Business Support for Companies in Buckinghamshire provided by

Buckinghamshire Business First

2020/2021

Table of Contents

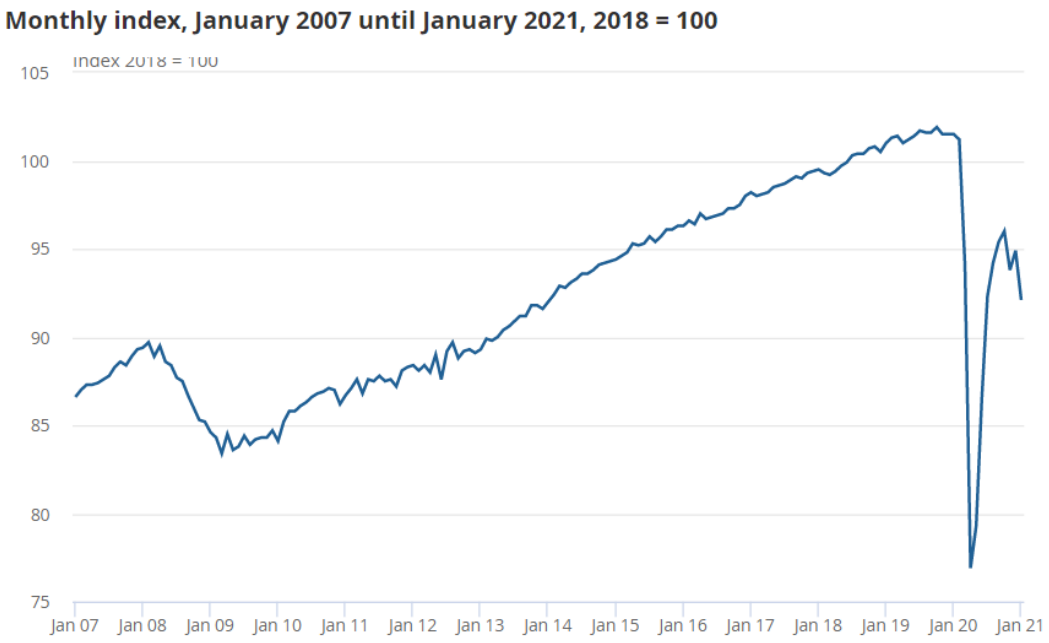
1. Economic Background 3
   - High Tech Sector 6
   - Retail Sector 12
   - Food and Drink Sector 17
   - The Rural Sector 21
   - De Carbonisation and the Net Zero Economy 25
2. A Year of Business Support Activity 29
   - Where have we supported? 32
   - What have businesses wanted / done with us? (all geographical areas) 32
   - What do we know about the business owners enquiring / needing our online support? 35
   - Where have we referred/signposted companies to? 38
3. Business Growth and Scale Ups 40
   - Growth Programme 40
   - LEADER 48
   - MD Ngage 54
   - Peer Networks Programme 55
4. Workshops and Events 59
5. Business Start Ups 61
6. Covid-19 Local Support 64
   - Business Recovery Fund 64
   - Local Authority Discretionary Grants 68
7. Visitor Economy 72
8. Low Carbon Workspaces 76
9. INNO Industry 82
10. Bid Writing 83
11. The Skills Hub 85
   - Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) Programme 85
   - Workforce Skills 89
   - Redundancy Support 93
   - Under 19 Skills 95
12. Business Engagement 108
13. Future Plans 116
   - Business Plans 2021 / 22 116

Latest Case Studies and Videos 121

1. Economic Background

The Buckinghamshire economy has experienced an extraordinary 12 months. Economic output fell off a cliff in April 2020 (figure 1) after the UK entered 'lockdown' in a bid to quell the Covid-19 pandemic. Many businesses (including shops, bars, restaurants, hairdressers and beauticians) were told to close by the government, and others chose to close as they were unable to adhere to social distancing and hygiene rules or had high levels of staff absence. Across all sectors, people were required to work from home if able.

Figure 1: UK GDP



Source: ONS, 2021

This severe phase of reduced economic activity lasted until mid-May, following which, the 'closed down' section of the economy began to re-open. Within Buckinghamshire, construction and manufacturing sites that had paused operations were amongst the first to re-open, with new Covid safety measures in place. From mid-June, the 'closed' element of the retail sector began to re-open, followed by the hospitality and tourism in early July. Filming resumed at Pinewood studios (one of the county's key economic assets) on 6 July 2020.

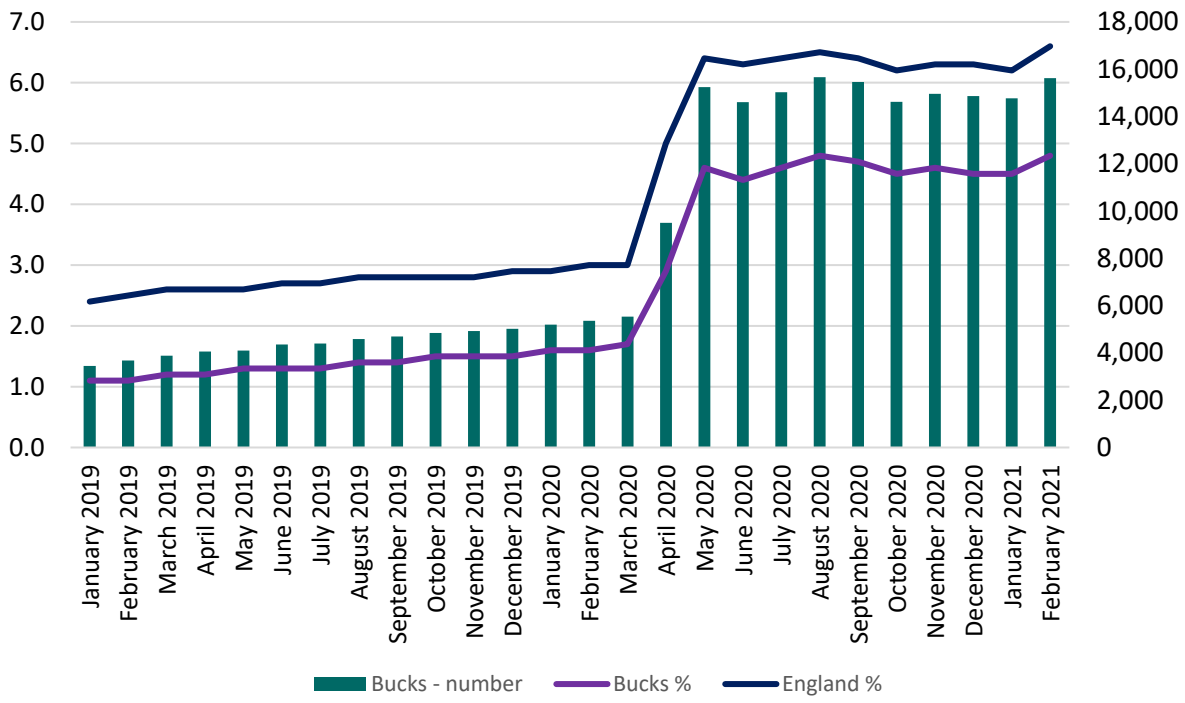
Whilst there was an economic recovery of sorts over the summer months, some sections of the economy remained dormant (theatres, leisure, live events) or operating at a severely reduced level (visitor attractions, aviation, hospitality).

As Autumn arrived, Covid-19 cases began to rise again, and in November 2020, the UK entered a second national lockdown. Whilst this was not as severe as the first lockdown (schools and more businesses remained open), it negatively impacted some firms. The subsequent third national lockdown that ran from January to March 2021 was more severe and had a greater impact.

As the financial year drew to a close:

- A fifth of all Buckinghamshire businesses were estimated to have paused trading.
- 38% reported decreased turnover compared to normal for the time of year.
- 8% reported increased turnover compared to normal for the time of year.
- 600 firms were estimated to be at severe risk of insolvency, with a further 4,600 at moderate risk.
- 15,620 residents were claiming 'out-of-work' related benefits, approximately 10,000 more than pre-pandemic (see figure 2).
- 15% of resident employees were furloughed (in line with the national average).

Figure 2: Claimant Count



Source: DWP, 2021

Sectors that have been particularly hard-hit by the pandemic locally include:

- Aviation – (whilst Heathrow and Luton are outside of Buckinghamshire, they employ Bucks residents and there have been knock on implications for local firms in their supply chains)
- Live events
- Hospitality
- Travel & transport (including inbound tourism)
- Leisure & entertainment (including visitor attractions)
- Personal services (including hair and beauty)
- Arts & culture (including theatres)
- Suppliers to the above
- Suppliers to the education sector

Over the course of the last 12 months there have been a plethora of government business support schemes, some administered nationally and some locally. These have largely been welcomed by the business community – although some businesses and individuals have fallen through the cracks. The Job Retention Scheme (furloughing) has had greatest take-up, followed by Bounce Back Loans. Within Buckinghamshire, around 14,000 firms have accessed the latter.

There are concerns amongst some businesses regarding: the amount of debt that companies have taken on; cliff edges regarding support schemes coming to an end; and consumer confidence. Particularly within the hospitality and tourism sector. However, business confidence has grown considerably since Covid-19 vaccines gained approval for use and the vaccination rollout began. Businesses also broadly welcomed the government's roadmap out of lockdown, as it removed uncertainty and made it easier to plan.

Overall, the latest business, construction, property and footfall data suggests that the Buckinghamshire economy has been slightly less severely impact than the national economy as a whole. However, it is still early days, and the situation will become clearer throughout the course of 2021.

It should be noted that there are some sections of the economy that have been minimally impacted by the pandemic, and that the last 12 months have seen some significant developments for the long-term future of the Buckinghamshire economy. These include: the opening of the Westcott Innovation Centre (a new multi-million centre which will lead innovation for years to come in the fields of space propulsion and drone technologies), the continuing take-up of space at the Silverstone Enterprise Zone by cutting edge high- performance technology firms, many of whom are involved with green transport technologies, and significant expansion plans at Pinewood Studios. These developments will create high value local jobs which should not only aid the speed and direction of Buckinghamshire's economic recovery but should also help reverse Buckinghamshire's recent poor productivity growth.[1]

Covid-19 aside, at the end of 2020 the EU transition period came to an end and new trading rules for UK companies began. Whilst there was no big bang (queues of lorries at Dover, lack of vegetables in supermarkets etc) several issues have emerged over recent months. These include: additional costs related to rules-of-origin checks; the implications of new EU legislation regarding food containing animal products; the implications of new labelling rules; and issues related to the Northern Ireland protocol. Some small businesses report finding it difficult to absorb additional costs (particularly for small orders) and some firms have switched to UK suppliers due to import difficulties. Further issues could emerge when full controls for all trading between the EU and UK come into play in July.

[1] Buckinghamshire's economic recovery plan and accompanying evidence base can be found here.

High Tech Sector

National Overview

The UK manufacturing sector has been gradually rebuilding, restarting and reopening following the last tumultuous year that saw manufacturers deal with both the COVID-19 pandemic and leaving the EU. The latest figures from the 2021 MakeUK Manufacturing Survey, indicate a much more positive start to 2021 for the sector as a whole, although there are still concerns around exports, employment and investment plans over the next 12 months. It is also important to acknowledge that, due to the declines of last year, the sector is starting from a lower base. Hence, much of the anticipated growth represents a catch-up to pre-pandemic levels of activity.

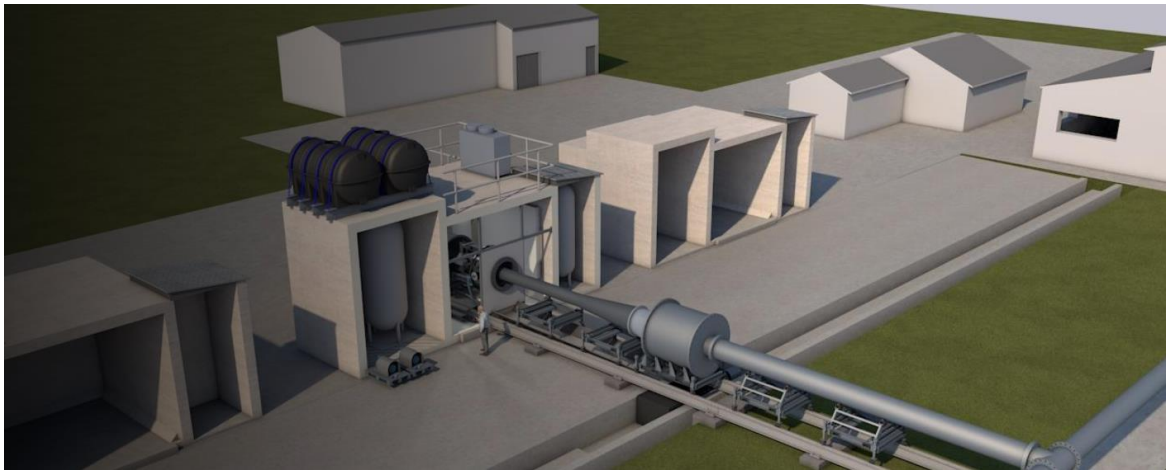
Key Findings:

- Sector confidence is returning as developments in vaccines have raised the possibility of returning to normal life.
- UK orders balance positive for the first time since Q2 2019.
- Export orders fall as manufacturers face new trade barriers between the UK and EU.
- Continued sector job losses, but the rate of loss slows. Focus should move towards re-hiring.
- Prices continue to increase as the cost of inputs are absorbed into the cost of goods.

(Source: MakeUK Manufacturing Outlook Survey, 2021 Q1)

Bucks Sector News

New satellite propulsion testing facility at Westcott Venture Park.
A new national rocket test facility is due to open soon at Westcott Venture Park near Aylesbury. The centre will allow UK companies and academics to test state-of-the-art space propulsion engines and will cement the international reputation of the Westcott Space Cluster in propulsion. Based in Aylesbury Vale Enterprise Zone, the facility, which is expected to create around 60 jobs, is due for completion in early 2021 and will offer companies a more affordable test facility than international rivals and allow more sustainable propellants to be tested. Designed to support the growth of brand-new space technologies, the government is backing the new facility (dubbed the National Space Propulsion Test Facility (NSPTF)) to the tune of £4 million in funding.



(Source: https://www.westcottvp.com/news-and-insights/news Dec 2020)

Buckinghamshire 'driverless car' test facility gets planning approval.

Driverless cars are set to be tested at a Buckinghamshire airfield after planning permission has been approved by Buckinghamshire Council. The proposed development, known as CAVWAY, is intended to deliver a purpose built, state-of-the-art testing facility, providing a fully controlled and safe environment to concentrate connected and autonomous vehicle (CAV) tests on Highway Intersections. The planned facility will be developed by Prova Development Ltd and IDIADA Automotive Technology UK Ltd at Oakley Airfield, near Worminghall in Aylesbury Vale.

The planning statement explained that the development will combine 'ambitious new technologies and innovative business models to address social and economic challenges that lie at the heart of the government's modern Industrial Strategy. Accelerating connected and autonomous vehicle technology development is central to achieving this ambition and will assist in ensuring the UK is one of the world's go-to locations in this sector. To achieve this, the industry and government are working together to create the most effective CAV testing ecosystem, creating new test sites across the UK to strengthen its capabilities.' *(Source: https://www.buckinghamshirelive.com/news/)*

(Source: https://www.cavway.co.uk/)

Chesham company uses robots to keep factory open.

(https://www.bucksfreepress.co.uk/news/)

To keep its factory open and fulfil orders from customers, Chesham-based promotional products firm B Loony has come up with an innovative solution to keep staff safe and practise social distancing. The company is using robots to keep the production line moving. Four years ago, they took the decision to invest in their first collaborative robot to work alongside members in their existing team to increase productivity as the business expanded. The technology is used to carry out some of the more repetitive, time consuming tasks. They now have eight robots which have made a key contribution to keeping production lines going and orders fulfilled during the COVID lockdowns. *(Source: https://businessmag.co.uk/)*

The Effects of Covid-19 and EU-Transition

There seems no doubt that grappling with a worldwide pandemic, alongside geopolitical uncertainties such as Brexit, has had a profound impact on the high-tech sector. Buckinghamshire's own high-tech business community, which numbers well over two thousand businesses and employs more than fifteen thousand people (2.5 times the national average), will continue to feel these impacts in line with the rest of the UK's tech businesses.

In the midst of this turbulence, the UK technology industry has demonstrated an impressive degree of resilience, stepping up to meet society's demands and providing a robust response to the many and varied issues that governments, business and individuals have encountered and continue to wrestle with. While many industries have suffered from the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the technology sector has remained a key enabler of the UK economy while driving transformation and innovation across other sectors. Many of Buckinghamshire's tech businesses have also made a significant practical contribution to the fight against the virus. Examples of this can be seen with businesses like Balform (aircraft parts specialist) who have manufactured safety visors for front-line health professionals. AI Healthcare, an independent healthcare engineering company, engineers worked hard to service and repair supplies of older ventilators for the NHS. A High Wycombe-based bio-medical devices company, Sky Medical Technology, supplied NHS Trusts across the UK with its ground-breaking geko™ device for Coronavirus patients at high-risk of blood clots.

Looking beyond the current crisis to the longer-term impacts on the sector in the area, discussions with the Silverstone Technology Cluster have highlighted several key issues and challenges facing businesses in the sector, including:

- Shift from firefighting (managing cashflow, changing products / services etc) to business planning.
- Opportunities to re-think business strategies to take advantage of new opportunities.
- Longer-term, global supply chains are likely to face ongoing pressure.
- Contingency planning, outsourcing or re-shoring operations, relocating production to the UK may be required.
- Accelerated adoption of new technologies (such as 3D printing, IoT, advanced robotics, artificial intelligence and big data) to help firms survive in a global marketplace that requires agile and flexible production systems and supply chains.

(Sources: www.pwc.co.uk/industries/technology/insights / Buckinghamshire LEP research & reports / MakeUK/BDO Regional Manufacturing Outlook 2020)

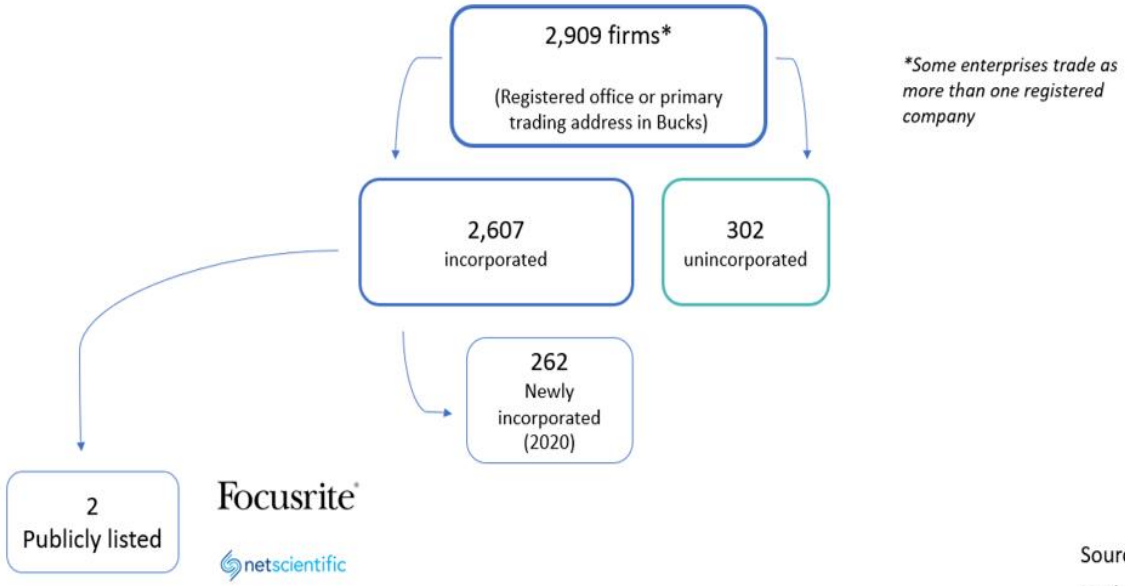
Spotlight on Businesses in Bucks

Latest market analysis on the High-Performance Engineering sector in Buckinghamshire shows the size of the sector, number of companies by sub-sector, legal structure, employment trend/number of employees and location.

Number of Companies by Sub-Sector:

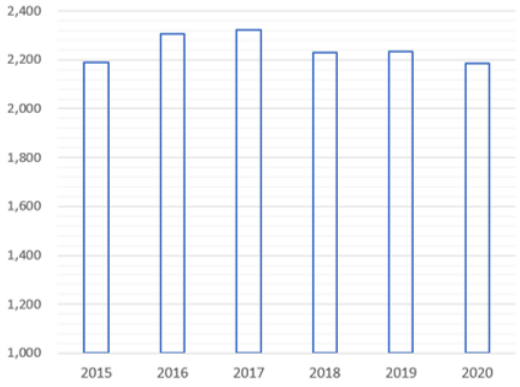
Engineering activities and related technical consultancy	820
Other professional, scientific and technical activities n.e.c.	580
Civil engineering	250
Manufacture of computer, electronic and optical products	105
Manufacture of machinery and equipment n.e.c.	65
Manufacture of rubber and plastic products	55
Other research and experimental development on natural sciences and engineering	55
Technical testing and analysis	45
Manufacture of motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers	30
Manufacture of metal structures and parts of structures	30
Manufacture of medical and dental instruments and supplies	25
Manufacture of other transport equipment	15
Recovery of sorted materials	15
Research and experimental development on biotechnology	15
Manufacture of basic pharmaceutical products and pharmaceutical preparations	10
Remediation activities and other waste management services. This division includes the provision of remediation services, i.e. the cleanup of contaminated buildings and sites, soil, surface or ground water.	10
Manufacture of doors and windows of metal	10
Manufacture of electric lighting equipment	10
Production of electricity	10
Treatment and disposal of non-hazardous waste	10
Manufacture of basic iron and steel and of ferro-alloys	5
Casting of metals	5
Manufacture of electric motors, generators and transformers	5
Manufacture of electricity distribution and control apparatus	5

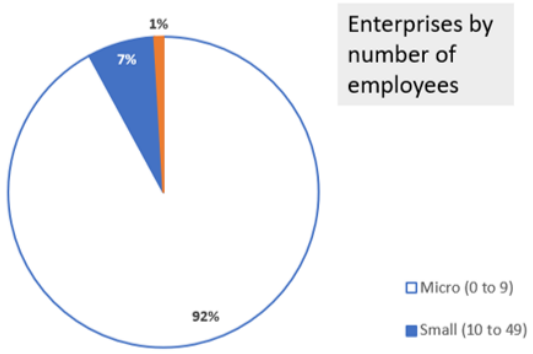
Breakdown by Legal Structure:



Source: FAME, BvD
Updated: March 2021

HPE Enterprises in Bucks - Trend and Size:



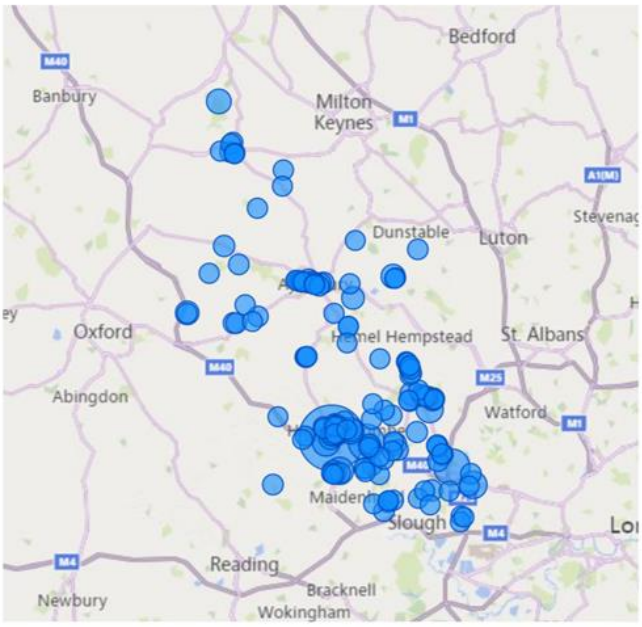


Source: UK Business Count, ONS

Location of HPE companies

(more than 10 employees*)

Top 10 (total employees)	Name	Type
1	BIFFA WASTE SERVICES LIMITED	Waste
2	JANSSEN-CILAG LIMITED	Life science
3	BUCKINGHAM GROUP CONTRACTING LIMITED	Civil engineering
4	KILLINCHY AEROSPACE HOLDINGS LIMITED (Martin-Baker)	Aerospace
5	GE HEALTHCARE LIMITED	Life science
6	TSL	Engineering consultancy
7	SAFRAN ELECTRICAL & POWER UK LTD	Electrical power generation
8	FOCUSRITE	Consumer electronics
9	STANTEC UK LIMITED	Engineering consultancy
10	OPTIMA CONTRACTING	Civil engineering



**Companies whose registered office is in Bucks and have more than 10 employees company-wide

Source: FAME, BvD

Retail Sector

National Overview

Retail Economy

Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that retail sales volumes rose by 5.4% in March, when compared to the previous month.

