacted on their skills development which is an excellent outcome. Further, 65% indicated that it had made a positive impact on their business productivity.
- For the delivery partners the impact on their sector/theme was felt to be wider ranging. At a strategic level DS4B provided visibility and momentum for some existing initiatives which will be used as a springboard for further developments. It created some brand new initiatives and supported the development of others. On a practical level, new training products have been developed and new apprenticeship standards have been brought to market. The partners also reflected on the positive collaboration between participating businesses.
- Businesses could also point to a range of strategic level outcomes with 69% of survey respondents indicating that DS4B had helped to share best practice to meet the skills needed in their sector and 64% indicating that it had helped to develop new or improved curriculum content to meet the skills needed in their sector.
- There was also overwhelming evidence that, despite its challenges, DS4B had been a positive experience for the partners themselves. Importantly, it has given partners a much better understanding of local skills needs, which, it is hoped, will be used to inform future developments such as the imminent employer-led skills delivery project.
- The collaboration between the partners has also been very valuable and should strengthen the business/skills support landscape in the future.
- The extent to which it will leave a lasting legacy is more questionable. There are certainly some tangible outcomes that will endure beyond the lifetime of the project such as curriculum changes, training products, websites and even relationships, however, most partners felt that there is still work to do.
- It appears that DS4B has been an important catalyst but not all partners have been able to deliver as fully as intended in such a short space of time and there is a fear that some of the momentum will be lost without follow-on projects to take the work forward.

Section Five: Overall Reflections

With the aim of providing a strategic approach to developing employer-led skills with businesses across C&IoS, DS4B was one of the first projects of its kind within the C&IoS allocation of ESIF Priority Axis 2. The purpose of this report has been to provide an evaluation of the DS4B project as it draws to a close.

The summative assessment has shown that the focus on businesses (as opposed to individuals) was important for C&IoS, as was the developmental focus of DS4B. A number of design features were also singled out as enablers for the project including:

- The role of the nine sector based delivery partners that were much closer to their constituent businesses than a central delivery body would have been;
- Their ability to develop discrete projects, tailored to the needs of the sector/delivery theme;
- The innovative nature of the match funding model which used the wages of apprentices recruited to the new standards as match; and,
- The availability of Employer Voucher funding, which was crucial for some sectors in particular to unlock conversations and also to practically support project delivery.

Learning Point: There are some innovative design features and lessons to be learned from DS4B that could be considered by those developing similar interventions, including the match funding model

There were, however, some design challenges within DS4B. Although the partnership model was an enabler, it also created some logistical difficulties around outputs as multiple partners could be unknowingly working with the same businesses even though they could only be 'counted' once. Evidence suggests that the competing pressures of 'chasing outputs' whilst delivering a developmental project like this could also be challenging at times. Further, the bold and innovative nature of the project itself added complications. Given that this type of project was entirely new for C&IoS, not all of the definitions, expectations and eligibility requirements were clearly understood at the outset and some activities that partners had expected to deliver were found to be ineligible which required plans to be changed. Additionally, the processes and systems surrounding the ADF model in particular had to be developed on the ground from working with the first few businesses that took the opportunity to get involved and the lead time for taking businesses through the whole process was longer than had been anticipated. Although the team worked their way through these challenges, they nevertheless impacted on what could be achieved within a compressed delivery timeframe. Having developed a three year proposal, DS4B was actually delivered within a 21 month timeframe.

It is also worth noting that, as one of four sector based ESF projects commissioned at the same time, care had to be taken to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication. Efforts were made to achieve this but there was some suggestion that a shared Steering Group may have been useful to aid that process. This could also have enabled providers across C&IoS to identify and respond strategically to any generic skills development requirements that crossed sectors. Although this is not necessarily a design consideration for DS4B itself, it could be a consideration for the design of future programmes such as this.

Learning Point: The Managing Authority could consider the establishment of a Steering Group or similar vehicle when commissioning a suite of projects with similar objectives to help ensure complementarity and avoid duplication between them

Internally DS4B had a clear governance and management structure in place. As a key feature of this, the Programme Management Group was seen as a useful forum for helping partners to understand and learn from each other as well as for understanding how the project as a whole was performing. However, feedback suggests that it could potentially have been more beneficial had partners been able to discuss particular businesses to avoid overlap and chasing the same outputs, though the evaluators understand that it was a partnership decision not to do so because some did not want to share details of their clients with ‘competitors.’

Learning Point: When used effectively, Management Groups such as DS4B’s can provide a useful forum for reflection and relationship building

The level of support provided by the central team was also described as ‘excellent.’ The only critical feedback about TCCG’s co-ordination of the project revolved around some of its strategic level decisions that were felt to have been taken without partner input. Several partners also mentioned DWP’s slow (and in some cases partial) payments which created a number of significant cash-flow problems across the partnership. Partners acknowledged that this was not the fault of TCCG who was actually praised for trying to manage that relationship to the best of their ability.

Learning Point: Slow payment can have a significant negative impact, particularly for the cash-flow of smaller project partners

In terms of day-to-day management, efforts were made across the delivery period to improve data quality but the evaluators note that some aspects could still be tightened further. It is suggested that a CRM tool could potentially be considered for complex projects such as this in the future. A shared CRM could also help to avoid some of the challenges with duplication of outputs.