Sales were 1.6% higher than February 2020, before the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Non-food stores provided the largest positive contribution to the monthly growth in March 2021 sales volumes, aided by strong increases of 17.5% and 13.4% in clothing stores and other non-food stores.

Despite strong March figures, retail sales for the quarter have been subdued overall. In the three months to March 2021, retail sales fell by 5.8% when compared with the previous three months. There were strong declines in both clothing stores and other non-food stores as a result of the tighter lockdown restrictions in place.

ONS director of economic statistics said: “Retail sales continued their recovery following a subdued start to the year, and in March were higher than the level seen in February 2020, before the pandemic hit. Specialist food stores, such as bakers and butchers, saw increased sales as the continued closure of hospitality saw customers buying produce for Easter festivities at home. The approaching spring enticed people into garden centres, which had a good month, while clothing sales sprung back to life as people looked to update their wardrobe in anticipation of lockdown easing. Fuel sales also recorded a strong month as the easing of movement restrictions meant people could again travel further afield.”

Bucks Sector News

Centre for Cities has a high streets recovery tracker, which looks at how cities and large towns are recovering from Coronavirus and tracks their respective recovery. Unfortunately, no Buckinghamshire towns have been included thus far.

Several national reports help to shed light on the situation in Buckinghamshire. The Local Data Company’s (LDC) retail and leisure market analysis report for 2020 talks about ‘hyper-localisation’. This is where a retailer plays to its local market. With national lockdowns and ongoing restrictions, consumers have largely been confined to their immediate locality, which has heighted ‘hyper-localisation’. This concept can benefit independents and work against national chains and has been seen in Buckinghamshire.

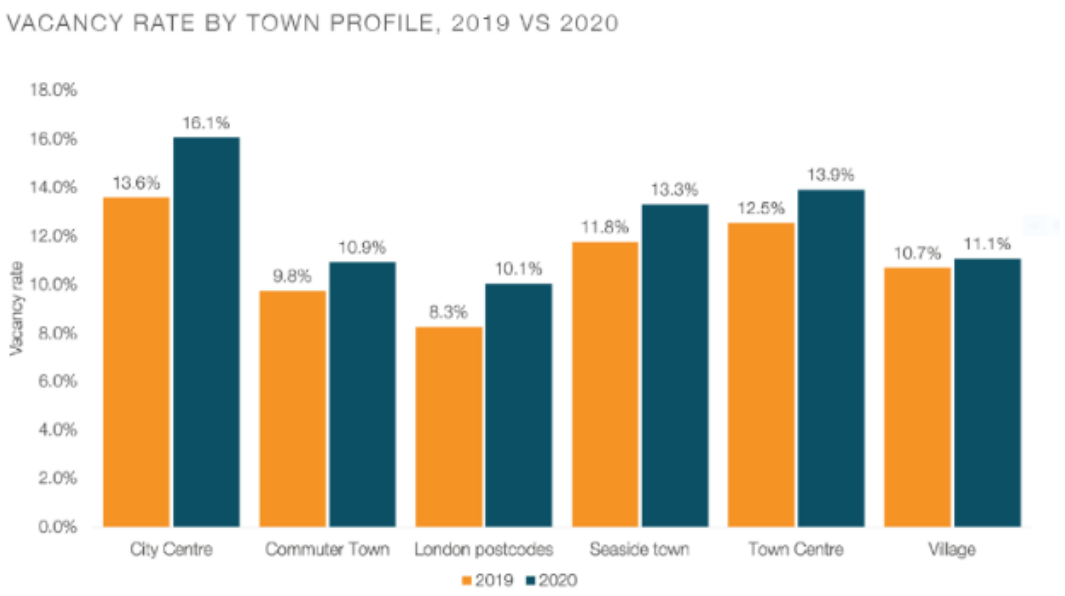


Figure 12: Vacancy rate by town profile across GB, 2019 - 2020 (Source: Local Data Company)

The commuter towns of Buckinghamshire have benefited from a shift to home working therefore being able to sustain higher levels of weekday footfall and spend, with home workers visiting coffee and takeaway food stores across the week. Pre-pandemic, these retails visits would have been in city locations.

The multiples vs independents debate is greatly affecting how retail in Buckinghamshire has managed in the last 6 months. The LDC have shown the multiples market had declined considerably faster than independents in 2020 – declining by a net 9,877 units compared to 1,442 for independents. The independent retail and leisure market accounts for 65% of the total market. The multiples market shrank by 4.5% compared with independents shrinking by just 0.4%.... and this is without Arcadia or Debenhams in the multiples figures as this occurred in early 2021. It is the larger towns of Aylesbury and High Wycombe that have been most noticeably affected with the decline and increased vacancy of units, unlike the smaller towns of Beaconsfield, Marlow, Amersham and Buckingham who have fared better. This trend has been confirmed by a recent study into "buying local"[2], which revealed that Beaconsfield is the nation's best place for shopping.

Buckinghamshire Council commissioned a piece of research to look at the impact of Covid-19 on retailers based in Buckinghamshire and how they are adapting to online retail. This research was looking for answers to confirm:

- Understanding of the needs of retailers, particularly in online engagement.
- Whether targeted investments would support the local economy and increase digital uptake
- To ascertain the appetite for an 'Online Retail Innovation Fund'.
- Type of support needed to help businesses adapt to reduced physical footfall and increase trading online.

The research interviewed 29 retailers during spring 2021, including 9 business representatives, 14 small and 6 medium retailers and 4 market traders. It confirmed that these retailers' online presence

[2] https://www.localdatacompany.com/insights/reports

was fundamentally affected by a range of other factors including age of business, type of stock, retail space, business model, resources etc. To explore this further the retailers were segmented into different clusters on their current online presence and does reflect their perceived reality. The clusters were:

- Full adopters of online – 10 out of 24 (this could include an information only website)
- Savvy Socials – 5 out of 24
- Journey Starters – 3 out of 24
- Cautiously interested – 2 out of 24
- Rejectors – 4 out of 24

Most retailers said that having an online presence and/or using social media, was essential to future survival, but did not want it to be at the expense of the high street. There was no expectation for support for encouraging online skills and knowledge but help in terms of building understanding/ filling in the gaps in knowledge type workshops, plus some financial support and recommended suppliers, and sharing of resources would be welcomed. There was a mixed response, but some interest for further information for the use of 'aggregator sites'. These are online portals that sell other local retailers products.

The research concluded that the council should:

- Promote independents whilst maintaining collaboration and a sense of community.
- Empower and support businesses to become more confident online.
- Provide a simple and effective customer experience with shopping locally.

The council could:

- Provide and interface and drive traffic to independent e-commerce sites.
- Be flexible and able to adapt to the changing nature of high street retail.
- Provide expertise in social media marketing.

Aylesbury Garden Town Masterplan (July 2020) which sets out the vision for the town centre: "In 2033, Aylesbury town centre will be a thriving community and commercial heart. It will be a destination, a place to live and a place of exchange, commerce, and leisure that goes beyond just retail. The Garden Town will be supported by a greater mix of uses and activities across a wider Central Area supporting long-term population and economic growth." The first consultation on the Gardenways workshop took place in December 2020.

In Hatch Regeneris's final report of the Aylesbury Garden Town Masterplan (Socio-Economic Evidence and Key Research) January 2021, it states that Aylesbury will need 'to deliver positive changes to support recovery and mitigate against the lasting effect of the crisis'. However, it also points to the need for flexible, forward thinking about what is likely to be different about how Aylesbury will need to adapt to any permanent shift in the way people live in, visit and run businesses in the town.

At the end of March, Buckinghamshire Council discussed the future of Vale Retail Park in Aylesbury as 3 of the 5 units are currently vacant, and a potential tenant has been found for the site. The option of converting the site into housing has been considered - with the site potentially being converted into flats, as there is decline in the number of retail businesses looking for this type of space.

High Wycombe's 'Masterplan' aims to make changes to the town centre which will improve public spaces, provide a better pedestrian landscape, promote new opportunities for economic growth and make changes to traffic circulation. In the last few months HWBidco have installed free Wi-Fi through the town centre and a footfall monitoring system to allow them to learn and adapt.

It has been confirmed that High Wycombe town centre will receive a £15 million cash injection to 'renew and reshape' it. A large portion of the cash - £11.7 million - came from a successful bid for funding from the Future High Street Fund competition run by the Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (MHCLG). Alongside the MHCLG funding, Buckinghamshire Council has approved a further £3.4 million of capital funding, making an overall investment of £15 million into the town centre. The money from the government will be used to "renew and reshape the town centre in a way that improves people's experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability".

In March, plans were released regarding the Chilterns Shopping Centre being replaced with new homes as part of the Future High Street Funds project. It will look to replace the 7,035 sqm shopping centre and intends to “forward purchase” commercial ground floorspace “in the comprehensive redevelopment” of the centre. In this plan, Primark would relocate to the Eden Centre to support that as the retail hub. It also talks about “repurposing the curve” on Oxford Street, formerly known as Octagon Parade by turning it into commercial space.

The Effects of Covid-19

In total, 5,841 new businesses were created in Buckinghamshire in 2020, up 6% on 2019, and many from the retail sector for both online and selling locally according to statistics from Inform Direct Review of Company Formations using data from Companies House and ONS.

The coronavirus pandemic has thrown Britain's High Streets into crisis, yet the full force of its impact has yet to be felt, according to accountants PwC. More than 17,500 chain stores and other venues closed in Great Britain last year, according to new data. That is an average rate of 48 closures a day. So, the picture is likely to get worse before it gets better.

Overall, city centre high streets and shopping centres saw a greater decline in chain stores versus more local markets and retail parks which proved to be more convenient and perceptibly safer. This is where Buckinghamshire, in comparisons with larger cities, have done well, and the predominance of small town/village high streets with a larger % of independent retailers have so far weathered the storm comparatively well.

Affects in the Town Centres

Aylesbury

In the final report by Hatch for the Aylesbury Garden Town (mentioned previously), it states that there are several headline messages about the future implications of Covid-19 for Aylesbury town centre: ‘high profile closures of major retails and food and drink operators have been a feature of the pandemic, and their impacts are visible in Aylesbury town centre. Whilst higher-end businesses appear to have been more resilient to the impacts of the lockdown, they will be vulnerable if the crisis is prolonged’.

Under the Aylesbury Garden Town umbrella, various aspects of town centre improvements have been able to take place during the last year. Such as: introducing a pedestrianised street in the town (parts

of Cambridge Street and George Street) and allowing locals cafes, pubs and shops to have additional outdoor space. The temporary pedestrianisation has proved incredibly popular with members of the public – with many people commenting on how pleasant and inviting the new spaces are.

In recent weeks, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of tenancy requirements for food units for new takeaways from family businesses in Aylesbury town centre – currently standing at 11 enquiries. These enquiries are covering a much wider array of options, offering foods/ingredients including Thai and Vegan foods.

High Wycombe

The Topshop and Topman units in the Eden shopping centre is the latest to be closed. That closure follows the shutdown of Dorothy Perkins, Burton, Smiggle and Yours Clothing - leaving approx. 17 shop units in the Eden centre empty.

B&M will be opening in the High Street, Creams dessert parlour is coming to White Hart Street, and Five Guys is opening up in Cressex.

Some of the tired paving in the High Street was also recently renewed, and free WiFi was introduced by HWBiDCo as well as them launching a new website to attract visitors to High Wycombe.

Spotlight on Businesses in Bucks

Store Closures

Gerrards Cross M&S Simply Food set to close.

The firm confirmed it will be closing the Simply Food store in Packhorse Road, Gerrards Cross, towards the end of May - with a final closing date not yet confirmed.

A spokesman said staff at the branch had been informed that M&S had “made the difficult decision” not to renew the lease on the store. They confirmed no jobs are at risk from the closure and staff will be transferred to other M&S stores such as in Chalfont St Peter, Beaconsfield, Rickmansworth and Uxbridge.

New Store Openings

Majestic Wine Bucks retail trend with new store in **Beaconsfield** in March 2021.

Majestic Wine has revealed a new expansion strategy as it targets future growth across the UK. The wine retailer has opened a new store in Beaconsfield, Greater London, as part of the wider strategy. The new Beaconsfield store is a slightly larger unit than the average Majestic site.

The store features an enlarged dedicated fine wine section, a new style tasting counter and revamped branding. It will also act as a hub store for Majestic Commercial, the retailers on-trade business to business arm.

Roberto's Italian restaurant and TheChapar.com move into White Hart Street, High Wycombe.

Announced in January that an Italian restaurant and gelateria would be opening in the former Ottakar's bookstore in White Hart Street, which has been overhauled by Buckinghamshire Council. The new ground floor Italian restaurant will be called Roberto's, run by a local entrepreneur Robert Kelly, one of the Growth Programme, Growth Champions It will open for outside dining on April 12 and inside dining on May 17. Meanwhile, the first-floor design studio offices have been let to a gentlemen's online styling and concierge shopping service - TheChapar.com

Food and Drink Sector

National Overview

UK food and drink exports have been hit particularly hard post-transition period. HMRC figures reveal significant year-on-year falls in trade, with whisky, cheese and chocolate worst hit. Analysis of the figures by the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) shows that cheese exports in January dropped from £45m to £7m year on year, while whisky exports fell from £105m to £40m. Chocolate exports went from £41.4m to just £13m, a decline of 68%.

They put the collapse in trade down to a combination of the end of transition and weaker demand in Europe, where restaurants, hotels and other hospitality outlets remain closed. Exports of some other goods such as salmon and beef almost collapsed, with declines of 98% and 92% respectively, but by value they were the 7th and 4th biggest losers of the top 10 exports to the EU.

Overall, trade in fish, thanks partly to a complete ban on the exports of certain live shellfish, dropped by 79%. The figures follow data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showing trade between

the UK and EU had been hit hard in January, with overall exports down by 40.7% in January compared to December. It comes as the House of Lords EU environment subcommittee expressed deep concern over the disruption to trade caused by the end of transition. “We’re dismayed that our agri-food sector is facing such high trade frictions” said Lord Teverson, the subcommittee chair.

“The increases in paperwork and preparation required for food and agricultural exports to the EU are presenting very difficult challenges, particularly for small businesses,” he added. The FDF said the worst-hit trade route was to Ireland losing its place as the single biggest export market for Britain accounting for 5% of the overall trade compared with 18% in January 2020.

Exports to Germany and Italy were close behind – down 85% and 81% respectively. While pre-end of transition stockpiling and weak hospitality demand during the pandemic will have been a factor, the FDF said “much of” the fall was likely to be due to new non-tariff barriers that have hit smaller producers particularly hard.

“Businesses face significant challenges when trading with the EU and small businesses in particular have been shut out because groupage distribution is not working,” the FDF’s head of international trade, Dominic Goudie, said, referring to a logistics system that previously allowed hauliers to carry small consignments from a variety of sellers.

ONS figures showed UK exports of goods to the EU fell by 40.7% in January, the biggest monthly decline in British trade for more than 20 years. These latest HMRC figures show the agrifood sector has been one of the hardest hit, with new checks and requirements for health certificates a significant barrier to trade.

Overall, figures now show that food and drink exports collapsed in January, plunging by 75.5% year on year. Down to £256m from £1bn. The government says UK-EU trade has been hit by the pandemic and problems with companies adapting to the new customs rules, which it expects to improve with time.

Defra said overall freight volumes were “back to their normal levels since the start of February”, adding that the ONS had said caution should be applied to year-on-year data as trading environments were very different. “A unique combination of factors, including stockpiling last year, Covid lockdowns across Europe and businesses adjusting to our new trading relationship, made it inevitable that exports to the EU would be lower this January than last,” said a spokesperson for the department.

The recent budget announcements have been critical for an industry so impacted by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, the response from the food and hospitality industries has been positive, although there are still some, particular in the brewing and beverage sector, that believe the budget does not go far enough to helping those businesses most in need of support.

Among the billions of pounds worth of measures announced in the House of Commons on 3 March 2021, some particularly important policies for the food and drink industry included the extension of the furlough scheme until September 2021, as well as an extension of the business rates holiday (until June 2021 and with a 75 percent discount after that), plus up to £18,000 in restart grants for hospitality businesses scheduled to open their doors in the next few months.

Food and Drink Federation Chief Executive, Ian Wright CBE, was generally positive about the update, and believes food and drink manufacturers will welcome the news. “The Chancellor’s announcement struck the right balance between supporting recovery and acknowledging the difficult choices that have to be made to restore the country’s finances,” Wright commented. “Food and drink businesses supplying the hospitality and food service sectors will welcome the extension of the furlough scheme. However, we have concerns that support tapers too soon and should be kept under review.

“As the UK’s largest manufacturing sector, we welcome the news that the Bank of England and the Chancellor are doubling incentive payments for businesses hiring apprenticeships. However, increased flexibility of the apprenticeship levy would upskill the sector to work for the wider food and drink supply chain, particularly SMEs, and must be considered in relation to any new incentives.
The Chancellor expressed his firm intention not to increase the cost of living and has recognised the importance of encouraging investment as the key driver of recovery.

Bucks Sector News

Overall, the small artisan producers of specialist food and drink that thrive in Buckinghamshire continue to grow despite the challenging circumstances as consumers seek intriguing alternatives to the usual ‘convenience orientated’ products produced by the major multinational firms. Anecdotally, this trend has accelerated with people ‘staying at home’ and finding the time to seek out these interesting producers and to treat themselves.

More people than ever are checking what goes into everyday food and drink products, questioning the presence of lazy artificial ingredients and seeking local, small batch, artisan products.

Supermarkets and a reviving independent food & drink sector (through delis, food halls, farm shops, etc) have grasped the nettle in Buckinghamshire, recognising that smaller speciality brands were key when it comes to differentiating from larger rivals. The growth and diversification to online sales and ‘click and collect’ has opened up market reach significantly.

The Effects of Covid-19

The food and drink sector has been hit hard by COVID-19 not least in retail and especially on-premise establishments such as hotels, bars and restaurants but it has also hit the often overlooked supply chain. Food and drink suppliers such as wholesalers exclusively servicing the on-trade and other sectors have been hit especially hard experiencing a significant drop in turnover. Furthermore, they fell outside the scope of Government support and were not eligible for the retail grant support. However, the Additional Restrictions Grant has helped plug a gap where certain businesses fell through the cracks.

Food and Drink events companies have been hit particularly hard but have shown resilience and diversity offering home delivery and pivoting – such as Cavendish events. But this doesn’t make up the turnover for events such as Henley Regatta etc.

The resilience shown by SME business continues to be impressive – pivoting and upweighting online services, virtual services and collaborating. The home food delivery service is thriving with fine dining restaurants doing a good trade. Many are offering special discounts and/ or raising money for the NHS and giving special discounts to key workers.

The alcohol industry is yet another sector where smaller, regionally affiliated brands have made their mark in recent times. Virtual tastings and upweighted home delivery is going well. Health-conscious brands are yet another food category that is prospering in today's better informed and healthier living world.

Spotlight on Businesses in Bucks

There has been some very positive news from businesses showing innovation and growth. Highlighted below are some notable examples.

Aylesbury based nutrition brand **Huel** was fifth in The Sunday Times International Track 200 covid 19 edition, February 21, 2021 with revenue growth of 208.68%. Julian Hearn and former NHS dietician James Collier founded Huel – 'human fuel' in 2015 to produce plant-based food products and powders that can be consumed as a nutritionally complete meal. The company secured a £20 million investment from venture capital firm Highland Europe in 2018 and have sold more than 100 million meals in 90 countries. Growth in the US, its largest overseas market, as well as on the Continent and in Japan boosted global sales to £39.8 million in the year to July. A third of its current team have joined during the pandemic.

Perkier Foods produce healthy snack bars high in fibre, packed with protein and low in sugar. Many have added vitamins and probiotics for gut health. They are gluten free, vegan and palm oil free. As well as operating a growing online direct to consumer offering, Perkier foods have recently achieved listings in major grocers including Morrison's and Sainsbury's.

Buckingham based **Nunc Living** are one of the only jun kombucha producers in the UK. This is a healthy drink fermented with green tea, raw honey and botanicals. They source the honey within a five mile radius of Buckingham and brew the jun kombucha at their brewery on premise. The probiotics are beneficial bacteria for intestinal flora. While most kombucha includes probiotics, because Jun is fermented with honey it also contains prebiotics.

Rumsey's Chocolaterie have developed an online sales platform during lockdown and sales have grown rapidly across the UK as a result. The changing trading patterns with covid has opened up the opportunity to expand their brand and distribution to national high-end retail.

Offering a unique new solution, **Autocanteen** have launched an AI-powered self-checkout for catering, with no need for barcodes or complicated set-up processes. Using a complete hardware and software solution, customers can pay for their meals, including plated-up food, without any human interaction, a further benefit during the current social distancing requirements.
Launched in May 2020 during the first lockdown, Autocanteen can demonstrate its value to leading catering firms as employees and students return to offices and universities. Its solution brings significant business benefits including reduced staffing costs, freeing up staff to focus on other tasks, reduced queues, increased revenue and less food waste. Autocanteen's team have set up a

successful trial with a global catering firm. Using the technology, the trial has enabled the client to test the service and achieve quick impressive results, cashing up 8,000 items, or around £20,000, in just six weeks with one self-checkout point. The average transaction time per customer is just 10 seconds, while the accuracy of the self-checkout service is 94% and always improving with its self-learning robot. Autocanteen is now in talks with several interested leading catering firms such as Aramark, BaxterStorey and others.

Buckinghamshire food & drink SMEs are readjusting to a changing world like everyone else and whilst the immediate outlook is 'turbulent' many are finding new sale channel opportunities which are offsetting the initial drop in revenue and look to be working towards new market leading innovations and growing revenues in 2021.

The Rural Sector

National Overview

Over the past 6 months there have been many reoccurring issues which have affected the rural and land-based sectors. Upon reflection most rural land-based businesses will be content with how the sector has fared over the past 12 months certainly, in comparison to others. Whilst there has been so much change, much has remained the same and primary production continues all be it with questions remaining regarding future support.

Top of the list within traditional land-based activities would be the changes to agricultural policy. The Agriculture Act has been passed into law and the lack of detail about future schemes is frustrating for many. Knowing the support which is being taken from businesses in the form of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), and not having the confirmed level of support for certain interventions that will replace it, is unnerving and is creating frustration. It is widely acknowledged that payments will be made against provision of public goods, but it is the detail regarding level of payments which is lacking. Details have been filtering through and pilot schemes are starting to be announced with the launch of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) pilot. Anecdotally, the pilot is understood to have attracted a large number of applicants thus far which is encouraging and highlights the importance that farmers and land managers place on the environment, which they have done for many years. Further to the SFI there is also capital grant schemes due to launch in the autumn called the Farm Investment Fund, again details are scarce, but it is thought that it will follow the principles of past RDPE Countryside Productivity grants. This coupled with the so called "super deduction" tax incentive announced in the Chancellor's recent budget statement may well mean that many businesses decide to invest in capital machinery and upgrading technology on holdings. All of the new schemes due to be announced will be funded through reductions in the basic payments scheme. Therefore, as BPS is progressively reducing year on year and as this current parliament has stated it will maintain the level of support for farms, theoretically there should be increasing levels of support for the sector until 2024.

Bucks Sector News

Farming and Food Retail

Buckinghamshire as a county has fared no differently to the national picture, there have been those who have struggled and those that have prospered. The key to success has been adaptability with changing consumer demands, particularly when it comes to distribution, processing and retailing

produce. Unfortunately, some land-based sectors have fared far worse than others. The dairy industry is certainly one where much of the produce nationally sold into commercial catering and hospitality sectors. With restrictions and lockdowns, the market has disappeared overnight and has caused the sector great difficulties for 6 of the past 12 months, often resulting in milk being poured down the drain. Within Buckinghamshire there are 3 dairy herds which have been sold in the past 12 months. This unfortunately, is and has been a continuous trend in the area for decades. This is a great pity, particularly when you consider the Arla dairy processing site sits within Buckinghamshire. Although this only serves as an import, bottling and distribution hub given its proximity to London, it is still a shame that support centred around this site cannot do more for any remaining producers within the locality.

Conversely, when looking at the dairy sector and those businesses which retail from the farm gate, or process foods adding value to produce have prospered. Barnowl Jerseys, Evenley, has developed further by opening and operating a farm shop retailing milk and ice cream produced on farm, alongside other local produce. Barkers Farm, Winslow is also another example where a dairy herd has diversified with milk vending machines in the past couple of years to serve the local community. Open Air Foods which retails cheese and artisan foods from Manor Farm Buckingham is another business which has seen strong demand for produce. The British cheese industry is continuing to grow and strengthen with EU exit/import/export issues increasing demand locally meaning many British cheese producers are often struggling to meet demand, as seen by LEADER funded dairy based diversifications.

Buckinghamshire Food Partnership

The formation of the Buckinghamshire Food Partnership has meant that the food sector as a whole is also gaining momentum within the county. The overall aim of the partnership is to provide a circular food system which benefits all within the county from producers, processors and retailers through to community growing projects and food banks supporting those in food poverty. The Agricultural sector can play a key role within this through production and or diversified enterprises particularly with a focus being on shortening supply chains. Nationally, the food sector is gaining support from Local Enterprise Partnerships often focussing on specialisms within the sector which depend on geographic area. Buckinghamshire is uniquely placed to support the sector right through from production to plates, given it is a predominantly rural county and in close proximity to densely populated areas.

Buckinghamshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Buckinghamshire is also taking part as one of 5 national pilot areas for landscape wide nature recovery scheme which forms part of the future Environmental Land Management Scheme. It is certainly positive that the county is taking part and looking at the issue, however all too often people think the answer to nature recovery issue is either rewilding or planting trees, particularly when carbon and the environment are brought into the equation. As highlighted below, issues are often cause by people and associated access which has the negative impact on nature and environment. As such, it is important for this work to raise awareness amongst the general population and countryside users. The strategy should also focus on working with farmers and land managers supporting adoption of land management techniques utilising machinery and technologies which support nature and environmental recovery alongside food production. Utilising digital data and satellite mapping there is a need for a programme which identifies parcels of land ripe for environmental schemes and that would often not be productive in an agricultural sense. It would be wrong to take land out of agricultural production, particularly when there are numerous examples of Buckinghamshire farms where nature is thriving, and businesses are carbon negative when looking at carbon sequestration through soils.

One example is a farm near High Wycombe which shows that land in arable production sequesters 3 times the amount of carbon than the equivalent area planted with trees. This proves that even soils which are often depleted of nutrients and those associated with monocrop production, can in fact sequester carbon and provide environmental gain when using certain land management techniques alongside wildlife offers and cover cropping regimes through countryside stewardship. The key to this is identification of suitable land for environmental schemes leading to a patchwork of habitat across the landscape.

The Effects of Covid-19 and EU Transition

It goes without saying that Covid is still having a significant impact on diversified businesses in various ways as well, both negative and positive depending on what that diversification is. Many farm-based retail diversifications would still confirm footfall is up overall, but it's not as high as it was during the first lockdown period. Overall, there does appear to be a renewed connection and appreciation for local produce and producers which is welcome news for the rural economy. Whilst this is positive, it can also lead to negative impacts. Unfortunately, there are almost daily cases of livestock worrying in the agricultural press and it can be even more of an issue in areas of high footfall like the Chilterns. Also, there is an issue when high numbers of people visit rural areas, particularly if there are cows and calves in fields. There are growing calls for temporary footpath diversions to keep people safe. Some farms in high footfall areas are deciding not to put cows out to pasture at present with higher than usual numbers of unaware visitors to the countryside. Whilst it is great to see people out in the countryside reconnecting with the land, often benefiting local businesses, there is a need to raise awareness of associated dangers and impacts people's actions can have on the environment. The countryside is in effect the factory floor or workspace, which needs to be treated with respect. The Countryside Code has been revamped and there are various other local campaigns to raise awareness.

The EU exit has undoubtedly caused issues across the agricultural and land-based sectors, however it is generally thought this will be short lived as issues iron out as people get used to new arrangements. However, at present the import/export market is adding to market volatility across many sub-sectors and this is not only seen at national level, but it also affects every business with prices sold from the farm gate which places increasing pressure and scrutiny on production margins. Also, the changing weather patterns from climate change are constantly affecting businesses. This past winter has been wetter than 2019/20, which was one of the wettest for many years. As such, last year farmers were once again were unable to plant winter crops in the autumn and having to wait until spring to do so. With lower yielding spring crops this could put more pressure on the import market which again will lead to volatility affecting businesses at the farm gate. At present with dry weather set to continue the current grain market price has spiked with predictions of another poor arable harvest this summer.

A variety of livestock sectors have also been affected by Covid:

- ✓ Beef – demand is high for British Beef due to import issues caused by the pandemic leaving retailers sourcing locally.
- ✓ Lamb - the price of lamb has increased due to reduced supply. Lamb exports to Europe are down, France especially which are down by 20%. Prices seem to be higher if being imported from New Zealand, Australia or Ireland.
- ✓ Pork – Due to African Swine Fever wiping out over 50% of the Chinese breeding pig population, British retailers have again been sourcing locally. This reduces transport emissions and increases biodiversity on farmed land as livestock provides sustainable habitats for nature.

Spotlight on Businesses in Bucks

Buckmoorend Farm Shop has been making headlines in the agricultural press which highlights footfall issues along the Ridgeway. Daniel Hares has urged walkers to adopt a sensible approach to the use of public footpaths after suffering damage to large parts of his wheat crop. The crop of winter wheat was drilled in early October in a 20ha field at Buckmoorend Farm after leaving the field fallow the previous year for blackgrass control. The field contains a 727m stretch of public footpath, which is normally about 1.5m wide – the minimum legal requirement – and allows walkers to enjoy panoramic views towards Aylesbury Vale as part of circular walks.

But the increased footfall during the coronavirus pandemic had turned the footpath into a quagmire – and its width had increased from 5.5m at its widest in early November to as much as 11m in places during January. Signs have been erected urging walkers to stick to the pathway, but this has not solved the problem and some of the signs have been knocked down. Now new signs erected temporarily divert the footpath, asking walkers to use a 6m margin along the field boundary. The crop damage is estimated over about 0.69ha of the field. This could have yielded about 6t of wheat – equivalent to 9,000 loaves of bread or about £1,000 in lost income.

Successful partnerships are something that many businesses are built on. When this extends from business to communities it proves to be very rewarding. This is exactly what The Patch Mk has done having teamed up with The Felix Project. Once the visitor attraction had closed for the season, a team of volunteers arrived on site to glean the Pumpkin Patch.

The Pumpkins and Squash which were left after the 31st October were sent into London and redistributed to homeless hostels, community kitchens, women's refuge centres, services for the elderly, foodbanks and schools in deprived areas across the city.

They managed to collect enough pumpkins and squash to create 8,810 meals for people who need them the most. Joseph Gurney who set up the diversification is very pleased that the left-over pumpkins and squash were put to good use. This is certainly a project to highlight future possibilities which could happen within Buckinghamshire with its very own Food Partnership.

Elsewhere within Buckinghamshire, W Heady & Sons, have been battling against fly-tippers in the North of the county. It has been a major issue over the past 12 months and Richard Heady has taken matters into the farm's own hands by erecting wildlife cameras in "hotspot" areas. There have been no fly-tippers caught to date, although the cameras have been activated showing the secret life of field gateways.

De Carbonisation and the Net Zero Economy

National Overview

Revamped Industrial Strategy

The UK Government has recently updated its Industrial Strategy, in the hope of aligning manufacturing and construction efforts to the national net-zero target, to the value of £1billion. The plan aims to support 80,000 green jobs over the next 3 decades, whilst cutting emissions by 2036 by two-thirds. In addition, it is hoped to save three megatons of captured carbon from industry by 2030 and provide a carbon pricing tool, assisting businesses to account for their emissions through investment decisions.

UK Energy

In support of the Clean Growth Strategy, the continual uptake of large renewable energy producing projects has led to a true revolution in our energy make-up. As recently as 2012 coal was producing more electricity that collective renewal alternatives. Only 8 years later, and renewables now produce 15 times more energy than coal.

Beyond the make-up of energy consumed, 5th April 2021 saw the lowest level ever recorded for carbon intensity, dropping to 39gCO_2e per kWh (from a previous low of 46g CO_2e per kWh). Windy yet sunny weather conditions, paired with a lower demand due to the pandemic encouraged this record. Even once the nation returns to 'business as usual', its anticipated the trend will continue as the grid's renewable profile increases.

Glasgow COP26

COP26 continues to be viewed as the most important climate summit since the 2015 Paris Agreement. The postponement from 2020 had put even greater focus on this event, and how this will shape national and international environmental targets. The conference will see the coming together of over 30,000 delegates including heads of state, climate experts and campaigners to agree coordinated action to tackle climate change. Arguably, more progress has been made since the 2015 Paris Agreement than any previous conference. COP26 is currently planned to take place from 1-12 November 2021 (moved from 2020 due to COVID-19 impacts). However, recent narratives from several stakeholders indicate this could be further postponed into 2022, dependent upon the pandemic.

UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE UK 2021

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ITALY

Race to Zero Campaign

To support the targets set out in the Paris Climate Agreement and to be strengthened at COP26, 471 cities, 23 regions, 1,675 businesses, 85 of the largest investors, and 569 universities are committing to the global target to achieve net zero carbon by 2050. As COP26 gets closer, and the net zero agenda continues gaining its unstoppable traction, those who commit will continue to grow. Committing to this endeavour shows can be done with relative ease (even more so for SMEs) through the innovative SME Climate Hub, incurring no upfront costs to pledge.

Bucks Sector News

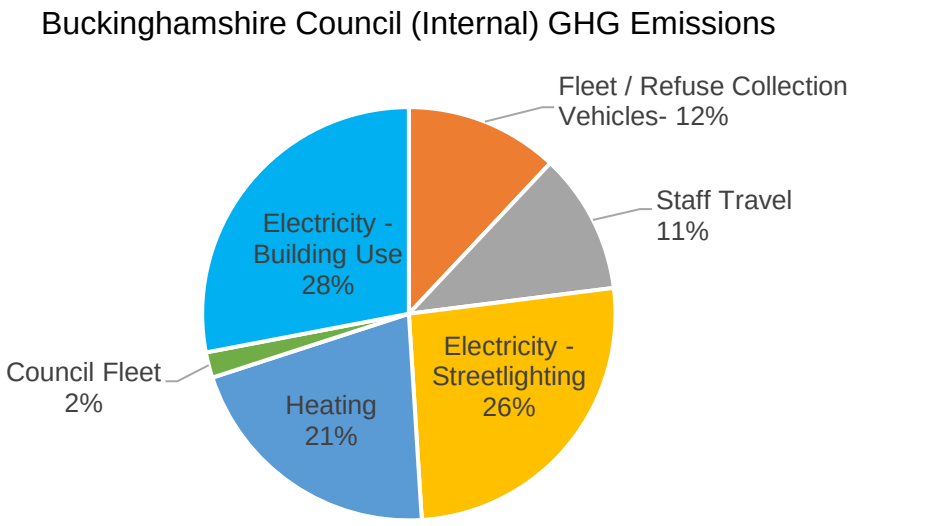
Buckinghamshire Council

In July 2020, the Council passed a motion to 'produce proposals to work alongside national Government with the objective to achieve net carbon zero for Buckinghamshire by 2050'. This step taken by Bucks Council (with a rising number of councils across the country) is essential to show a joined up working approach to the climate.

Area	CO_2e emissions (tonnes)	% GHG emissions
Global	36,500,000,000	100%
UK	366,000,000	1% of global total
Buckinghamshire	2,832,000	0.8% of UK total
Buckinghamshire Council	8,985	0.3% of Bucks total

https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/environment/sustainability/climate-change/

On the back of this motion, the Council carried out a carbon audit on its own operations, claiming responsibility for 8,985t CO_2e. Below can be seen the Council's internal carbon production, split by source.



Data extracted from Carbon Baseline Report / Bucks CC

HS2

The progress of HS2 continues to hit obstacles within the county. The Council has blocked the application to use the Wendover route (A413/A355 corridor from north of Wendover to the M40 at Beaconsfield) when carrying out work on the line, due to impacts on local noise and air pollution.

Beyond the council, protests have continued in response to the felling of trees in Jones' Hill Wood (Roald Dahl wood), which when complete will result in half of the space being destroyed.

Buckinghamshire County Council's New Waste Transfer Station

March saw the local authority open a new, £9.2million waste transfer station to collect and load recyclables for 88,000 residents, to be transferred onwards to recycling sorting facilities. The new space will maintain quality of the materials and recognising its growing volumes.

Heart of Bucks

Following their 2019/2020 annual report, Heart of Bucks have now included 'The Environment and Public Spaces' as one of their 6 impact categories (directing the organisations direction and focus). Due to reach of the charity, this has the potential to have a meaningful impact on Buckinghamshire, and its communities. To this end, the charity has already supported several environmentally based projects such as Chiltern Rangers and Winter Warmth campaign, in addition to Daniel Cope (BBF) joining as their Ambassador for the Environment.

The Effects of Covid-19

COVID-19 Build Back Better and Greener

The E.ON survey referenced in the last sector reported of 500 businesses calling for a 'green' recovery to be a government priority, with nearly half of people (48%) feel lockdown made them re-evaluate sustainability. As businesses came out of lockdown though, it appears that, at least in the short term, business practice is in many ways returning to 'normal' (based upon research carried out by Centre for Cities, showing 80% of cities have returned to, or exceeded pre-pandemic levels of air pollution). Full air quality analysis within Buckinghamshire will be available once 2020 levels has been confirmed.

Scrapping of Green Homes Grant

The Green Homes Grant Voucher scheme was launched in August 2020, providing 600,000 homes with £2 billion of support to reduce domestic energy use, whilst safeguarding 100,000 jobs in the green industry.

Bucks County Council, in partnership with Greater South East Energy Hub had planned to provide support (in the form of accreditations) to domestic installers of insulation, to better access the national scheme. An event (attended by LCW) in March took place to promote the scheme, and the organiser's ambitions to uplift the quality of work undertaken.

However, as of the 27th March 2021, it was announced that the Green Homes Grant would be scrapped from the beginning of April. The Government has blamed the cutting of funds due to a lack of uptake (only 10% of the targeted 600,000 homes had received help), and difficulties in establishing value for money. This is an unfortunate outcome that will no doubt hit those with lower incomes within the county the hardest. Whilst limited funds are being rolled down to the council for local distribution (with Bucks County Council currently considering how to best utilise this), it will not come close to the financial support expected under the Green Homes Grant scheme.

Spotlight on Businesses in Bucks

PUNCH Flybrid

Innovations in flywheel energy storage engineering are helping to significantly reduce pollution in inner cities in both the construction and automotive industries. In construction: a new hybrid flywheel system injects energy at high power to cover power spikes when cranes lift heavy loads. As a result, the size of the generator can be reduced by a factor of three, recording fuel savings of more than 50%. In automotive: a plug-in hybrid electric Ford Transit van with a flywheel hybrid system. The demonstrator vehicle is being built by Prodrive. Such a powertrain is of benefit for inner cities, with delivery vans constantly starting and stopping. This project is looking to achieve a reduction of 25% of the vehicle's emissions.

Simon Taylor Furniture

Simon Taylor Furniture received a Low Carbon Workspaces grant to install a biomass boiler on site, fuelled by wood offcuts from the furniture manufacturing operation. This significantly cut the costs of waste transport / disposal at a time when the business needed to cut operational costs. Switching from oil heating to heat produced from the biomass boiler reduced the carbon emissions of the business by 26.6 tonnes, the largest saving ever from a Low Carbon Workspaces-funded project in Buckinghamshire.

Bio-Global Industries

This is a new business in Buckinghamshire, looking to sell an innovative clinical waste recycling system made in Italy, which can be located at convenient sites (council sites, hospitals, shopping centres, industrial estates etc). The 'Ompeco' converter shreds and dehydrates clinical waste (the volume of which has exploded during the pandemic and is putting great pressure on landfills) into a dry, sterile compound, significantly reducing volume and weight and lowering disposal costs. The processed waste can be compacted & palletised, converting it into a category of waste known as 'sub-coal' which can be incinerated at waste-to-energy plants.

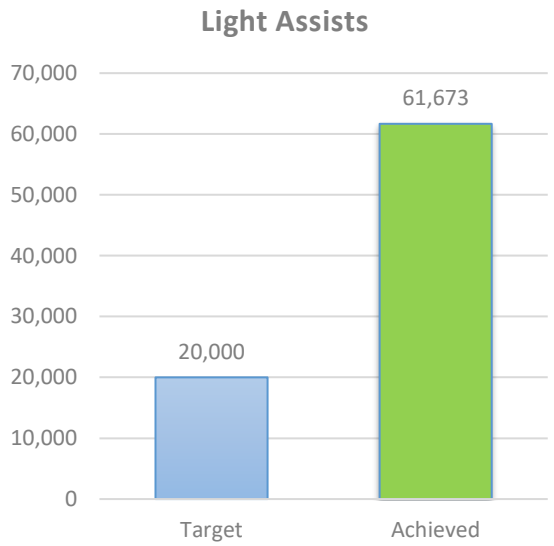
Westcott Venture Park

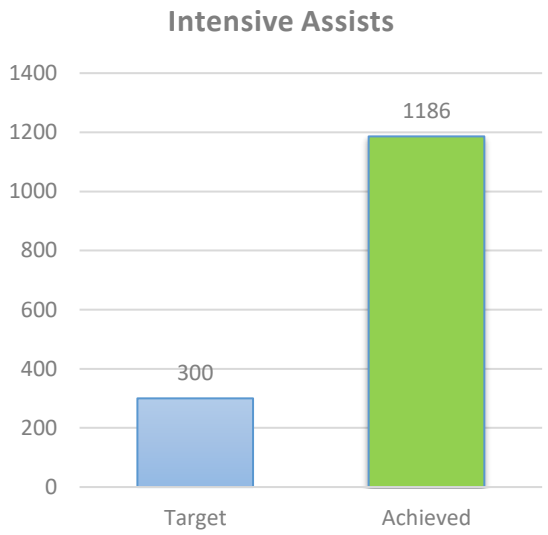
The existing Solar Park on the venture park generates around a third of the current electricity requirement. Westcott are beginning installation of a new unsubsidised 15MW Solar Park which will make it the UK's first carbon-negative business park. They have installed two electric vehicle charging points in the past year and plan to install more once sufficient renewable generation capacity is in place.

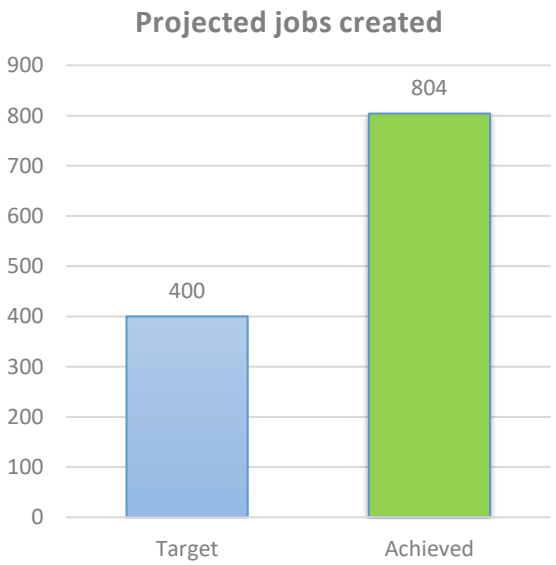
2. A Year of Business Support Activity

What are the figures are telling us?

2020/2021, has been a truly memorable year for the many significant changes for all of our businesses as well as to our personal and working lives. From the first day of the year, it has been one of change; - the number of times we helped businesses increased by 65%, and to accommodate this the number of team members increased by a third. Throughout the year there was an increased need to ensure all advisers were kept up to date with the latest business support offers as they were rolled out at speed at both national and local levels, new temporary teams had to be created, working from home became permanent and virtual meetings became the norm. The team pulled together like never before, willingly putting aside any thoughts of "this isn't my job", and ……. they delivered in spades. The figures speak for themselves with all targets being smashed.







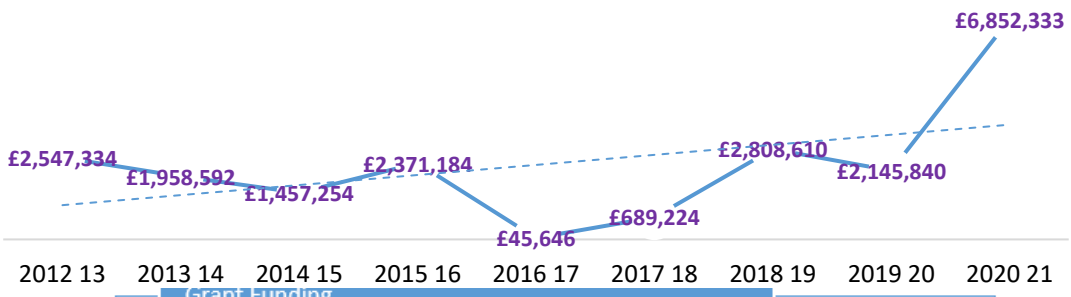
Information and assistance has been provided on a total of 64,093 occasions year to date (average – 5,340 times per month) and have worked with 5,527 unique companies, which is an average of just over 25 for each working day of the year.

Delivery of business support in 2020/21 fell into 4 key categories ie grant funding, business advice, workshops and events and online support (see diagram on next page), with grant funding playing the dominant activity.

Thanks largely to the Buckinghamshire Recovery Fund, BBF has continued to pay out large sums in grant funding, however, it is to be noted that these high levels are likely to reduce in future years due to the change from European funding to what is anticipated to be a more reserved level of funding in future years through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Match provided by private sector businesses against this year's grant provision was £2,621,248.

GRANTS PAID



Grant Funding

- Local Authority Discretionary Grants (LAD)
- Bucks Recovery Investment Fund
- Restart Grants
- Low Carbon Workspaces Grants
- Growth Grants
- Leader Grants

Business Advice

- 1:1 support
- Mentoring
- Sector specialist support
- Workforce Skills support
- Peer Networks

Workshops and Events

- Masterclasses
- Member workshops
- Focus On events
- Skills Show

Online Support

- BBF website
- Skills Hub website

Outputs Achieved

In order to identify the change in levels of activity from pre pandemic to pandemic - see diagram on next page. **Arguably the most notable statistic is, that through our increased activity we have been able to influence the creation of over 800 new jobs – an increase of 105% from the previous year and the more affluent pre Covid world.**

Please note:

Light Assist = Membership activity, hotline calls, M2M workshop hosts, M2M offers, LCW efficiency plan completed, LEADER applications, inward invest assist initial enquiries, networking events, roundtable and Bank of England attendance, Business Support unique web views

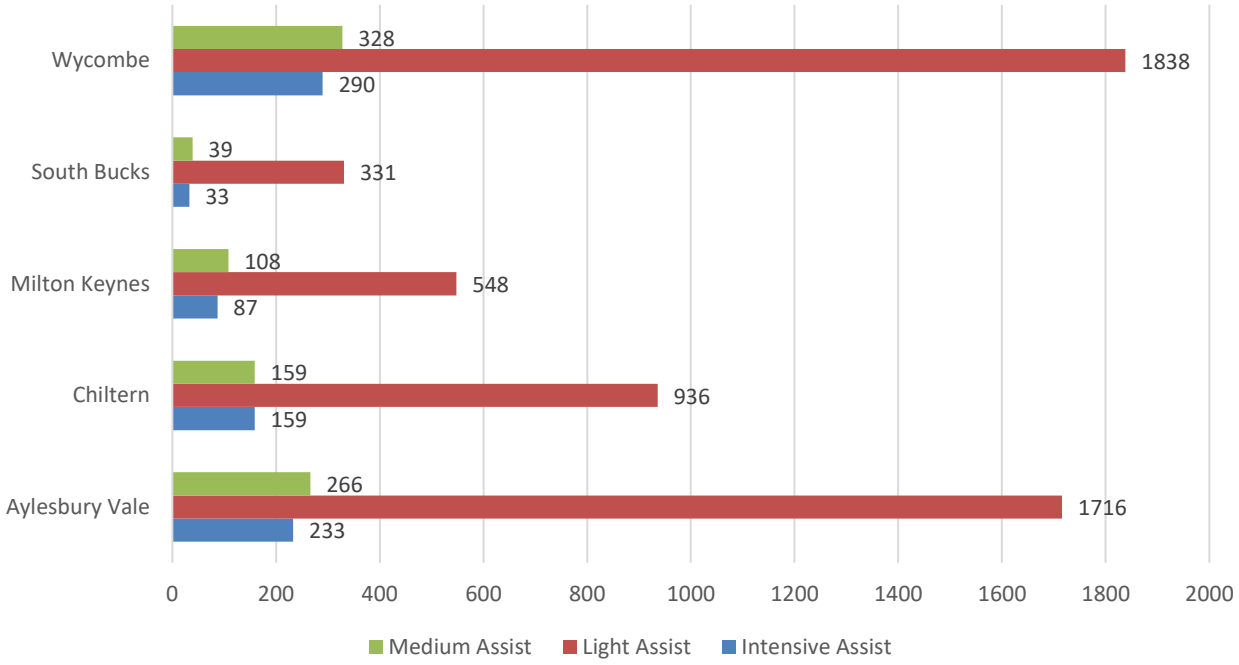
Medium Assist = Event/workshop attendee, 1:1 business advice and meetings (1 hr min), Inward invest intensive assists, virtual assists

Intensive Assist = 12 hours of support, whole grants paid of £1,000 plus

2020/21	2019/20
61,673 light assists	**32,913** light assists
1,223 medium assists	**1,085** medium assists
1,186 intensive assists	**411** intensive assists
£6,852,333 grants paid	**£2,145,840** grants paid
£2,621,248 created in match funding	**£4,455,162** created in match funding
804 jobs created	**392** jobs created
266 new products / services created	**109** new products / services created
68 people attended an Enterprise Day	**64** people attended an Enterprise Day
91 people joined a start up course	**40** people joined a start up course
Over **5,000** people took part in the Skills Show	**4,000** people took part in the Skills Show
117 business owners joined a peer networking group	**30** business owners joined a peer networking group

Where have we supported?