Learning Point: Complex multi-partnered projects may benefit from investment in a dedicated CRM system to ensure accurate reporting and data quality as well as helping to manage interactions with businesses

Overall it was expected that the DS4B would provide:

- Sector co-ordination - working with employers to identify current and emerging skills needs to inform the development of innovative, collaborative and labour market relevant solutions;
- Programme development and delivery models - focusing primarily on the curriculum development of existing courses;

- New business models - focusing on completely new course development in terms of content or delivery; and,
- Creation of placements - supporting businesses to create collaborative projects, work experience placements, internships and apprenticeships.

Although not every partner was able to achieve all of these, as a whole, DS4B has delivered activities against each of its core project themes. A broad cross-section of business types were supported through these activities and the geographic spread was excellent. There was also clear evidence of the partnership's commitment to horizontal principles within various aspects of its delivery, although potentially more could have been achieved with a longer time frame.

As of the end of Quarter 4 2019, the project was slightly behind its financial profile, although the ESF output performance was broadly on track and aspects of the project's added value indicators were actually ahead of profile. The exception here is the added value apprenticeships which were behind at that point. Although progress against targets varied slightly across the partnership it is expected that all of the output targets will be achieved by project closure. Considering the delivery challenges faced by the project, including the fact that one delivery partner ceased trading and others have faced staffing shortages, the expected achievement of all the outputs is a considerable success.

Furthermore, whilst DS4B's unit costs are expected to be slightly higher than forecast in the application by project closure, they will be considerably lower than the unit costs calculated from the call for projects. The project therefore offers DWP excellent Value For Money.

There is also evidence that a range of business level and sectoral/thematic outcomes are emerging from DS4B to date. Business survey respondents reported a greater likelihood of engaging with training providers after their involvement in the project as well as a greater likelihood of identifying the skills needed in their business. Overall, 75% of survey respondents felt that DS4B had positively impacted on their skills development which is an excellent outcome. Further, 65% indicated that it had made a positive impact on their business productivity.

Learning Point: Skills development projects like DS4B can lead to improved business productivity which has important policy implications

At a strategic level DS4B provided visibility and momentum for some existing initiatives which will be used as a springboard for further developments. It created some brand new initiatives and supported the development of others. On a practical level, new training products have been developed and new apprenticeship standards have been brought to market. The partners also reflected on the positive collaboration between participating businesses.

There was overwhelming evidence that, despite its challenges, DS4B had been a positive experience for the partners themselves. Importantly, it has given partners a much better understanding of local skills needs, which, it is hoped, will be used to inform future developments. The collaboration between the partners has also been very valuable and should strengthen the business/skills support landscape in the future.

Learning Point: Investing in capacity building projects like DS4B can provide an important catalyst for improving the business/skills support landscape

The extent to which it will leave a lasting legacy is more questionable. There are certainly some tangible outcomes that will endure beyond the lifetime of the project such as curriculum changes, training products, websites and even relationships, however, most partners felt that there is still work to do. It appears that DS4B has been an important catalyst but not all partners have been able to deliver as fully as intended in such a short space of time and there is a fear that some of the momentum will be lost without follow-on projects to take the work forward. When the project was in development the partners had expected a complementary call to be released for a large employer-led skills delivery project, to allow the identified needs of businesses articulated through DS4B to be delivered. However, there were delays with releasing this call and, at this point in time, the 'follow on' project has yet to be approved. It is hoped that the anticipated employer-led skills delivery project will be funded, building on the foundations that DS4B has put in place.

Learning Point: Although short, focused projects can be very valuable, evidence suggests that 21 months is not a long enough timeframe in which to deliver lasting change. Sustained efforts are needed to shift entrenched skills issues and continuation funding will be required for there to be an enduring legacy

Appendix 1: Business Survey Response by Sector

Answer Choices	Responses	
	%	Number
Manufacturing - Run by Cornwall Manufacturers Group	16.67%	13
Health (Adult Social Care) also called 'Proud to Care' - Run by Cornwall Council	10.26%	8
Health (Primary Care) also called 'Kernow Health' - Run by Cornwall Council	1.28%	1
Health (Workplace Health) also called 'Healthy Cornwall' and 'Healthy Workplace' - Run by Cornwall Council	5.13%	4
Construction also called 'Building Cornwall' - Run by Cornwall Council	19.23%	15
Digital Software - Run by Software Cornwall	6.41%	5
Digital Wider - Run by Digital Peninsula Network	10.26%	8
Digital Media - Run by Pirate FM	0.00%	0
Agrifood also called 'Experts Grow' - Run by Cornwall Food Foundation	8.97%	7
Hospitality also called 'Experts Grow' - Run by Cornwall Food Foundation	6.41%	5
Marine - Run by Cornwall Marine Network	16.67%	13
Retail - Run by Cornwall Marine Network	8.97%	7
SME and Supply Chain - Run by Cornwall Chamber	1.28%	1
	Answered	78
	Skipped	5