All Assistance (light, medium and intensive assists) by area



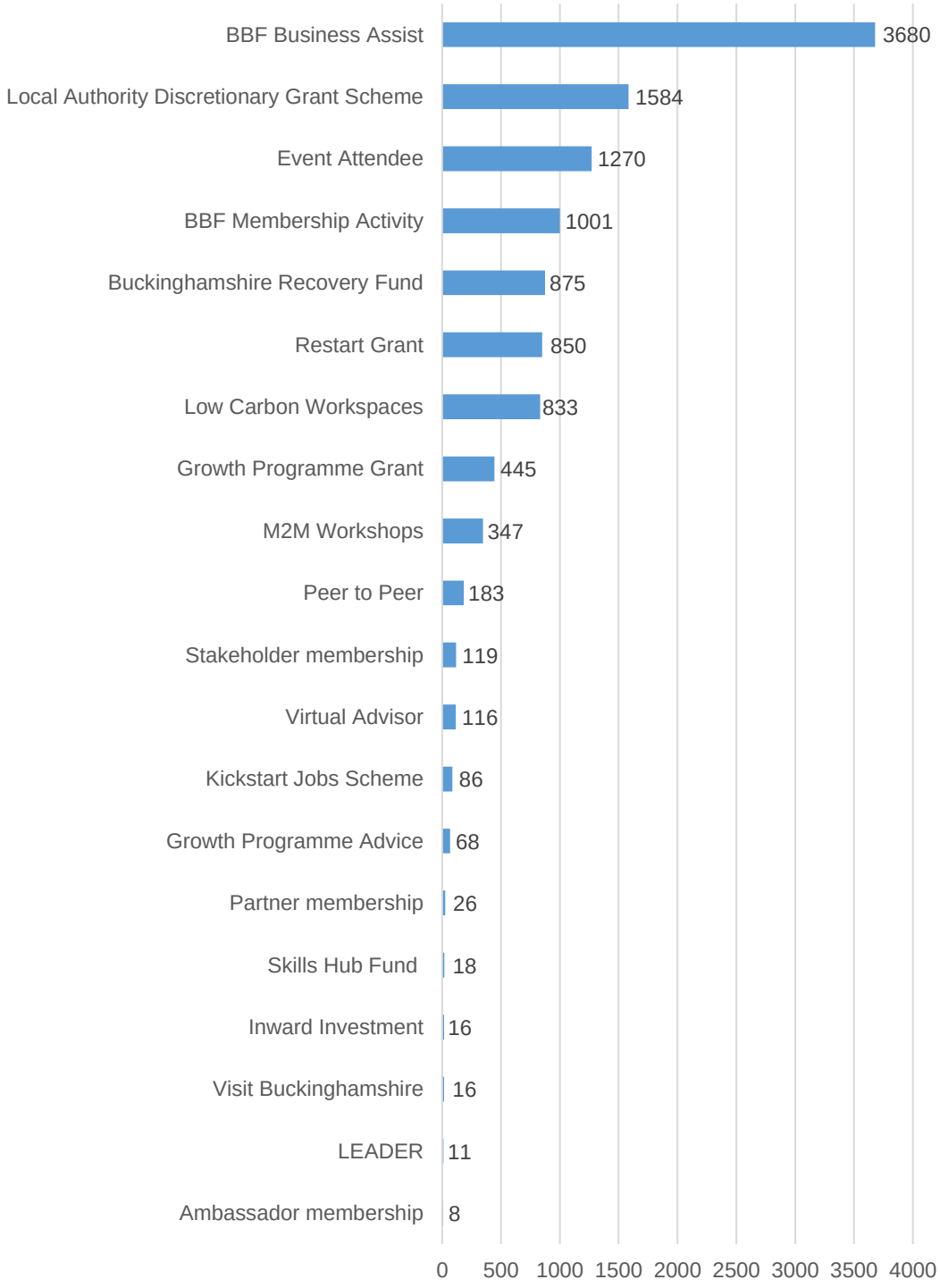
The breakdown of support by area in year, has repeated the same pattern of geographical support as in previous years, with surprisingly high numbers for Milton Keynes.

What have businesses wanted / done with us? (all geographical areas)

Unsurprisingly, the team have been swamped with requests for financial support, regardless of grants or loans. New automated systems had to be created to deal with the enormous number of grant applications and the hotline dealt with huge numbers of enquiries for the locally delivered grants from the Council. Whilst finance has remained a hot topic throughout the year, business advice took a back seat for the first 6 months despite many businesses needing it. There was a period of panic for employers, which slowly turned to anger, frustration and finally acceptance or denial in equal measure. After September and the initial shock of lockdown, realisation set in that advice was needed and the Advisers became busy again, employers wanted 1:1 advice and they wanted to learn from each other – Peer Networks came into its own. Finally, as 2020 drew to a close BBF took an active stance in contacting businesses and over 5,000 were called in a 4 month period. All were grateful, most willing to listen – and delighted that their business had been called to ask if we could help.

Not all businesses have struggled in the last year, many have identified new opportunities, and some have even grown significantly. One comment from a business owner was that “he hoped lockdown never ended!”

Graph showing the type of support applied for in 2020/21

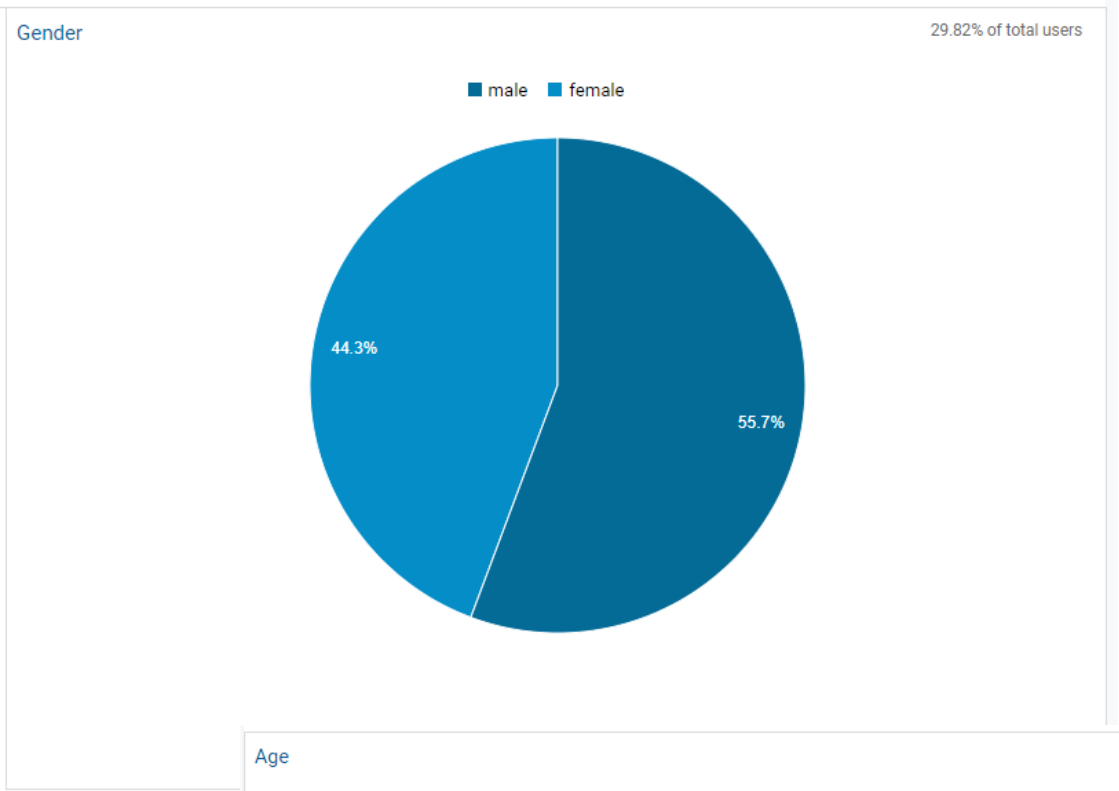


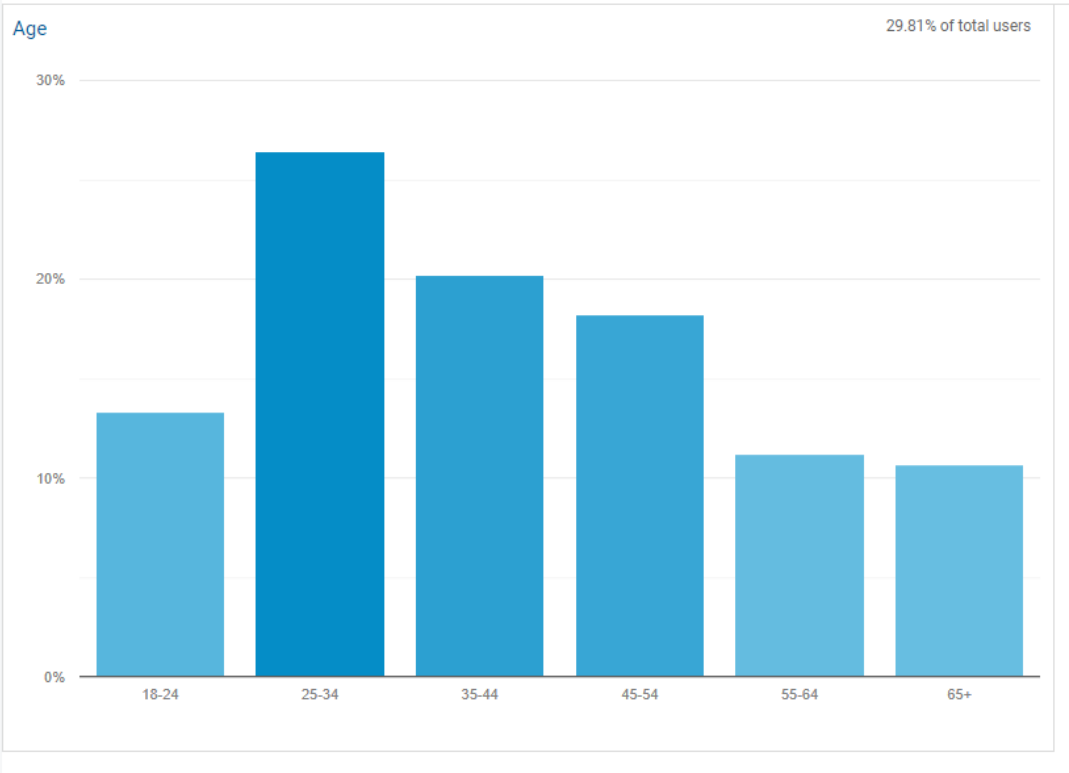
Page Views on Website 2020/21

Page Name	Page views	Unique Page views
Covid-19	27,654	23,051
Local Authority Discretionary Grant	11,757	9,431
Business Support	8,783	7,212
Learn Digital Skills for Free with Googles Digital Garage	6,882	6,438
Funding and Finance	5,685	4,168
Growth Grants	5,630	4,950
Business Resilience Fund	4,268	3,787
Grants and Vouchers	4,237	3,715
Buckinghamshire Recovery Fund	4,194	3,600
Restart Grant Application Form	3,924	3,039
Restart Grant	3,266	3,132
Local Authority Discretionary Grant Application Form	3,147	2,062
Growing Your Business	2,284	1,870
The Growth Programme	1,896	1,535
Covid-19 Funding	1,787	1,061
Be Your Own Boss	1,532	1,246
Starting Up	1,492	1,079
Growth Grants – Book a Chat	1,472	870
Business Support - Questions	1,468	1,023
Peer Networks	1,185	1,025

What do we know about the business owners enquiring / needing our online support?

Age Demographic of Website Users 2020/21

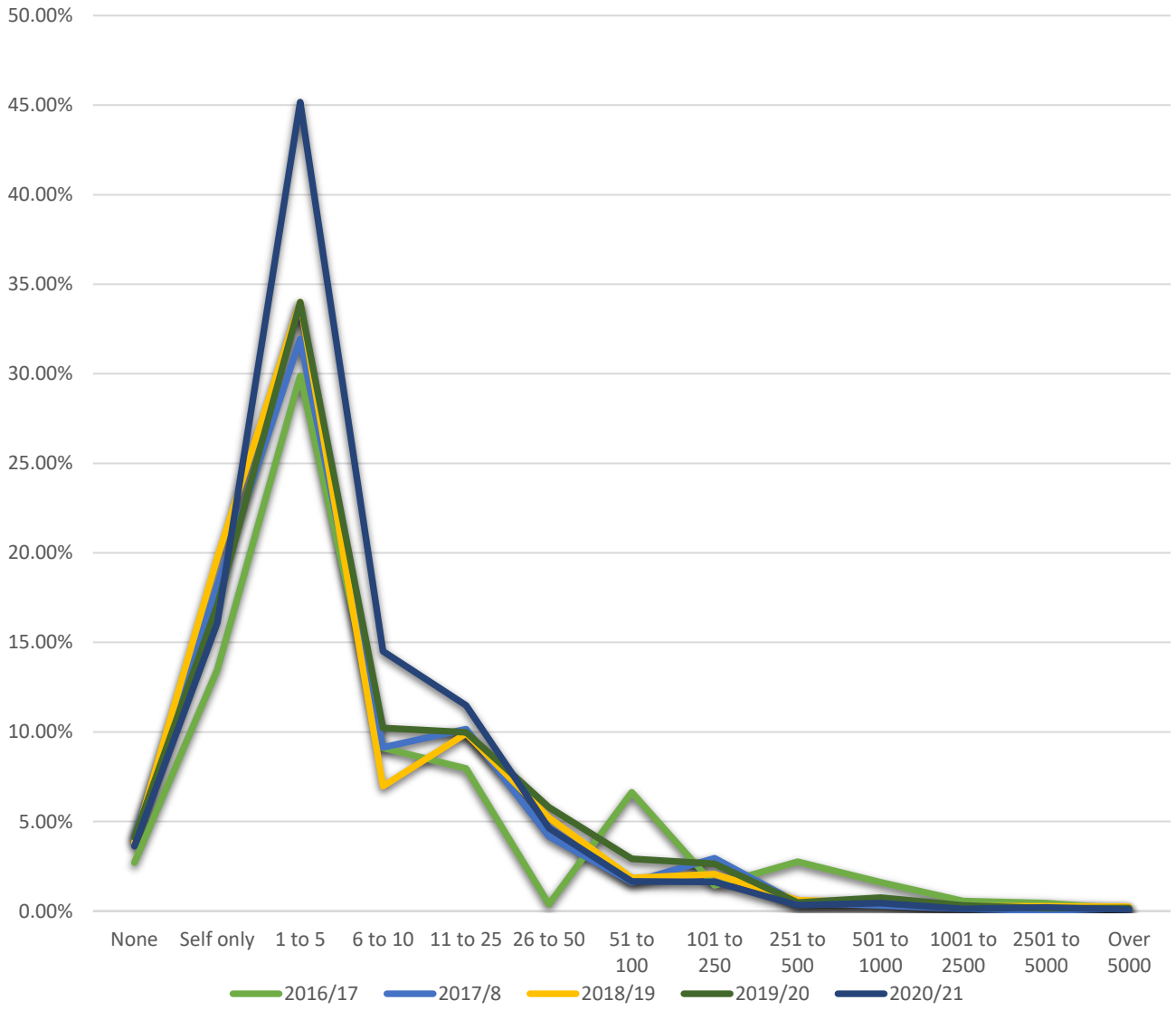




Business Support by Size of Business 2020/21

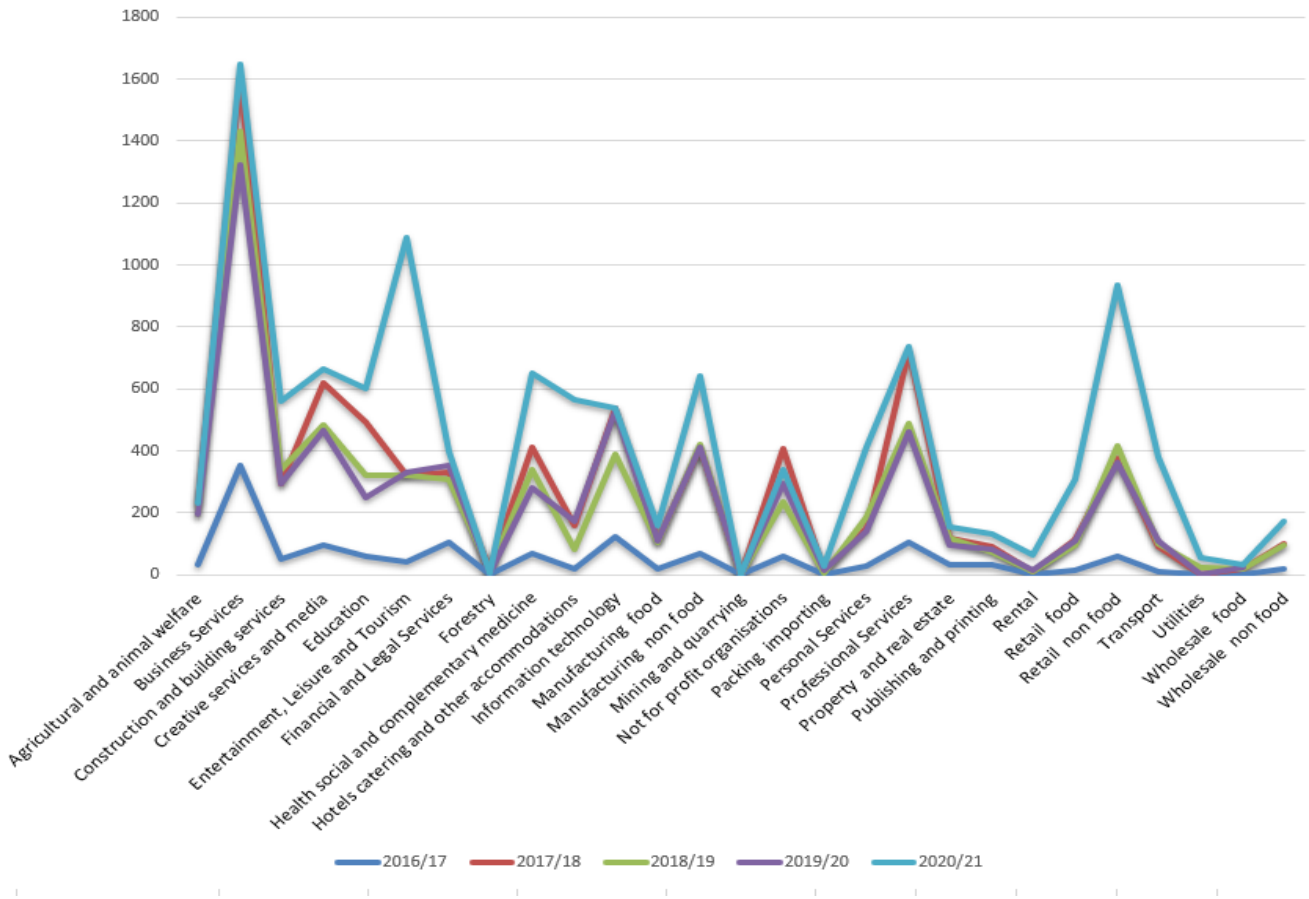
The profile of companies by size has changed slightly in the last year. There has been an increase of 11% in the number of occasions we have worked with business with between 1 and 5 employees and a 6% increase with those between 6 and 25 employees.

Percentage of Assists Undertaken by Size – By Year

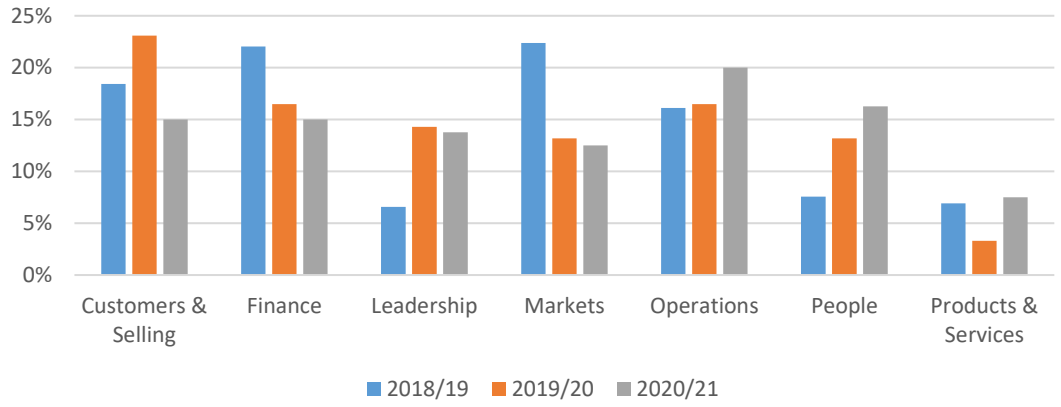


Business Support by Sector

The following table shows the businesses requesting business support by sector and compares the changes over the last 5 years. The bright blue line in is the one for 2020/21 and for the first time it shows a significant increase for support provided to the hospitality, tourism and leisure sectors which have been most adversely affected throughout the last year. Business Services represents by far the largest single sector supported by our BBF Business Support team, this sector is made up by businesses operating in the knowledge economy, often providing B2B services, such as management consulting, training or recruitment.



Key issues businesses want to discuss with a business adviser in a 1:1 meeting, a 3 year comparison



Given the issues for businesses concerning resilience in the last 12 months, it is surprising to see a downturn in requests for finance. It would appear from the figures that business owners have been deluged with national financial provision and support which has meant this topic has not been at the top of the list for advice. Instead businesses have requested support for their practical operations, staffing issues and creating new products and services to suit the changing markets.

Where have we referred/signposted companies to?

The business support team has worked closely with many partners and have referred a total of **305** referrals to **78** organisations in the year.

Top 20 Referrals 2020/21

Start Up Loan Co	59
Finpoint	45
British Business Bank	39
Chandler Garvey	23
Buckinghamshire Council	22
Buckinghamshire Skills Hub	21
Harwood Hutton	12
Visit Buckinghamshire	11
Department for International Trade (Formerly UKTI)	10
Low Carbon Workspaces	8
Choice Business Loans	7
HMRC	7
Innovate UK	7
Community Impact Bucks	6

Ngage Solutions	6
Be-Digital Ltd	4
APS Accountancy Ltd	3
Aylesbury Town Centre Partnership	3
Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (Bucks LEP)	3
Buckinghamshire New University	3

In addition, the business support team have ‘signposted’ (provided details of, rather than directly pass company details to a referring company) on **861** occasions to **148** organisations.

Top 20 Signposts 2020/21

Buckinghamshire Council	258
Choice Business Loans	72
Start Up Loan Co	58
SME Business Finance	52
Streamlion Consulting Ltd	49
Bucks Business Advice	47
ASC Finance for Business	46
Finpoint	36
South East Midlands LEP	28
Buckinghamshire Libraries	19
British Business Bank	18
Chandler Garvey	15
Gov.uk	15
HMRC	11
Visit Buckinghamshire	10
Intellectual Property Office	9
Blaser Mills Law	8
Buckinghamshire & Surrey Trading Standards	8

Community Impact Bucks 7

Hillier Hopkins LLP 7

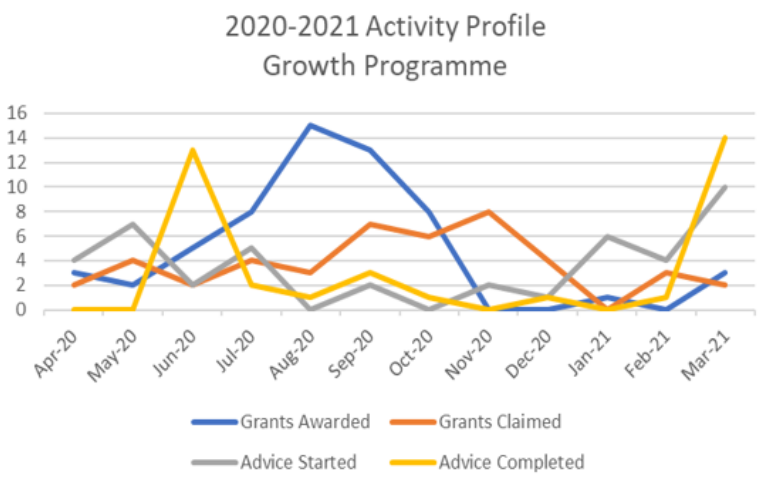
3. Business Growth and Scale Ups

Growth Programme

Delivered by Ngage Solutions in partnership with Buckinghamshire Business First, the Growth Programme (HALO) provides support to Buckinghamshire based businesses to encourage them to grow and create employment. Enhancing the support provision already provided by Buckinghamshire Business First, the programme delivers either grants or bespoke one-to-one business advice, peer-to-peer support to local SMEs with growth potential.

This year, more than ever, the Growth Programme has been about flexibility, adapting and supporting the changing needs of businesses alongside the needs of the project.

The business landscape in the last year has been one of dramatic change and uncertainty. Companies have had to reinvent themselves rapidly to remain relevant and some sectors have been subject to huge demand, or none at all, because of the pandemic. The creativity and innovation that business owners have displayed during this period has been inspiring. However, it has also meant that many are challenged to find time for business support, contrasting the extreme need for cash and financial support, and exposing the leaders who are willing to take on debt and those that avoid it at all cost. This business journey in the last year has seen all emotions from; sheer desperation, panic, relief, and imaginative diversification. Of course, there were also businesses that flourished in an unexpected shift of priorities in the marketplace.



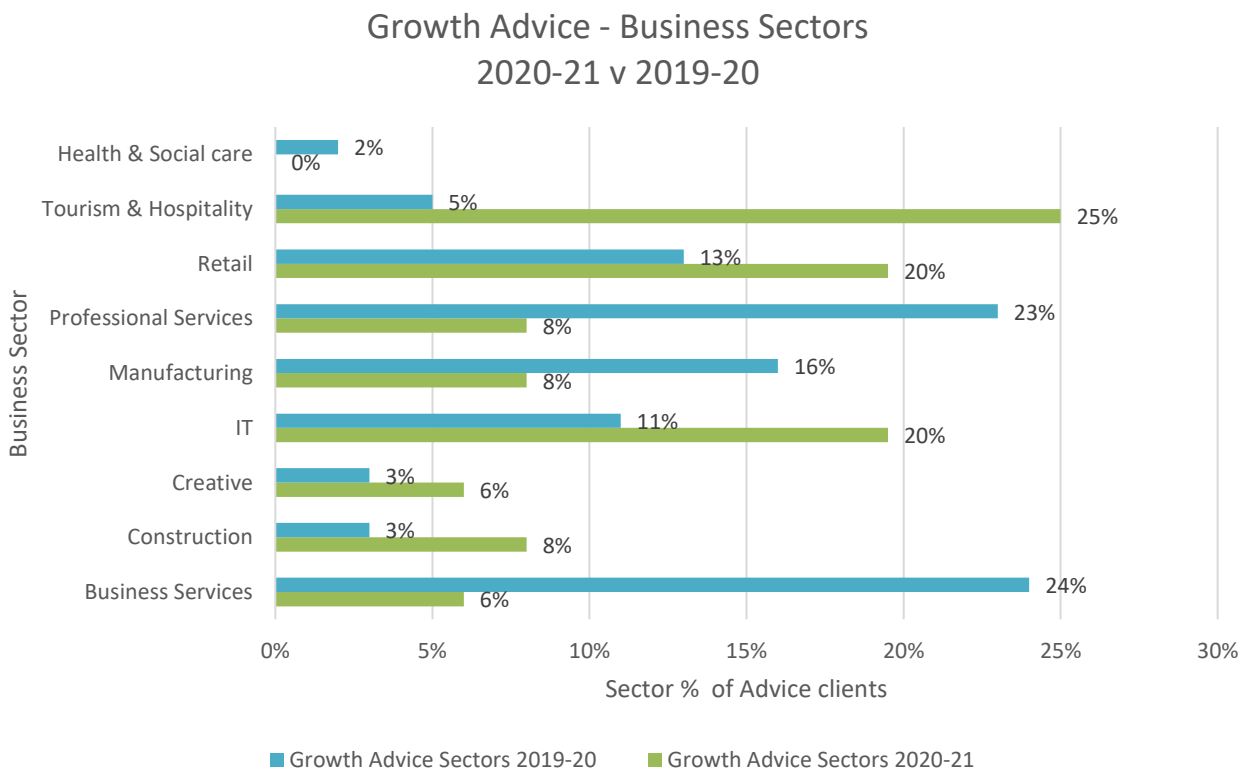
The change in business support needs is clearly seen by the activity of the programme during the year. Initially, the team focused on being available on the phones to support, provide information, signpost, and provide reassurance. As the summer progressed, there was a distinct shift in the mindset of business owners to capture all available financial support, which included a sudden dramatic surge in grant applications – 'free money' became the mantra for survival in uncertain times. With the start of the new year, and new lockdown, the focus appears to have changed again. Financial support became the norm, and demand for business advice was valued and appreciated for lonely, exhausted business owners.

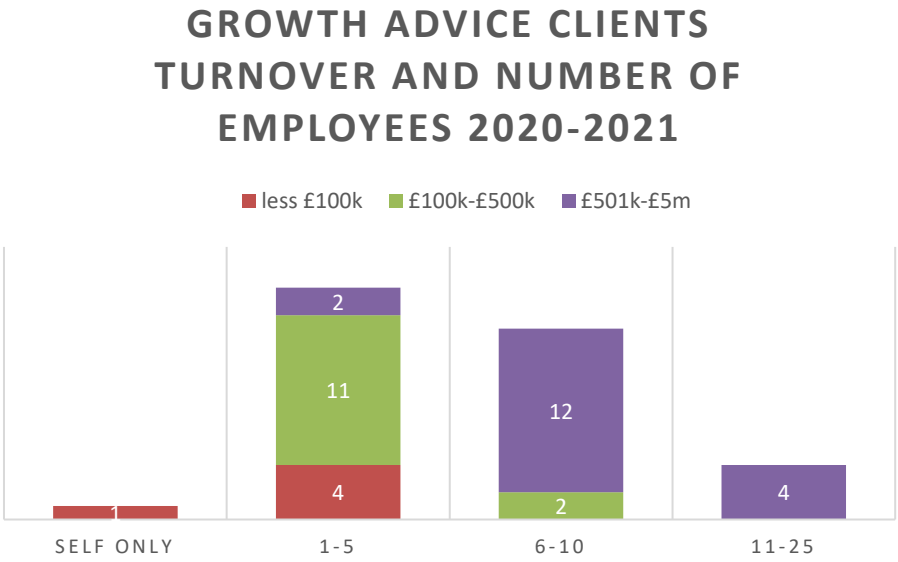
It is now evident that business owners, more than ever, need support to know how to step back and plan in this rapidly shifting landscape.

In the initial few months of the year, businesses were not interested in growth advice - survival and adapting were their primary focus. When business owners started to look outwards again, the programme revised the marketing messages and quickly modified the content of the masterclasses to ensure relevance and empathy with business owners. The masterclasses were all transferred to Zoom, and while there has been a slight drop in masterclass ratings (from 100% stating excellent/good prior to Covid, to 90% excellent/good), this is still considered a positive result, ultimately demonstrating that 'in person' remains the preferred medium for delivery.

Nevertheless, during the summer months, several businesses did reach out for support. They were looking for help in restructuring and repurposing their business models, especially across several some of the hardest hit sectors e.g., the entertainment industry suppliers, hospitality, and retail.

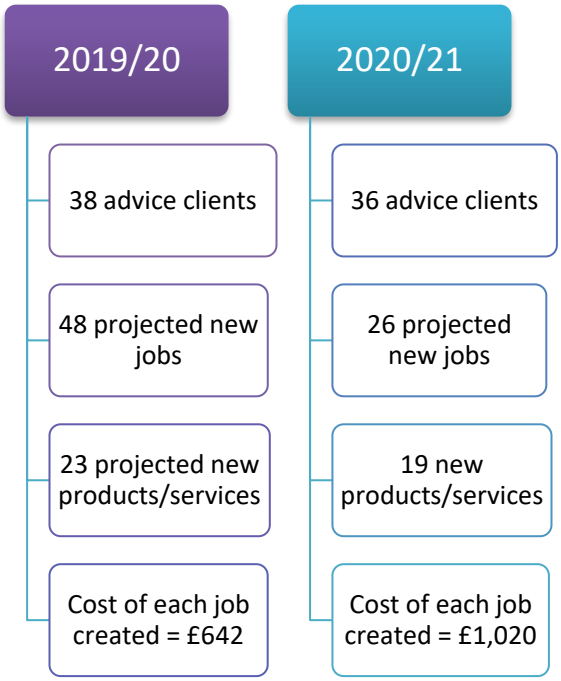
The next graph shows the increase in the number of businesses in the last year taking up advice from Tourism, Hospitality and Retail sectors, compared with the previous year.





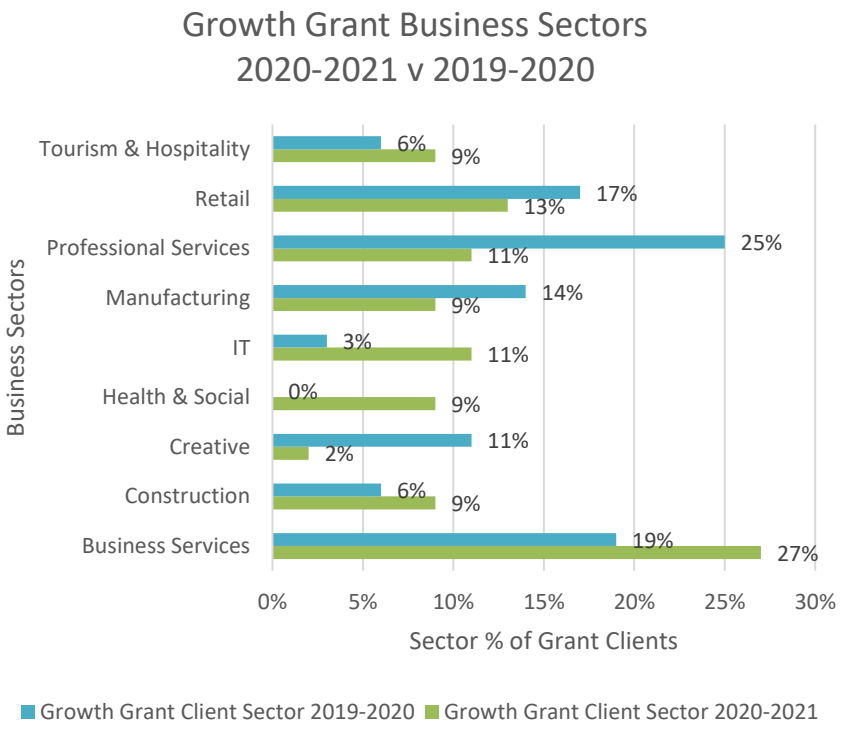
In recognising that the Growth Advice programme needs to be flexible to accommodate the changing needs of business owners, it is still clear that the greatest value created is in supporting businesses with several employees and a turnover of £300k+. This graph shows the progression and shift in the profile of businesses to this point and above. Support and advice are most needed when organisational changes are happening with increased head count and turnover rising, often at a couple of critical points; £500k, £1m and £3m. It is at these stages that business support is most valued, and can act as a catalyst for change, be it with the need for strategic plans and introducing systems, processes, and the understanding of leadership requirements.

Prior to Covid, the clear indication had been that the programme would see the greatest outcomes in terms of jobs and new product development, working with the larger category of businesses. Time will tell whether this fact remains true. The projected number of new jobs and new products/services are significantly down compared to last year, which has also resulted in a higher cost per outcome.



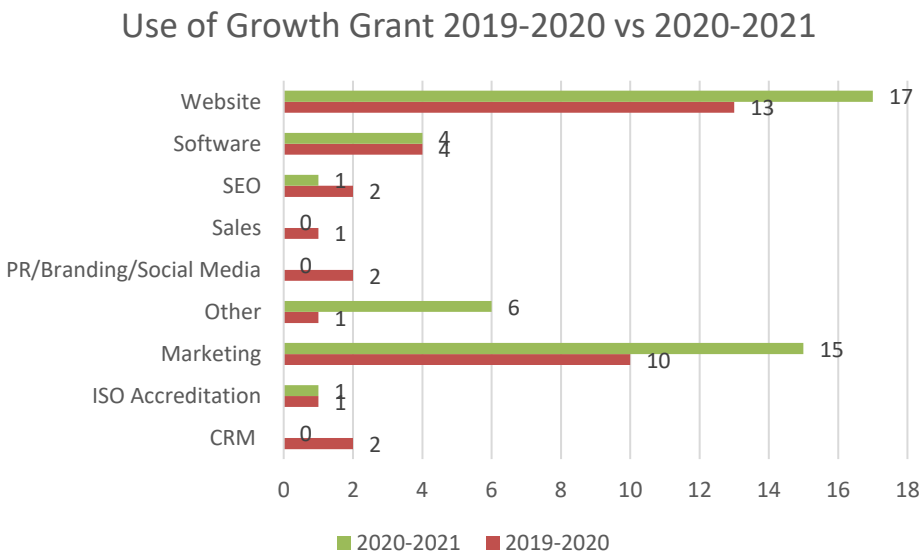
Demand from business for Growth Grants has swung from being mediocre (pre pandemic) to outstanding, as the awareness of 'free money' rocketed during the summer. As a result, the average grant size noticeably increased, and larger projects became the new normal.

The demand for the Growth Grants during the summer months came predominately from businesses who had seen some positive results from Covid and had seized the opportunity for funding support. Many used this funding for website development and digital software to both improve sales but also productivity.

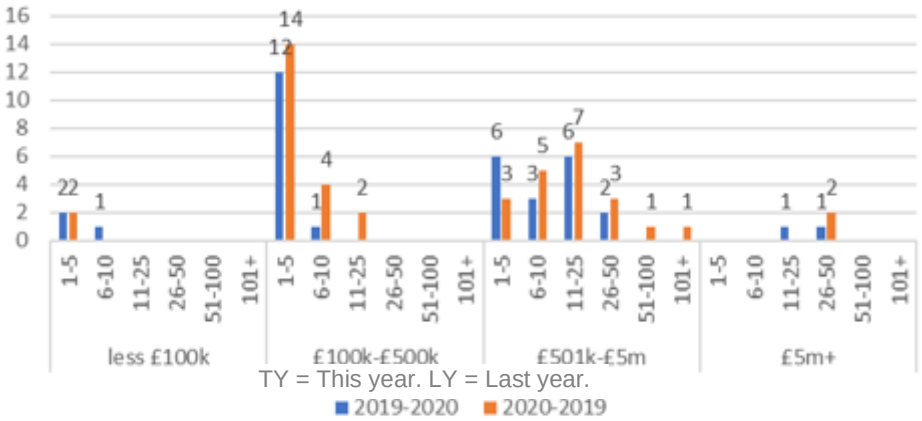


The introduction of the Restart Grants in October 2020 saw the opportunity to pause the Growth Grants delivery to re-evaluate the impact of the increased average grant size. Growth Grants were relaunched in January 2021, with a reduced grant size of between £1k - £2.5k - still with the 1:3 funding ratio.

The increasing importance of digital working was seen in what the Growth Grants were used for. In 2020-21 there were 45 grants, compared with 36 from the previous year. There was a noticeable increase in the number of grants for digital marketing and websites as well as software which enabled increased productivity and the ability to work remotely in many cases.



The main criteria for the grants did not change but there is a noticeable increase in larger businesses who have benefited from them in the last year. However, the projected number of new jobs and new products/services coming from the grants are significantly down which has resulted in a higher cost per outcome.



45 grants paid out - £147,566

Creating 20 new jobs by June 2022.

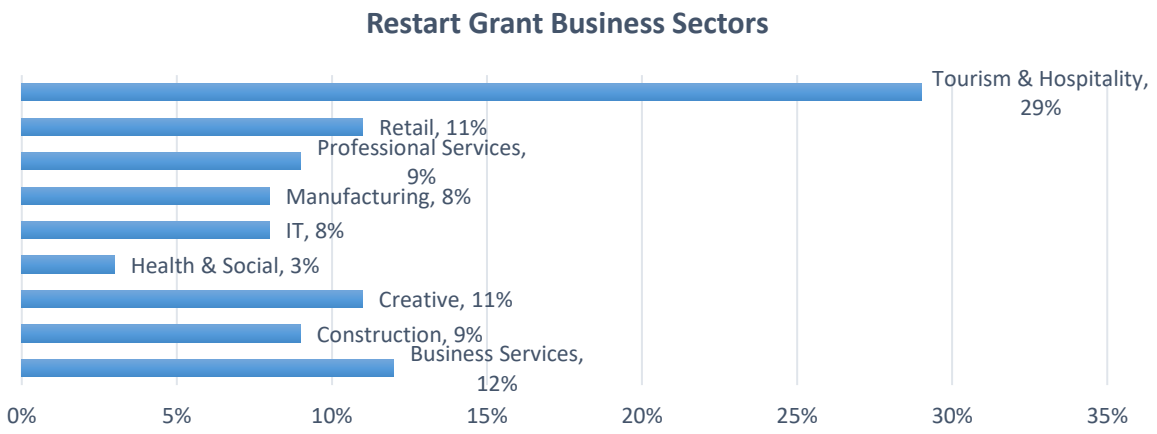
41 projected new products and services

Restart Grant

In October, £307,500 of additional grant money was received due to the awarding of a 'child' project to the Growth Programme – Restart Grants. Restart enabled the awarding of 116 grants to businesses with fully funded projects of between £1k - £3k, to mitigate the effects of Covid on their businesses. This took place between October 2020 and March 2021.

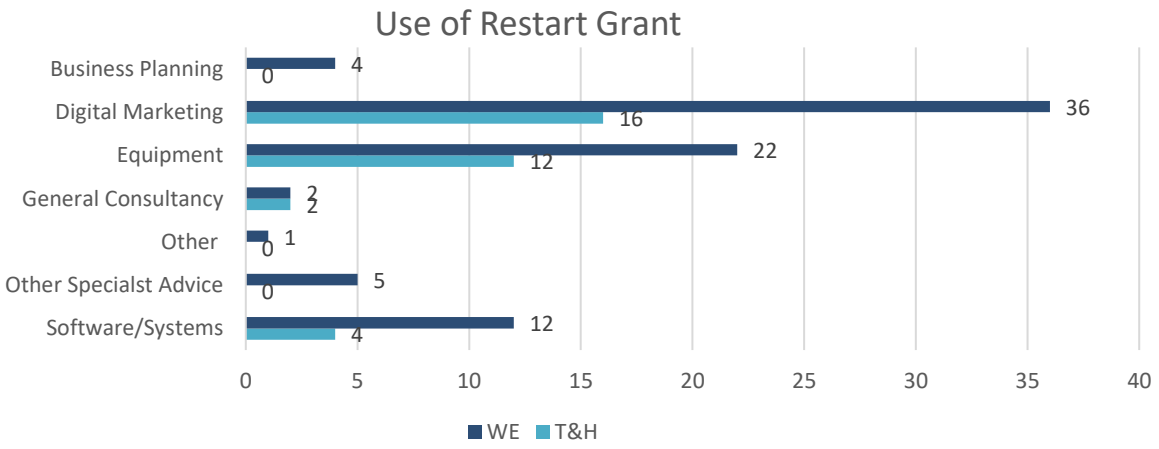
These heavily oversubscribed, fully funded grants were made available to Buckinghamshire businesses to help them mitigate against the effects of Covid. A rigorous process was introduced to ensure that businesses were given a fair and equal opportunity to apply. Ensuring that the grants would be processed and awarded as quickly as possible, whilst maintaining due diligence and control.

A heightened need to identify fraud in application and claims was identified and several applications were rejected on this basis.



A dedicated ring-fenced amount of £87,500 was specified for businesses from the Tourism & Hospitality sector with specific SIC codes due to them having been impacted most in the last few months.

There was a noticeable split in the different uses of the Restart Grant between the Tourism & Hospitality businesses, and the ones from the wider economy. The Tourism & Hospitality sector used this grant for help with re-opening in a safe way e.g., buying outdoor equipment, and it was encouraging to see a good many use it to help with digital marketing and software.

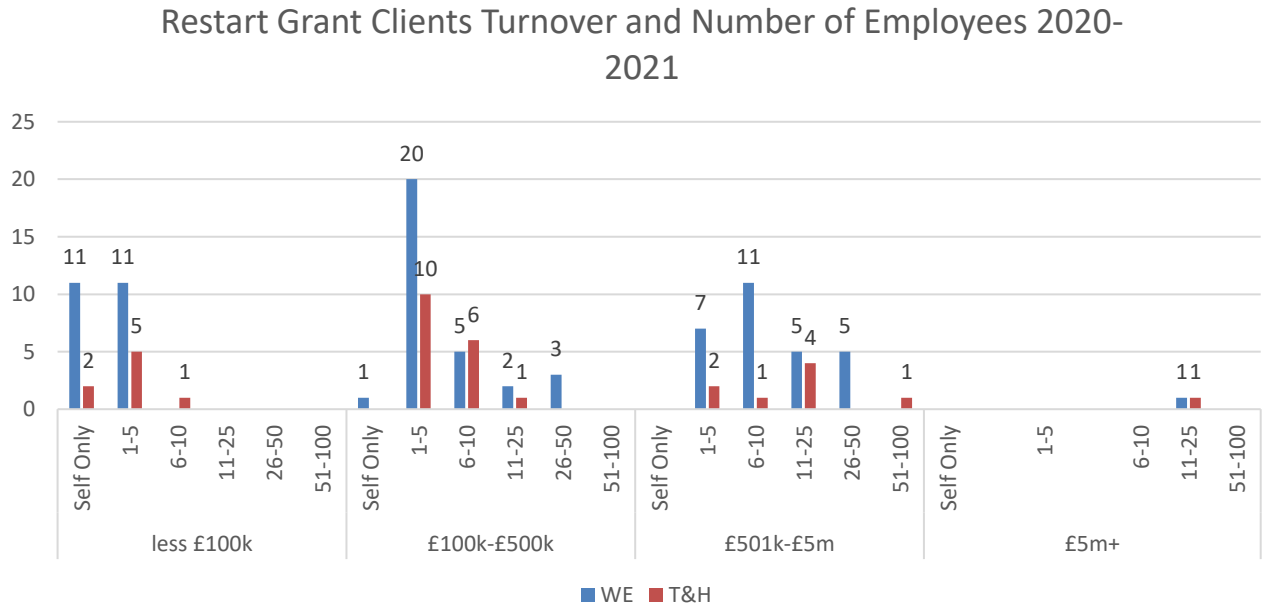


WE = Wider Economy * T&H = Tourism and Hospitality*

The next graph shows that most businesses who applied were from those smaller categories. A surprising 21% of businesses had had no previous interaction or support from BBF, proving that during these desperate times previously considered “hard to reach” businesses were turning to BBF for support.

Covid-19 and Consequences for the Project

The main impact of the pandemic on the Growth Programme contract has been that the focus was diverted to provide general help and support for businesses in the early months. This support was acknowledged by the wider business community and many notes of thanks were received which



recognised the support that was given in difficult times.

One of the outcomes of the pandemic is the underlying longer-term effect on jobs and innovation with advice and grant clients. The projected number of new jobs and new products/services are significantly down on last year, reflecting general uncertainty and anticipated growth prospects. This also is reflected in a higher cost per outcome achieved. It is most noticeable in the reduction of new jobs projected from grants, confirming the previous indication that grants have been used to increase productivity with software, which does not always reflect in job increases. Also, the concept of the grant has been looked upon as ‘free-money’ to help with more essential projects, whereas previously they were to support more growth-based activities.

Since May 2020, all applications for both advice and grants have asked whether as a result of Covid, any jobs were classified as being 'At-Risk': -

- Advice clients recorded 21 jobs 'at-risk'.
- Grant clients recorded 39 jobs 'at-risk'.

Out of the 81 outputs across grants and advice, 60 jobs have been classified 'at-risk'.

Case Studies and Testimonials

Case studies have been created with Autocanteen Ltd, Bullet & Bone Ltd and Bluebell Label.

"BBF are great, we really appreciate you. Without you we wouldn't have known about those grants either, so you are all doing a great job in a time of difficulty and uncertainty. Covid and Brexit, a very strange combination!"

"Thank you so very much for all the help and listening to all of us under these situations, it is very much appreciated".

"It's tough for so many people. Thanks to everyone at BBF for the support you're able to offer businesses at this time, even if that's just a friendly chat or email - it does matter."

"Thank you so much for keeping us in the loop, you have been fantastic throughout this unprecedented time"

"Jerome is an outstanding adviser. Thank you"

"I would also like to make a personal shout out to Jeremy from BBF who called to help make sure I completed the grant forms correctly and offered kindness and support at a very scary time"

"Think BBF are communicating and obviously helping in a way that's much better than I hear of other councils. I think the team that answer phones are all excellent and super friendly - they make it feel like a really personable group. I always feel BBF are genuinely trying to help"

The Next 12 Months

The team is ready to take on the challenge of the year ahead and get back on track and on target for the project. An additional 3 days of adviser time is now in place which will help to achieve the targets.

Specific focus is underway to sign up businesses to the advice programme. Several businesses who have finished the Peer Networks programme are now recognising the benefits of support and are looking at the advice programme as a natural follow on. Ideas and thoughts which have been generated by Peer Networks can now be implemented with continuing support. This fits perfectly with the revamped Growth Advice programme which is now offering Strategic Planning and Digital Marketing Masterclasses in addition to the established Finance session.

A flexible approach is being taken on who is eligible for Growth Advice, however, it is felt that it is imperative that the business owner has a positive mindset for change and development and that there are at least 2 people in the business with a turnover of £100k+. The average business size remains around £500k and 5 people. The remaining 40 Growth Grants continue to be offered and are well received, even at the lower grant value.

A steady, careful, and sensitive approach will be taken on establishing whether the projected jobs and new products/services have been introduced as planned. Part of the process will be following up to establish whether the 'at-risk' jobs have been saved and how, in general, the grants and advice support have helped to safeguard jobs. With just 15 months left of the existing project, the final outcomes and targets are in sight. However, it is still firmly anticipated that the project will receive its long-awaited extension request for a further year until June 2023. This will enable the project to continue giving its highly regarded and much appreciated business support in Buckinghamshire. The challenge equally is to ensure that Phase 2 can maintain or even surpass the evaluation from Phase 1 that confirmed 92% would recommend the programme to other businesses.

LEADER

LEADER is a programme designed to support rural economies and rural communities through awarding grants of up to £200,000 to micro/small businesses and community projects that will either create jobs, growth or increase productivity within the applicant organisation.

The programme is funded through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and is required to be 5% of the wider Rural Development Programme for England. All priorities are set locally. Funding decisions are made by the Local Action Groups which are made up from public, private and third sector organisations and individuals with an interest in the local rural economy.

2020/21 has been the fifth full year of operations for the LEADER Programme. Normally, this type of programme delivery would increase year on year until its completion. However, the final year has been severely affected by the Coronavirus pandemic which has stagnated project and programme completion.

In Buckinghamshire, both the Chilterns and Clay Vales areas have been 100% committed since September 2019. With the programme winding down, expressions of interest have only been accepted on the basis that they are held in reserve should additional funds be made available. Final claims for projects were due to be submitted by 31st December 2020 however the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) have extended the deadline due to the pandemic affecting project completion. This has allowed projects time to complete and only 1 project now remains to be paid in Buckinghamshire.

Each project is required to submit an annual monitoring report for the first 3 years post financial completion or until the outputs are fully evidenced. At the outbreak of the pandemic the RPA suspended all monitoring, but progress is now being made to clear the backlog. It is evident that some projects have fared worse than others and some are requesting variations to contracts extending beyond the output monitoring period.

During August, the RPA confirmed there would be additional funding made available for fully developed and locally approved applications. In all, an extra £215,000 was made available for the Chilterns and £162,000 for Clay Vales. The amount of additional funding obtained to date now stands at £1.3m.

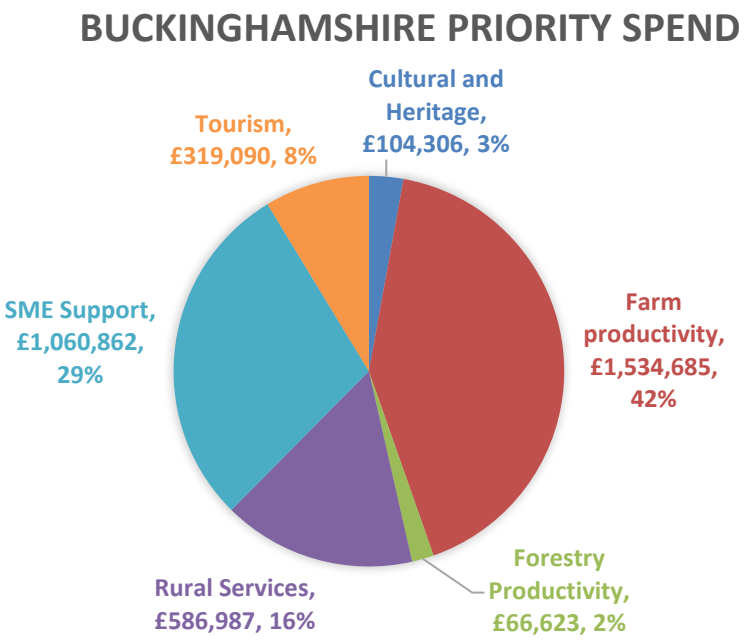
Highlights

- ✓ The year's major success story has been increasing additional funding to a total of £1.3m.
- ✓ In addition to receiving this funding, being able to allocate this in a short timescale has been a major achievement.
- ✓ The value of grants paid to businesses in Buckinghamshire stands at £472,454 – 16 in total.
- ✓ An unexpected, but very welcome additional £177,300 has been awarded to 3 businesses to 3 applications due to funds being handed back from other programme areas nationwide
- ✓ These 3 contracts bring the total of projected jobs in Buckinghamshire to 125.

Challenges

- Dealing with the volume of variations and delays with projects submitting their claims due to Covid has been the biggest challenge.
- The other main challenge has been supporting some of the funded projects through a very difficult economic period which may have brought about changes to the business, requiring variations to contracts to remain compliant.

The next chart details the amount awarded under each priority, over £2m of this has contributed to projects supporting automation and robotics, focusing on production or processing.

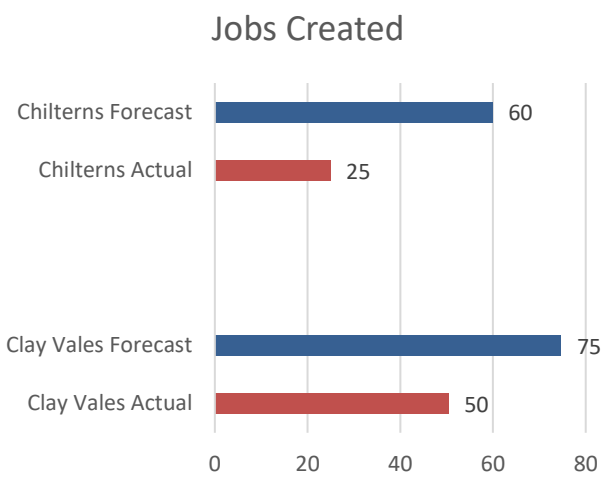


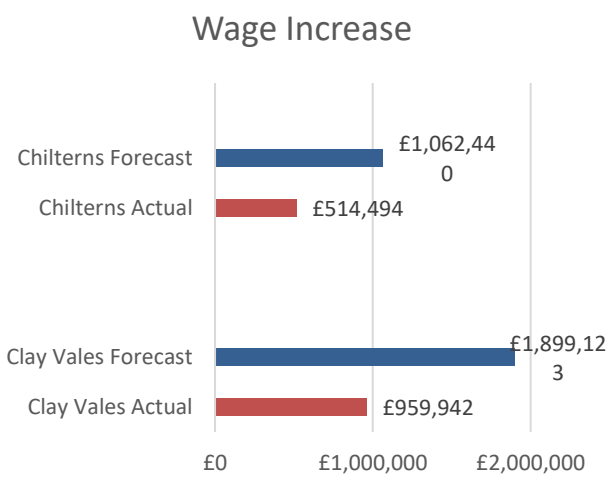
Agricultural productivity has been the most popular in terms of grant applications This is likely to be due to the fact it is funded through European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development which many agricultural businesses are already aware of. Secondly, Brexit and the uncertainty for businesses, has made many SMEs cautious when considering investing during the 5-year project period.

In the later stages of the programme, agricultural production as a sector in this area has been least affected by the Coronavirus pandemic with interruptions mainly focused on routes to market for agricultural products.
Finally, whilst there is constant uncertainty within agricultural sectors with fluctuating commodity prices, the government approach to changing subsidy payments is becoming clearer. As a result, many agricultural businesses know they need to adapt to reduce input costs where possible. Many have chosen to take advantage of various innovative technological advances within the sector. They can increase efficiencies and productivity on farms through new and improved technologies that provide satellite-supported digital management of crops and livestock through the uses of infield real-time monitoring supported by robotics which provide instant data, aiding businesses growth. Agriculture remains one of the most innovative sectors to work in and many businesses are adapting and adopting new technologies.

Impacts of Programme
A total of £3,421,085 has been paid out in claims to businesses who have projected to create 139.45 fte jobs over the next 3 years as a result. £5,082,950 has also been leveraged against this sum as match funding.

From the 90 projects, there have been 75 jobs created to date with a further 50 in the next 3 years and wage bill increase is set to increase to £3m across Buckinghamshire. The charts below show job creation and wage bill increase split by area.





Projected jobs are set to meet the programme target, unsurprisingly many are being created under the priority of SME support which has the greatest number of customer-focused businesses which are more reliant on labour. As a result, this is where the greatest wage increase will occur. Many of these businesses will have been affected by Covid over the past 12 months although, it is still anticipated that these outputs will be created.

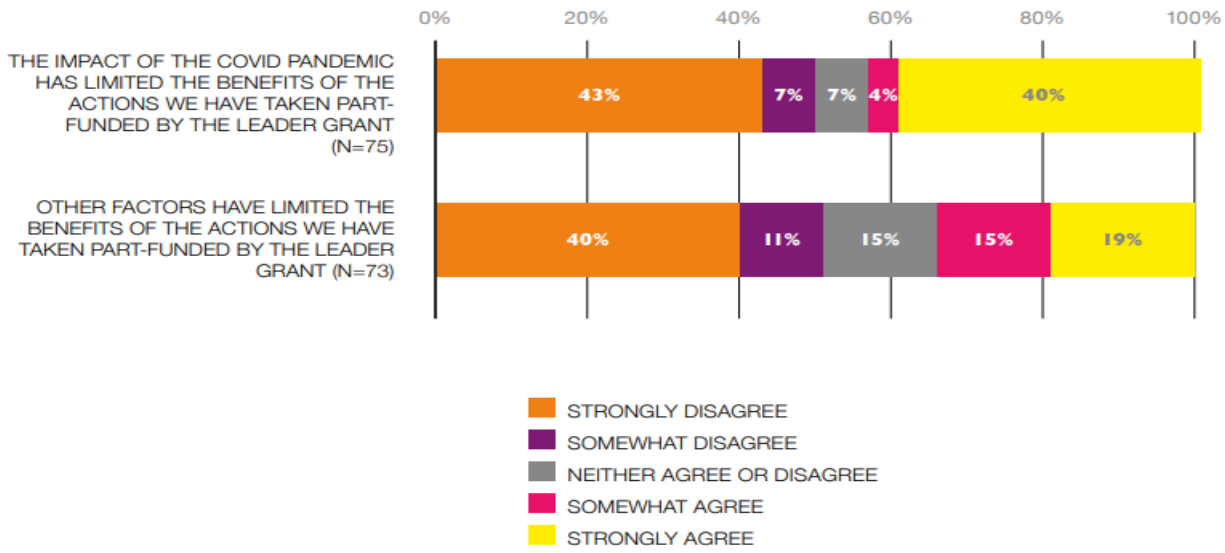
The cost per job varies significantly and is very dependent on the type of investment within each priority/sector. For example, farm productivity-based grants have focused on investments in machinery, robotics and automation which often come at a high cost whilst reducing labour. However, the nature of this machinery provides high-tech automated precision-based end results for both the livestock and arable sectors. Investing in modern agricultural machinery greatly enables increased productivity and growth of businesses due to digital data recording which enables reducing inputs and costs whilst increasing efficiencies. There are also huge environmental gains which improve soil, air and water quality when new technologies and techniques are adopted. Many of the items purchased with LEADER funding often increase innovation, growth and productivity through robotics and automation. As such, not all projects will create employment and wider benefits need to be considered. Even so, the average cost per job across all projects is £29,000.

Covid-19 and Consequences for the Project

The main consequence of Covid-19 has resulted in an extension of the programme, which has benefitted in 12 beneficiaries in Buckinghamshire being able to undertake their projects when there have been delays with supply chains and the delivery of goods. Inevitably, this has had the knock-on effect with programme management, particularly with an extended monitoring period, causing delays to the expected outputs from each project.

As the programme has such a wide remit, the effect of Covid on beneficiaries has been varied. One tourism project is known to have closed and a second is currently going through a change of ownership resulting from difficulties caused. There are, however, several beneficiaries who have benefited, particularly those involved in food retail, as there has been a significant increase in people sourcing produce locally. It is anticipated that many of the tourism projects who have been unable to operate during the pandemic will bounce back whilst overseas travel restrictions are maintained.

Many of the businesses from the agricultural sector would say that the weather and EU exit have had a larger impact on their business. However, Covid has significantly disrupted supply chains which has impacted on commodity markets and farm gate prices.



Leader and Low Carbon

One area where the LEADER programme has had significant impact is the investment in direct drills. Direct drills have a positive impact on the environment, to the extent that some experts say it could reverse climate change if they are used widely. With funding from LEADER, Gentle Farming has purchased 40 direct drills and recently launched an Agricultural Carbon Credit scheme. The scheme supports farm businesses with regenerative agriculture. Based on its average figures for the carbon credit scheme, it shows for every 1 hectare managed under regenerative techniques it predicts 3 tonnes of carbon are sequestered annually. With 40 direct drills enabling regenerative agriculture, these cover a combined area of 21,000 hectare which would total 63,000 tonnes of carbon sequestered pa. Typically, 1 hectare could yield 2-5 tonnes of carbon sequestered pa but some, including one known holding in Bucks suggest the figure is as high as 9 tonnes pa.

Other funded equipment such as variable rate technologies used in fertiliser spreaders and sprays as well as land management techniques which reduce cultivations will bring benefits to the environment. This particularly the case where artificial inputs such as sprays, fertilisers, and fuels can be reduced through precision applications.

Adopting new technologies, which enable farms to increase the amount of carbon sequestered within the soils they manage, is key when considering climate change. The soil is not yet recognised for its carbon capture capabilities, but this is likely to happen over the next 3 years with EU research projects defining a verifiable method of recording soil sequestration. This will enable certain land management techniques, through the integration of livestock and adoption of new technologies, to develop healthy soils and a better environment. With the integration of livestock also being key to increase biodiversity, it is vital that routes to market are available for sustainably produced local products.

Comments taken during a recent survey of grant beneficiaries.

"It has allowed investment into a system that we would not have been able to afford. It has improved efficiency and flexibility and given us opportunities to enter new markets."

"The building erected that came from the grant transformed my business."

Beneficiary comments made in relation to the administration of the grant were often similarly positive:

"They gave so much help, they were really good."

"All the contacts with them were excellent."

"Ngage were very good especially [Programme Manager name]."

The Next 12 Months

The focus for the next few months is to ensure the 3 final projects complete and claim their grant monies and to undertake a back dating monitoring exercise. 20 projects still require inspections, and the programme closure and archiving procedures need to be completed by December 2021.

Looking ahead, as this programme is EU funded, it remains to be seen if a similar programme will follow. As it is such a diverse funding programme, there will be a considerable gap left in the rural economy for Buckinghamshire businesses looking to develop and grow. We are developing a Rural Development Plan to build on the success of the LEADER programme, which is being designed to support business who have the ability to grow the economy and make a considerable contribution to net zero carbon targets.

There is the developing Bucks Food Partnership which aims to support the local food economy with production and processing to food waste and consumers. With the right messages and targeting this is something which will benefit the population of Buckinghamshire and provide exciting opportunities for business, consumer and the environment.

MD Ngage

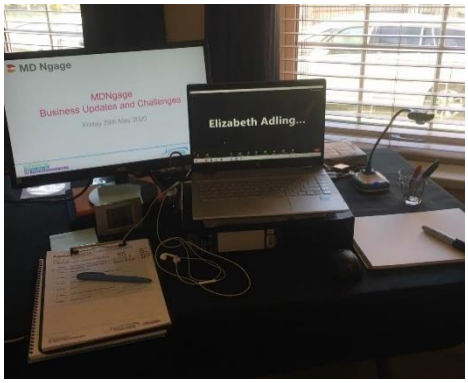
Professional Development for Business Leaders

MD Ngage provides business leaders with ‘the board they can’t afford’. It is a leadership programme which, as well as incorporating expert speakers, also allows business leaders to take time out from the day-to-day running of their business to explore new ideas, tackle challenging issues and grow as leaders, all with the support of their peers.

From its first inception in 2017, the MD Ngage programme is now in its fourth year of delivering peer-to-peer networking and support for business leaders with growth ambitions. Two groups were merged at the start of the 2020/21 year in October 2020 as, due to pressures added to businesses from the pandemic, some former members were unable to renew their membership. There is currently one group running, called the Momentum Group which consists of a total of 12 members and a Chairperson.

A film showcasing our MD Ngage programme can be viewed online **here >**

What are the benefits of the MD Ngage programme?



During the pandemic, the full benefit of being a member of the MD Ngage group was demonstrated as participants regularly connected between meetings, using their expertise to support other members of the group. WhatsApp groups that were in place for both groups became valuable tools as members offered their support to their peers within their field of expertise e.g., solicitors, accountants, commercial property agents were able to quickly interpret messages coming out through government and offer support on questions raised.

To add a further level of support during COVID-19, the group Chair held additional weekly online ‘check-in’ sessions with the group which were reported to be extremely valuable during the fast-changing climate.

During the 2020/21 programme, members were allowed to invite guests from their business to the speaker sessions. This has enabled the intelligence gained to be shared with another member of the business, allowing further discussion after the event and possible implementation within the organisation.

The surveys undertaken after each event have shown that 93.67% of members rated MD Ngage ‘Excellent’ overall up to the end of March 2021.

Future Plans for MD Ngage

The current MD Ngage Momentum Group will be continuing when the new year commences in October 2021. There will be follow up with any potential new members to decide whether to add to the existing group or start a new group bringing the number of groups back to a total of 2.

Peer Networks Programme

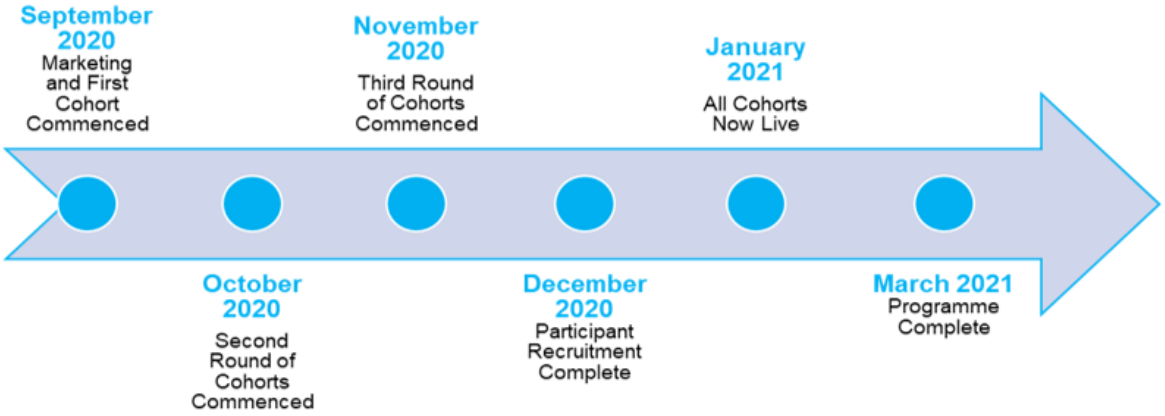
Peer Networks is a national initiative with the long-term aim of reducing the UK productivity gap by helping business leaders find practical solutions to strategic and operational challenges.

Funded by the Department of Business and International Trade, the target was to assemble 10 cohorts consisting of 8-11 Buckinghamshire based business owners or senior managers. The cohorts benefitted from nine 2-hour sessions every fortnight to learn from each other and were led by an experienced facilitator. Each participant of the programme also received up to 3.5 hours of one-to-one support.

Project Achievements

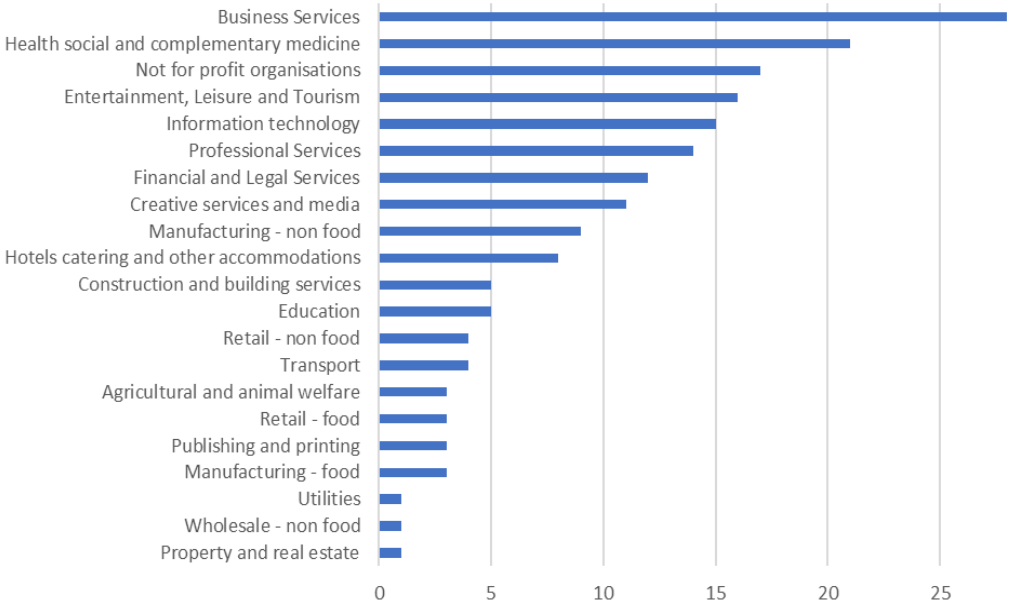
Over the 8 months that Peer Networks was running, the programme managed to fulfil all targets. Ten cohorts were set up and both aspects of the programme delivery (networking sessions and one to one support) were completed before the end of the financial year.

Project timeline



The programme received a total of 184 expressions of interest (EOI) from 21 different sectors.

Total EOIs by Sector

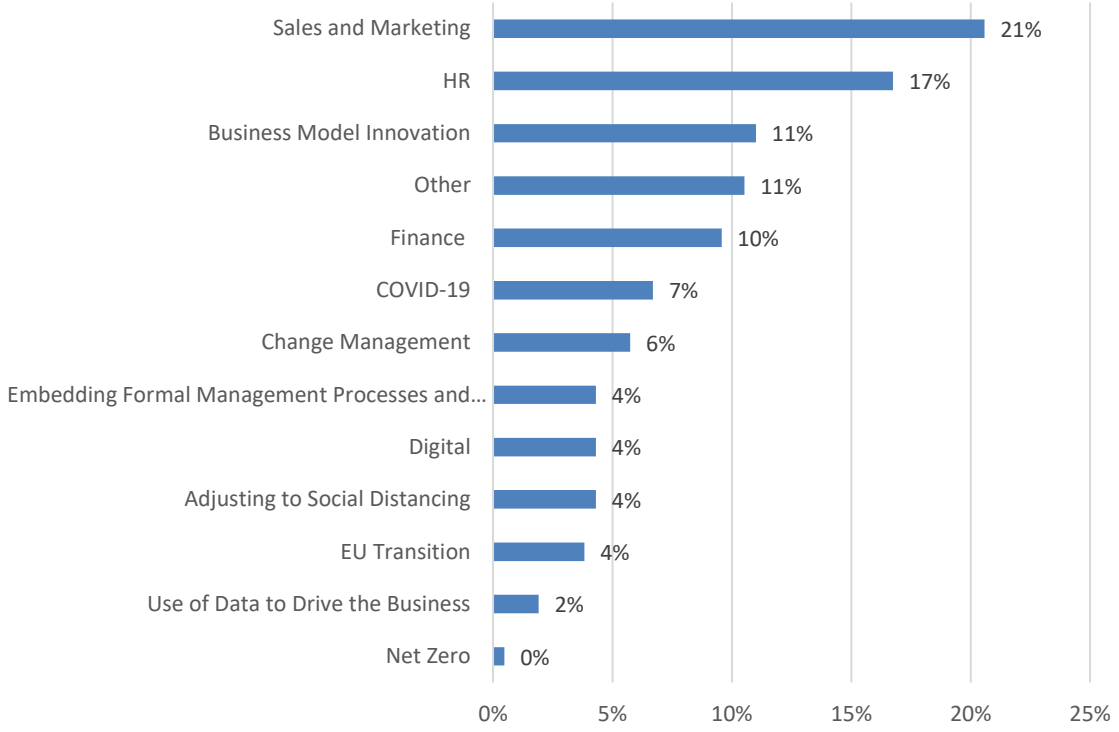


The majority of the EOIs came from BBF marketing - email campaigns and telemarketing.

Most of the cohorts comprised businesses from a range of sectors, seen in the graph above. These cohorts were divided and arranged by job title. For example, senior managers were allocated to one cohort and managing directors and owners to another. This enabled participants to be able to relate to the same issues and concerns shared within the group. The programme also allocated some of the cohorts to be filled with sector specific businesses such as tourism, hospitality and caregiving cohort due to them being more impacted than others. A social enterprise and charities cohort was created in the same way and proved very popular.

Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Cohort 5	Cohort 6	Cohort 7	Cohort 8	Cohort 9	Cohort 10
• Tourism and Hospitality Sector	• Managing Directors and Owners	• Social Enterprise Sector and Charities	• Managing Directors and Owners	• Care Sector	• Managing Directors and Owners	• Managing Directors and Owners	• Senior Managers	• Senior Managers	• Managing Directors and Owners

During each session, participants were invited to discuss up to three 'hot topics'. The graph below shows the hot topic categories, and which were most popular throughout the programme.



Surveys were an integral part of the Peer Networks programme. The funder stipulated that an onboarding survey was to be completed by all participants, alongside another survey that was to be filled out by the participants after each session. This survey monitored the participants satisfaction with the session.

Covid-19 and Consequences for the Project

The consequences of Covid-19 were certainly felt throughout the programme and caused some positives and negatives for the delivery and commitment from the participants.

- The programme was delivered online using zoom which made it simpler for participants to attend. However, despite this, some participants were still unable to fully commit to the 18 hours of networking sessions. This led to dropouts and occasional poor attendance by some participants.
- Whilst the sector cohorts were set up with the idea to allow sectors hard hit by the pandemic to join together, these cohorts unfortunately had the worst attendance rates.
- Some business owners were unable to properly make use of the one-to-one support due to time constraints citing that their focus had to be on working, not having advice.
- The pandemic and the uncertainty it caused made recruitment to the programme particularly difficult. The last 2 cohorts were postponed until the beginning of January 2021 due to the second national lockdown in November.

- The programme became an escape from the pandemic. Participants found a supportive atmosphere where businesses from completely different sectors could come together and relate to each other on talking points and hot topics.

Participant Feedback

Keith Jenkins, Westwood Rock

As a direct result of the course, our business is now collaborating with one of the other group member's business. So, ignoring all the other benefits (which are many) from the peer networking, participating has directly provided us with business! Thank you for a fruitful programme.

I have found the groups to be really warm and engaging throughout. I have struggled to commit the time as a part time employee but have got value from all of the sessions I have attended.

Rachel Covey, The Pace Centre

I have to say I've been so impressed with BBF and so grateful for all the help and advice we have been given so far.

Jan Jenkins, Room 54

I just wanted to say thank you for your time and efforts over the programme! I have taken so much from it, both personally and professionally.
The businesses that were put together were brilliant in helping one another in different ways. Everyone's experience shone through and respected each other's time and comments.

Anna Brown, Walk This Way Podiatry

The Next 12 Months

Buckinghamshire Business First has secured additional funding to continue with another 8 cohorts of Peer Networks and will run until March 2022.

4. Workshops and Events

Buckinghamshire Business First delivered or supported 307 events between April 2020 – March 2021.

This has been a year of online events with no events taking place on a face-to-face basis. Adapting to new methods of delivery and, at the height of the pandemic, opening the doors to all members posting events – Buckinghamshire Business First has continued to deliver the high quality and variety of events that members have come to expect. Recorded webinar's can be viewed by members online here.

A new series of Buckinghamshire Business Briefing events were launched monthly to address the lack of face-to-face networking opportunities for businesses and to provide a platform to update businesses on the latest support available to them. Feedback has been 100% positive from those registering for this event...

> It was great to meet you on Friday. I really enjoyed the networking session; I thought the content was fantastic with some very interesting discussions! Looking forward to the next one, and to speaking again soon. **Sam Fogwill, PragmatiQ Solutions**

> It was a really positive environment to be in. Good to meet Philippa. She facilitated well, stimulated conversation and ideas. I appreciated the stats and information about Bucks at the beginning and the signposting to other useful events. **Siobhan Smullen, MS**

Masterclasses to support the Tourism & Hospitality Sector. These groups were invaluable in supporting this sector which was hit so hard by the pandemic.

In addition, some other stand out events included…

Demystifying Apprenticeships to support businesses with apprenticeships and taking on a new apprentice…

> BBF have offered great support and guidance. I have gained customers as a result of our shared relationship with BBF – **Steven Bryant, Aston Cleaning Commercial Ltd**

Virtual Advice sessions to support businesses through one-to-one meetings with our Business Advisers…

I was really impressed with the level of support and the ability to book a meeting the next day**. - Susan Nash**

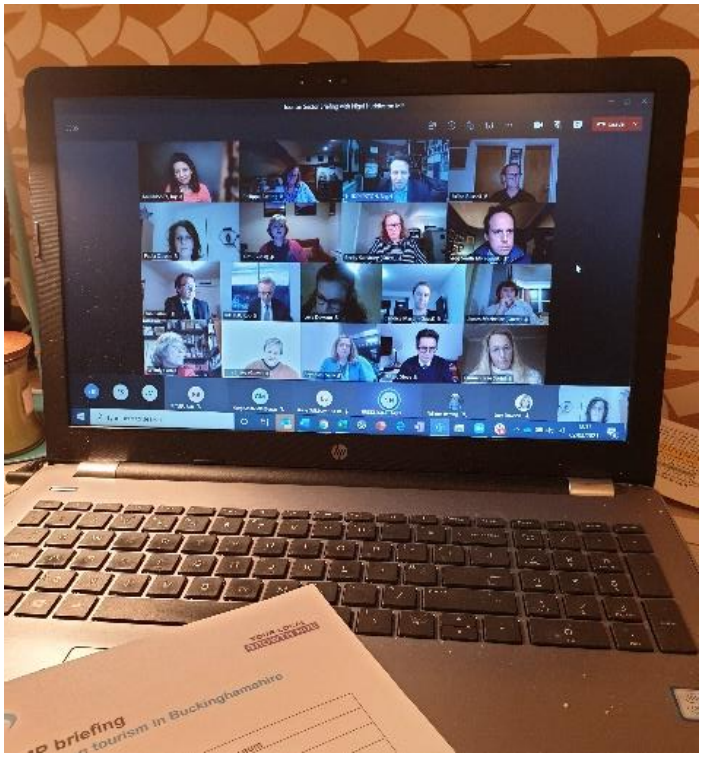
Justin from Jam Vans (based in Herts) got 4 house move bookings on the back of our

Build Back Better & Greener: Tackling Climate Change Makes Good Business in July 2020

MPs Briefing sessions covered the following topics including:

- Buckinghamshire Post Covid Workplace: What will normal look like?
- The impact of the pandemic on Buckinghamshire's key sectors
- The Impact of the Pandemic on Tourism and Hospitality in Buckinghamshire
- Opportunities & Challenges for the Med-Tech Sector in Buckinghamshire.

Businesses had the opportunity to speak directly. One such Briefing resulted in a Ministerial meeting with Nigel Huddleston MP – Minister for Tourism and Sport.

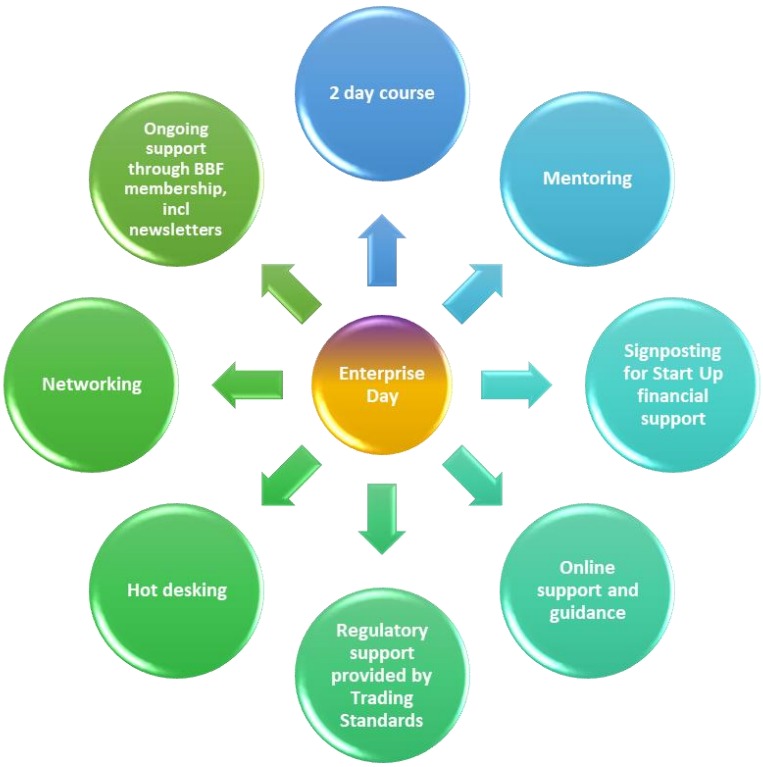


BBF's first online Annual General Meeting attracted 135 members for an evening of 'Thinking Outside of the Box' and networking on a new online platform that we were trialling. The AGM provided a fully interactive experience for members and allowed more opportunities for businesses to connect and network. The AGM attracted businesses who have not attended events in the past – so the plan is to investigate a new Hybrid event for this year's AGM with a mix of on and offline.

5. Business Start Ups

Be Your Own Boss was established in 2018, to offer professional support and guidance to individuals looking to start a business in Buckinghamshire. Offering a guided start-up programme to increase an individual's chances of success. Funding has been provided by four housing associations and all four district councils.

The project provides a mix of the following and uptake of each activity is based on the individual needs of each candidate:

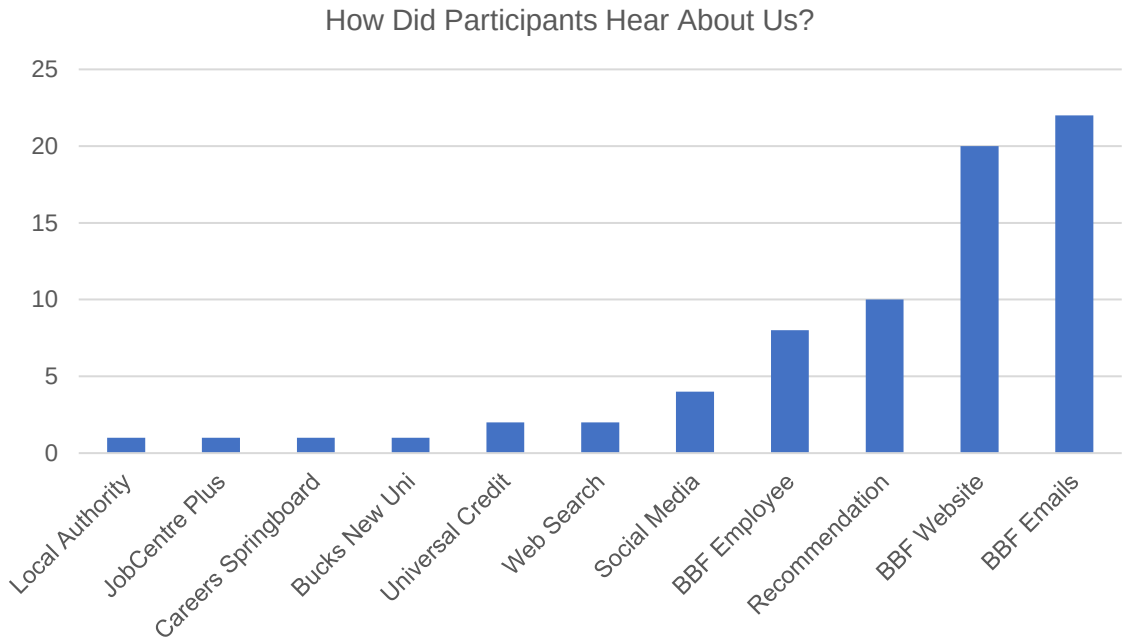


Project Achievements

Throughout the pandemic, Be Your Own Boss made the switch to online workshops and was delivered via virtual media throughout the year. Enterprise days and 2 day workshops, saw increasing interest throughout the year.

	2019/2020	2020/2021
Number of new Start Up Members introduced to the BBF network	134	195
Number of attendees at the Be Your Own Boss Enterprise Days	64	78
Number of attendees at the Two Day Workshop	40	49
Number of pre starts taking up a Business Review	5	8
Number of people registering a business/start trading during the programme period	15	TBC

The majority of participants found the project through Buckinghamshire Business First's advertising and marketing. However, promotion by other stakeholders is also evident.



The programme has benefited from many guest speakers including:

Chris Shennan – APS Accountancy	Dave Richards – Talks About Value Limited	Dave Forrest – Marketing Consultant
James Johnson – Hillier Hopkins	Philip Le Shirley – Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards	Andy Scott - Photohello

Covid-19 and Consequences for the Project

Virtual delivery was met with a positive response and greater benefits for some. However, getting new ideas adopted has been identified as an issue eg the Business Model Canvas. Attendees gelled just as well as when the workshops were face to face and members of each workshop have continued to keep in touch post programmes.

> I really liked the fact this course was online, with the next course also being online too. It made things so much easier with no travel or parking worries. The use of time feels much more focused and efficient as well. - Elizabeth Bond, The Smart Stitcher

Very easy and smooth to book and attend. The small number of attendees meant we could ask plenty of questions and go into a bit of detail on our businesses. All the presenters were very welcoming, friendly, and inclusive, it felt as though they were all really interested in helping us. Toby Offen - Customer Experience Consulting Limited

Covid had an impact on the attendance. The various Covid restrictions have inevitably impacted the participants' drive to start their business. However, low attendance numbers often benefitted participants.

Customer Satisfaction

From start to finish, this was a really valuable workshop. Presenters answered all our questions, often tailoring scenarios/solutions to meet individual participants needs. The balance of sessions and breaks - together with the time-keeping - worked perfectly. Claire Warburton

I can't believe I had access to this kind event for free. Lots of it was beneficial but for me the highlight was the section where Grae went over the Business Model Canvas in detail. This is an invaluable tool for business planning. Jo Sutherland, Getlocalee.com

Great to have the online course and be active whilst in lock-down. Honest, frank and informative. Full of help and advice. No jargon! Beth Foster – Rets of Design

The Next 12 Months

Be Your Own Boss has now received funding from 7 of the Community Boards starting March 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic, has resulted in many individuals considering setting up their own business and starting work for themselves. This is evidenced by the increase in Start-Up BBF membership, increasing by 46% in the last financial year. The numbers attending the workshops has also increased by 22%.

The general view is that when furlough ends, there will likely be more redundancies and another increase in interest in people looking to run their own business.

6. Covid-19 Local Support

Business Recovery Fund

The Buckinghamshire Recovery Investment Fund, created by Bucks LEP, Buckinghamshire Council and Buckinghamshire Business First, was a £2 million grant fund used to support businesses in the county affected by Covid-19. £1.6 million of the fund was allocated to provide grants for businesses in Buckinghamshire.

The grants provided immediate support for local businesses, whose cash-flow and future viability had been adversely impacted by Covid-19. The funds aim was to provide grants to businesses who were most likely to create new jobs, products, or services and to survive the pandemic.

The grants provided were between £3,000 and £120,000 with a match ratio of £1 matched investment by the business for every £3 grant, with the aspiration that projects contributed towards any/all the following:

- New income streams / product development.
- Improvements in productivity / profitability.
- Safeguarding jobs.
- New job creation.
- Accelerated COVID-19 recovery.
- Future resilience.

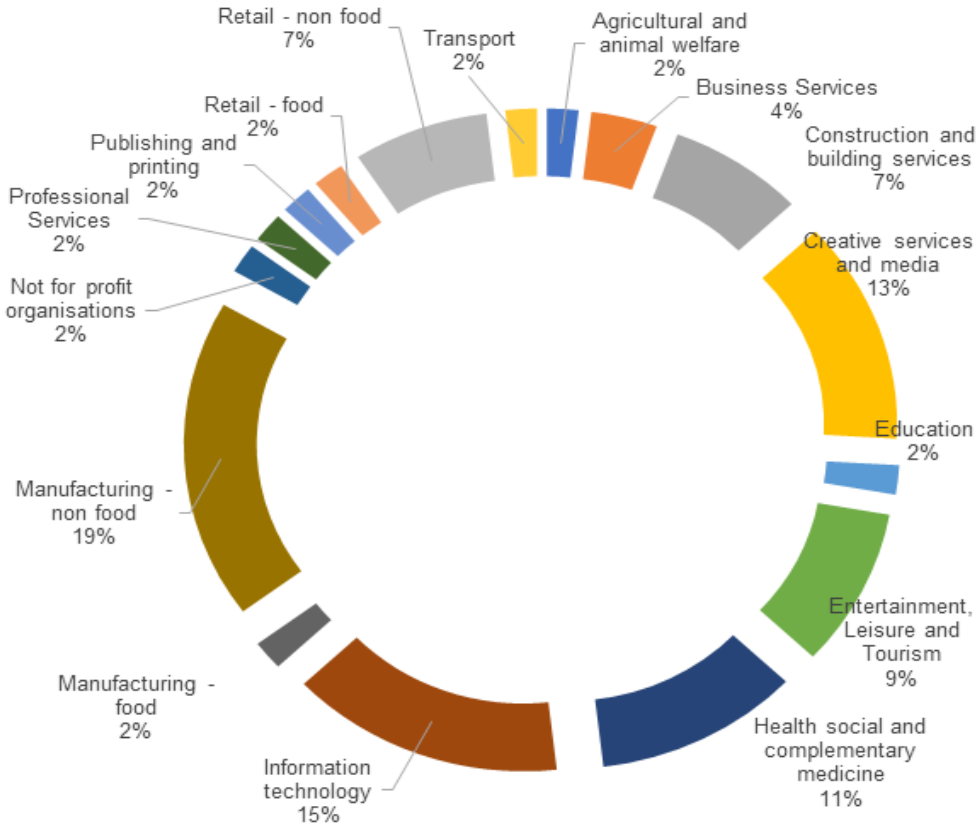
Project Achievements

The project had an exceptionally high demand for the grants from the outset. The project and delivery team communicated well, overcame the challenges associated with this high demand and successfully assisted businesses in a methodical, timely fashion.

Total grants paid by Mar 2021	Total ££ paid out by Mar 2021	Matched funding created by Mar 2021
59	£1,495,359.36	£655,772.67

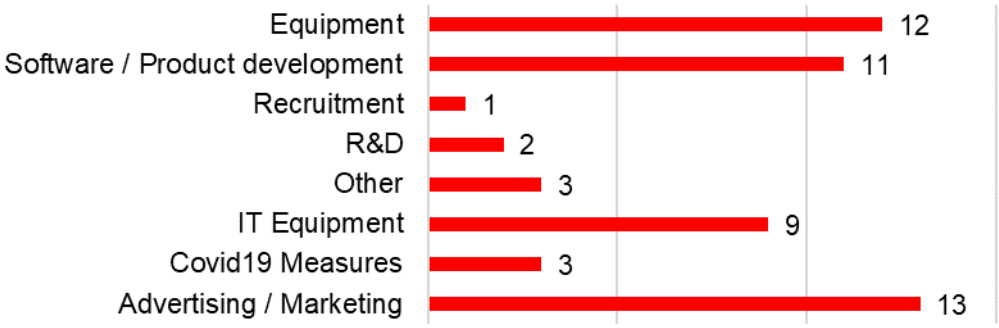
A wide range of 16 different sectors benefitted from the grants and the heat map shows an even spread of grants awarded throughout the county.

Grants Awarded – Companies by Sector

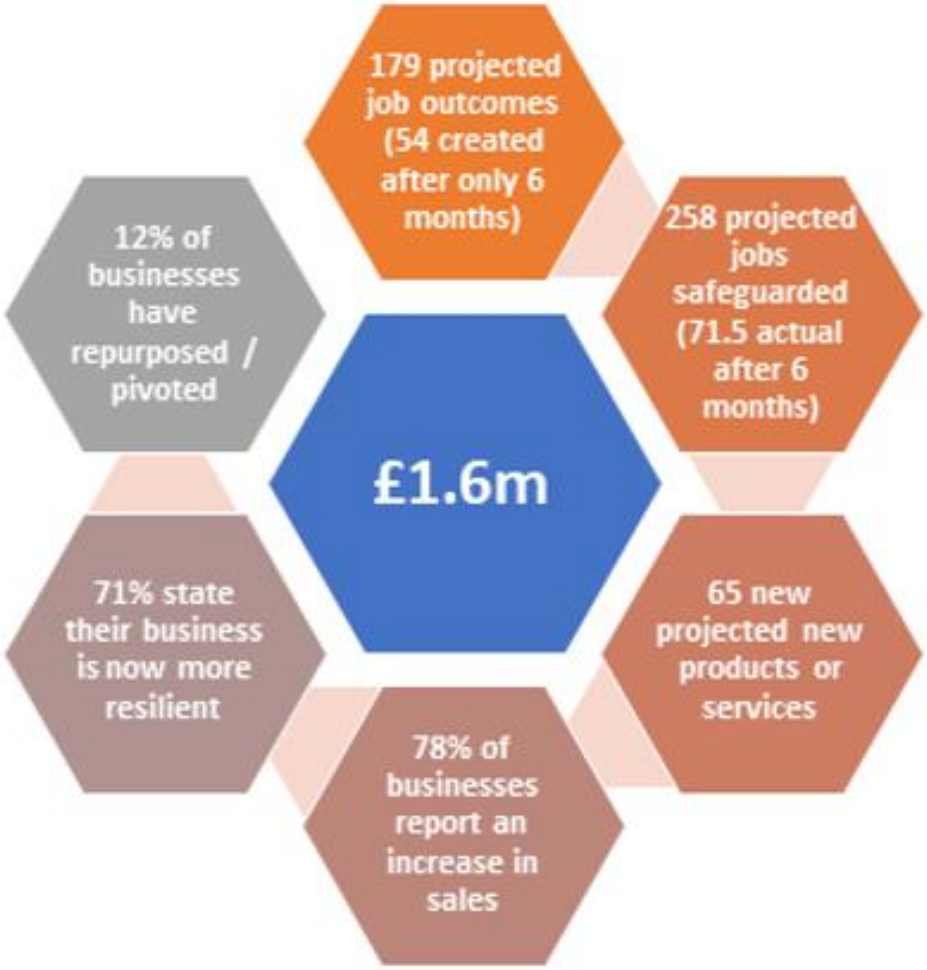


Grants Paid – Map of Trading Addresses of Grantees

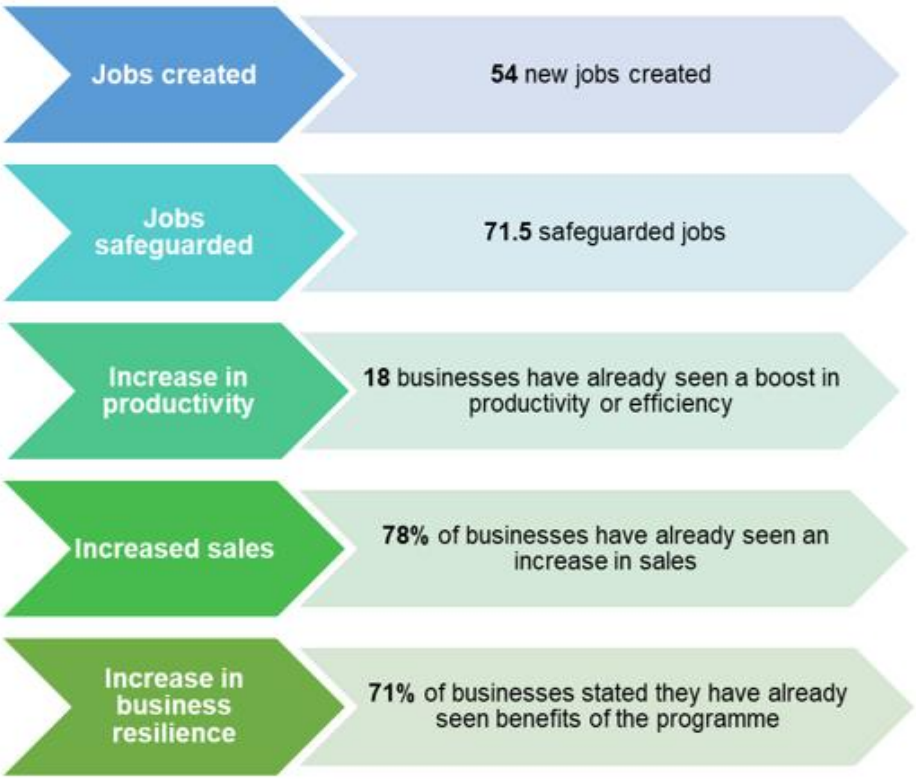
Many businesses used the funding to invest in marketing activity to improve business growth. Funding has also been invested in advertising and marketing (27%) and equipment (22%).



The achievements of the project can be seen through the project outcomes. The outcomes were recorded based on new jobs, safeguarded jobs and new products and services which reflect the criteria on which the grants were offered.

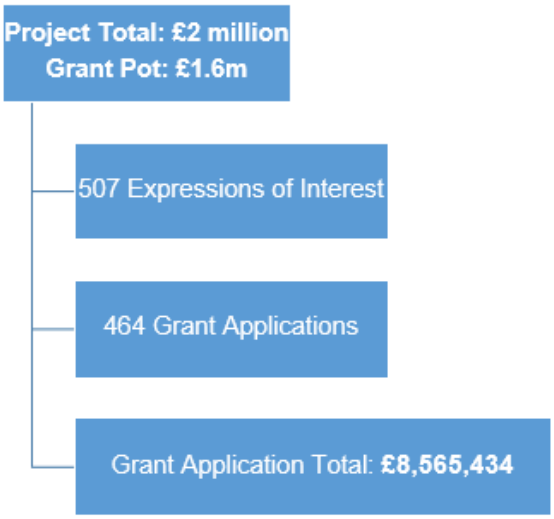


An evaluation of the project, conducted 6 months on from grants awarded, highlights the impact of the grants to date. The evaluation provided the figures below and it is expected that these numbers will continue to grow over time.



Covid- 19 and Consequences for the Project

Although the project was established to help businesses stay afloat and invest in their recovery post Covid-19, it was inevitable that Covid-19 itself would be a factor that contributed to the consequences of the project. The project was initially heavily oversubscribed and was a lifeline for many to ensure survival through the pandemic. Due to the high volume of expressions of interest and with the total for the grant applications being £6,965,434 over budget, it was difficult to turn down so many businesses from the grant opportunity.



Success Stories

"BRIF was a holistic finance solution that made the business comfortable and confident in undertaking the project without concerns over future repayment commitments."

"It has transformed the business and they are continuing to invest in this transformation which was kick-started by the project".

"It has taken a lot of worry away and the staff's confidence returned after implementing the project. It has made a very real difference to us".

Local Authority Discretionary Grants

The Local Authority Discretionary Grant (LAD) was set up in June 2020 with the aim of distributing £4.55m to the local economy through Discretionary Grants of up to £10,000. These grants were to cover business property costs for a period of 6 months. The grant scheme was administered by Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF), in collaboration with Buckinghamshire Council. The role of BBF was to receive and carry out all initial applications, alongside evidence and eligibility checks, to then recommend businesses for payment back to the council. The council verified the recommended grant to assure that all details were correct and that applicants had not previously received a Covid-19 related grant.

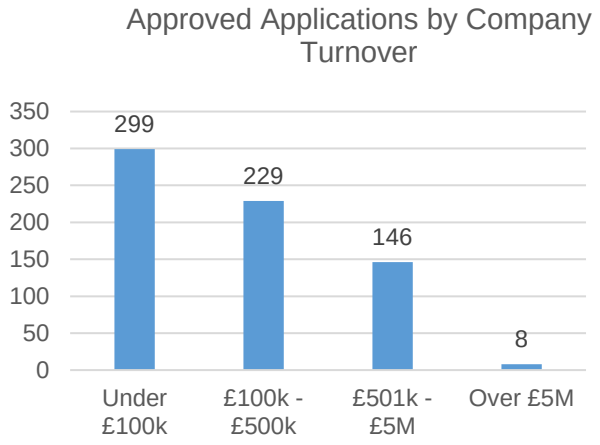
In order to achieve this, a new team was recruited and 3 x 0.5 fte and 5 fte employees including an Administrator and Project Manager were deployed.

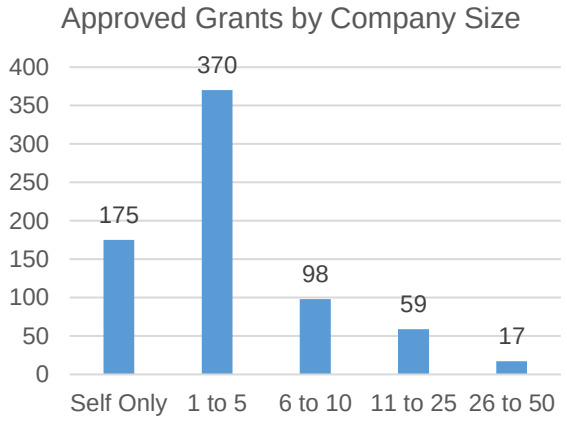
Process

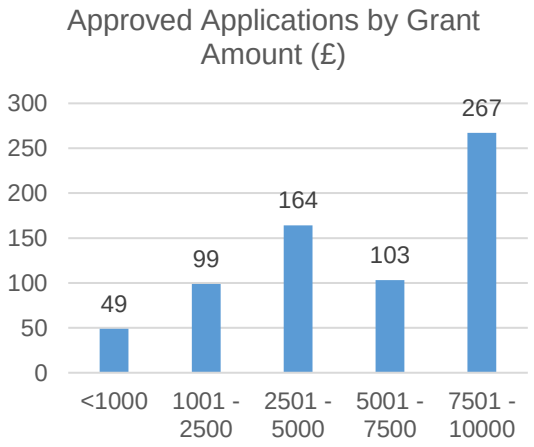
The conversion ratio of expressions of interest to application was very low, approx. 28%. This was a surprise as up until this point, the demand had been so high but on investigation was due to the greater detail required in the grant application process. Due to a lack of sufficient applications, a second round of applications was opened to the public on the 7th of August and remained open until the government mandated closure date of 28th of August. A total number of applications of 847 was received for the project.

Applications received	870
No of applications recommended for approval	728
£££s in applications approved	£4,204,668
Applications recommended for rejection	87
£££s in applications rejected	£632,704
Shortfall	£95,332

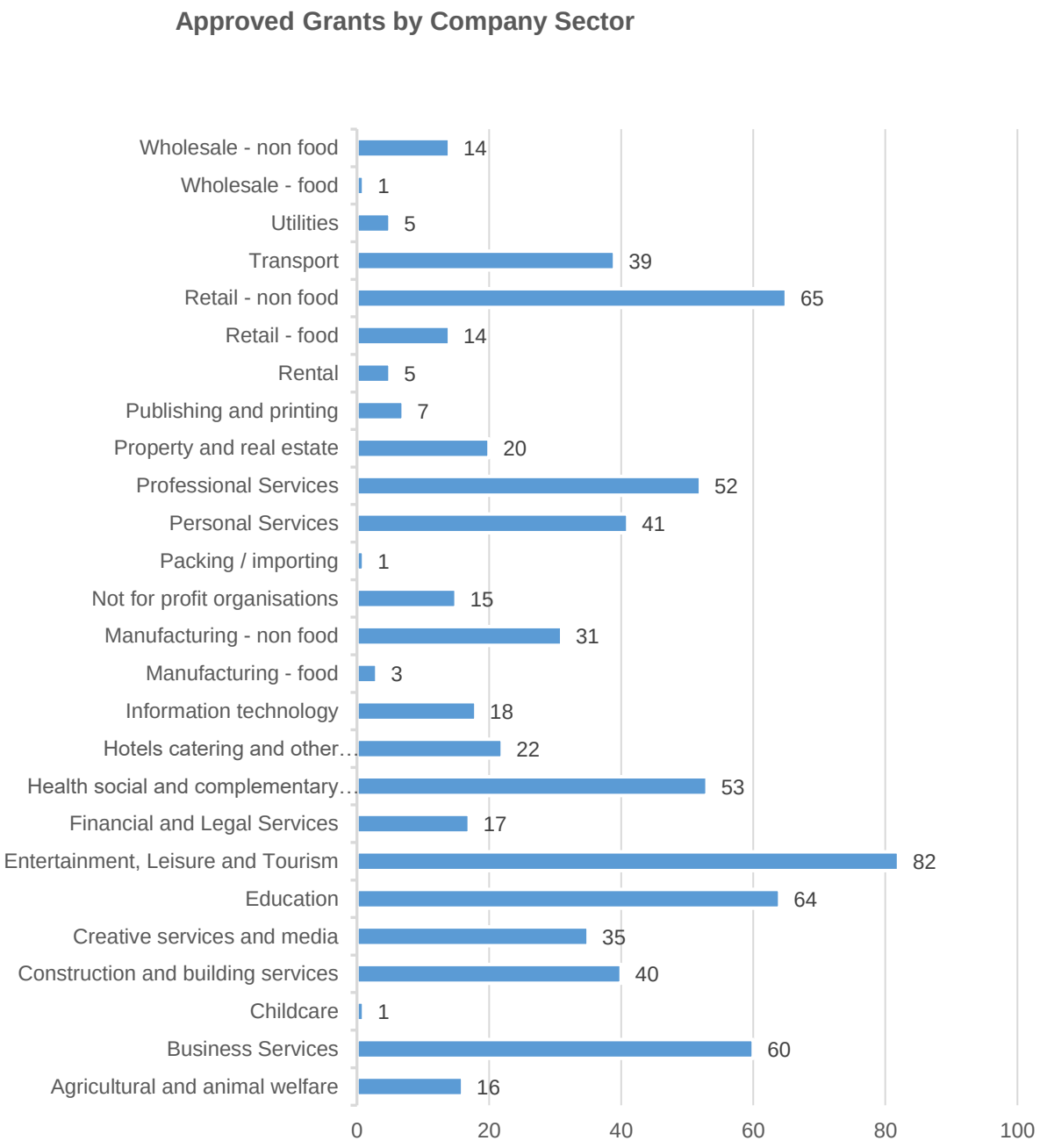
The following graphs show that it was mainly micros business that applied for the grants. It can also be seen that most of the grants paid were between £7,500-£10,000 which unsurprisingly with businesses losing money in the pandemic was at the top end of the maximum available grant.







It is also not surprisingly that the two sectors with the most approved grants were Entertainment, Leisure and Tourism and Retail – see next page.



Project Achievements

- ✓ Overall speed of project setup
- ✓ The level of robustness applied to evidence gathering and assurance limited the amount of fraudulent activity being recommended for payment.
- ✓ Resilience of the team working hard each day to approve as many applications as possible.

Customer Satisfaction

Just wanted to say a huge thank you for your help and guidance with the discretionary grant. The money was transferred into our account this morning!! Hooray - what a relief!! This is really going to help a lot. I really appreciate all of your help and of the Bucks council for making this happen.

I just wanted to say thank you for all your help with the application, your patience and understanding. Simply…. THANK YOU.

I must say that Lily has been an absolute pleasure, very professional and helpful. I was a nightmare as I did not know what evidence you required but she has been so patient with me and explained everything thoroughly. Thank you so much.

7. Visitor Economy

An Overview

The tourism industry has been among the sectors hardest hit by COVID. The impact was seen quickly and any recovery during 2020 was patchy at best. Forecasts indicate that recovery will be slow to start with but gradually picking up in the summer and autumn of 2021. Inbound demand is likely to be the slowest to recover and the short to medium term prospects for domestic tourism recovery are better with full recovery likely in 2022.

ONS Impact of Coronavirus on Tourism Businesses

GDP figures have been released which show the severe impact that Covid-19 continues to have on the UK tourism industry, compared with other sectors of the economy. The figures show that, compared to February 2020:

- The air transport sector is down by 91.6%
- Travel agencies and tour operators are down by 87%
- The accommodation sector is down by 73.9%
- Creative, arts and entertainment is down by 59.1%
- Food and beverage is down 51.3%
- Museums, Libraries and other cultural activities is down by 48%

For the visitor economy locally, it has been a challenging year due to the pandemic. The focus for Visit Buckinghamshire in response to the virus has been about providing business support, advice and grants to tourism and hospitality businesses to ensure they can recover and rebuild. The usual Visit Buckinghamshire activity which includes marketing, product development, attending exhibitions and networking events etc. has sadly taken a back seat this year.

Despite a reasonable buoyant summer trading season, the second and third lockdowns were very challenging for businesses. Many staff went on furlough this time round, some just shut down for winter all together and others said trade was very slow as the winter months took hold.

Here are some visitor numbers from our attractions locally which demonstrate the effect of the pandemic on their business:

Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway (pax journeys)
2019/2020 – 63,306
2020/2021 – 6,032

Roald Dahl Museum (thousands of visitors)
2019/2020 – 68,348 of which school visitors 12,830
2020/2021 – 1,563 of which school visits 0

Waddesdon Manor (thousands of visitors)
2019 - 375,874
2020 – 262,849

Bucks County Museum (thousands of visitors)
2019/2020 – 85,981

2020/2021 – 407

Bekonscot Model Village (thousands of visitors)
2019 – 146,247
2020 – 74, 727

Businesses have been very grateful for the Covid grants, the furlough scheme, business rates & VAT relief and access to CBILS and BB loans. However, the concern now is paying off the debt that has accumulated over the year with the limited income that has been generated. Also, with social distance measures in place, it is very hard for some to make money.

Visit Buckinghamshire membership sales and renewals have also suffered, with no income generated in 2020. As part of the support package for Visit Bucks members, free membership upgrades to a stakeholder have been offered. As the visitor economy reopens gradually, hopefully membership sales will start to recover from June 2021.

Despite many businesses in the visitor economy largely closed for 2020/2021, visitor traffic to the Visit Bucks website has grown steadily, as has social media.

Achievements

Business Support
Since Covid took effect in March 2020, the focus for Visit Buckinghamshire has been supporting the visitor economy. A programme of support was created, which was a mix of existing programmes and the creation of new ones. This article from the BBF website offers a precis of what support was available.

Be The Business
January 2020 was the start of a tourism & hospitality series of masterclasses, run in partnership with BBF, Visit Bucks and Be The Business. Two well attended (50+ delegates) masterclasses were run in January and February, sadly the March event was cancelled, and the programme paused until October 2020. The 6 x weekly 45-minute events went on-line, the content tweaked to reflect the 'new normal', and sadly were not as well attended as the in-person events that had been planned.

The programme also included two Peer to Peer network cohorts which moved on-line once the pandemic hit. Concluding in October, these have been a great success and have helped those who attended to pivot their business because of collaborations, product diversification and new product development as follows:

- Orchard View Farm: BB Loan to fund new campsite and has created collaborations with local companies.
- Chadwell Hill Farm: B&B had to close in the first lockdown, and in response to great outdoors created a glamping site.
- Lata Lata provided food for local football team whilst in training and has since secured the contract for providing the catering for the corporate hospitality boxes.

Proactive Calls to Businesses
From November to March, Visit Buckinghamshire have been pro-actively calling every visitor economy business on the BBF database, including Visit Bucks members. The purpose of the calls was to flag up EU support that is available, check the business is okay, has applied for the government grants, and to signpost them to further advice and support available. The feedback has been very positive, with the majority appreciative of the pro-active call.

Over 792 calls were made to businesses in the visitor economy in Bucks. Over 550 of the calls resulted in detailed business advice and support of more than 30 minutes on the phone, or a separate 1-2-1 call with an advisor.

Furthermore, over 155 new businesses signed up to the Visit Bucks website, with many still to sign up.

Restart Grants
Early September the Government launched the Kickstart Grants with money ring fenced for the tourism and hospitality sector. A monumental task to process these, but 34 Restart Grants were approved for the visitor economy with a grant value of £89,632.70, with the average grant value £2636.25. The ringfenced target was £87,500 for this sector so the target was exceeded.

- In the absence of Brewery Tours, Malt the Brewery created a 'Tour in a Box'.
- Funded play equipment to attract more of the family market at Hill Farm & Orchard
- Protective screens for the Orchestra at Garsington Opera
- A marquee which could house Father Christmas and associated activity in a socially distanced manner at Chinnor & Princes Risborough
- Other support funded website upgrades, SEO support, equipment such as ovens, vacuum pack machines and outdoor cover and equipment for pubs, café's and restaurants.

Growth Grants and Advice
With an appetite from business owners to access business support and grants, Visit Bucks is very fortunate to be able to offer further assistance through the ERDF funded growth programme. Grants of up to £2,500 have been awarded, or 12 hours of free business advice offered.

Visitor economy businesses to have gone through the programme include: Masons Minibus & Coach hire, Chiltern Brewery, Rumsey's Chocolateries, Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway and The Carter Holiday to name a few.

BEIS Peer Network
BBF have been running the BEIS Peer Network programme, with over 100 businesses signed up to the series. One of the groups was specific to the 'Visitor Economy' sector with 11 Visit Bucks Members on the course. There were also a few businesses who joined the more generic business focus groups too. There were 20 businesses in total who went through this programme from the visitor economy.

Other Activity

MPs Roundtable

In early March there was a Tourism & Hospitality focused MPs Roundtable with Buckinghamshire's MPs. Personal invites were sent out to 15 key businesses in Bucks, with a representative from the Hotels, Museums, Theatre and hospitality sector invited to speak to about the impact of the pandemic on their sector and to highlight specific issues facing their businesses. The event concluded with a Q&A session for all those attending. More information can be found here.

As luck would have it, for the second time in one month, Visit Buckinghamshire members within the tourism and hospitality sector were invited to speak directly with MPs to discuss the support they need to survive and thrive beyond the pandemic, including Nigel Huddleston MP – Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Arts, Heritage and Tourism. More information can be found here.

Explore GB

This is a travel trade 'Meet the Buyer' event, which is held every year, the 4-day event was delivered on-line. Visit Bucks met with over 30 UK and International travel trade organisations, these are the businesses who bring the tourists into the county either as part of a group, a conference, special interest group, or the independent traveller. These operators are planning their programme for 2022 and 2023 now.

Visit England Funding

Visit Buckinghamshire applied and were successful for two rounds of funding from Visit England, the national tourist board. The money was provided on the basis that the Visit Bucks team continued to offer guidance and support to their members throughout the pandemic. The second tranche of money also included an amount which could be used to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Visit Bucks, the Destination Management Organisation.

8. Low Carbon Workspaces

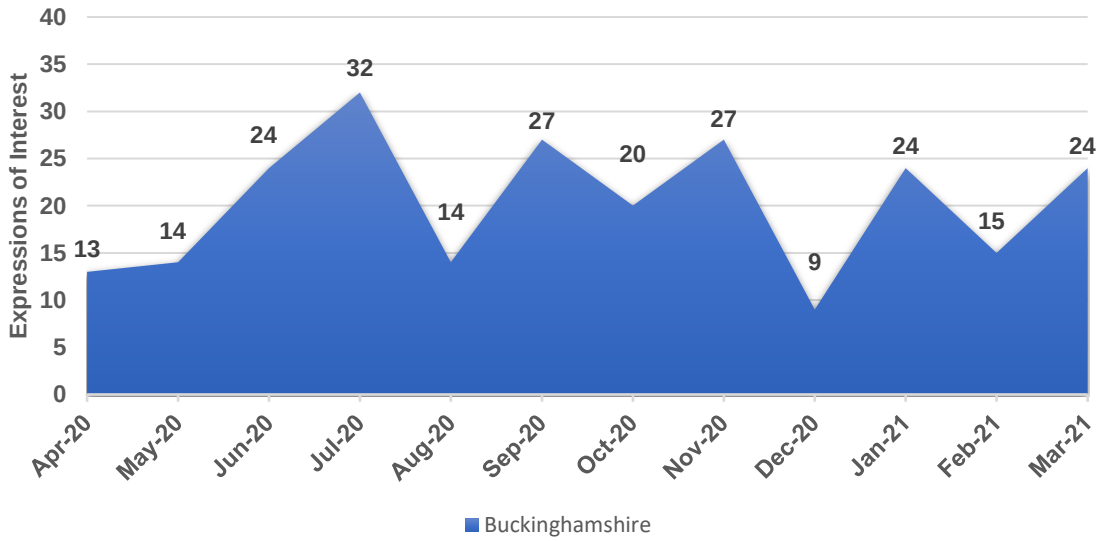
Low Carbon Workspaces offers small and medium-sized businesses in Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, and Berkshire grants of between £1,000 and £5,000 to cover up to a third of the cost of installing resource efficiency measures, and thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

A year in summary:

- ✓ The launch of Phase 2 of the LCW programme, providing a further £570,000 in Buckinghamshire, following the overwhelming success of Phase 1 (2017-2019).
- ✓ The programme has seen a significant increase in solar-funded projects compared to Phase 1. As solar has a traditionally longer ROI, this demonstrates the long-term confidence applicants have in their own prospects. 2020-21 has seen 1 in 5 applications for solar.
- ✓ Virtual site visits / green diagnostics were offered to potential applicants, ensuring SMEs still had bespoke environmental advice, whilst mitigating the health implications of physical visits throughout the lockdown.
- ✓ An optimistic outlook for the proceeding months, with January to March 2021 showing positive signs of business recovery.
- ✓ Recognising that low carbon technology suppliers/installers are a strong referrer, LCW have increased the number of suppliers on its Supplier directory in a 12-month period from 70 to 155.
- ✓ Building social media presence in a post-COVID-19 world is seen as a key channel to connect the scheme to eligible businesses. Low Carbon's LinkedIn has seen its followers increase from less than 100 in January to nearly 300 by the end of March 2021.

Listed Supplier' footer for installers / providers of Low Carbon technologies

Graph showing expressions of interest in Buckinghamshire 2020-2021



The graph outlines expressions of interest for the programme. As confidence grows, through removal of lockdown restrictions and vaccine rollout, so too have EOIs. March 2021, saw the largest number received throughout phase 2. Next year, it will be important that LCW maintains this growth and convert EOIs to applications.

How Funding is Being Applied

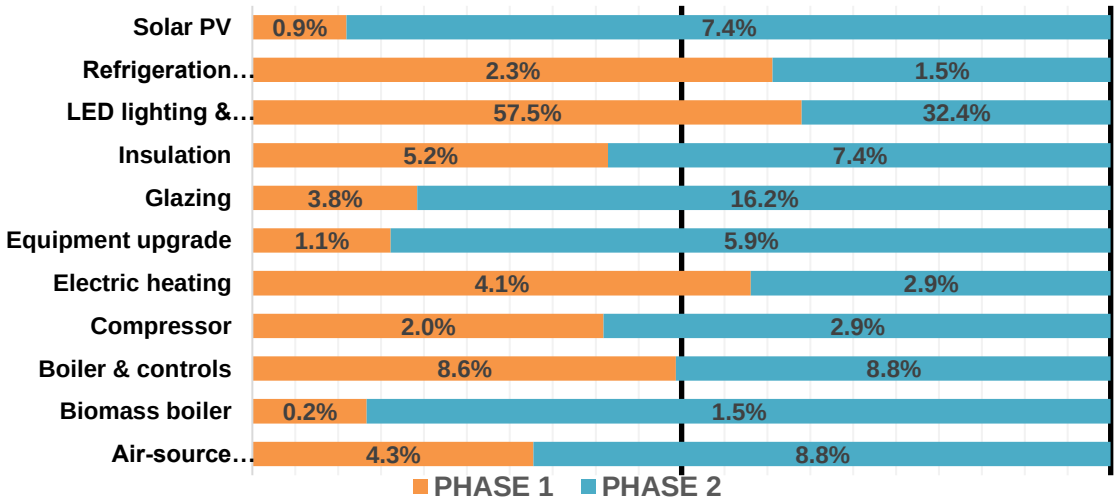
Comparing phase 1 (2017 to 2019) and phase 2 (2020 to date) intervention types provides a real insight into where the programme should focus its efforts, demonstrating shifts in the demand for different technologies.

Phase 1 to Phase 2 % Uptake / -Decrease in intervention / technology			
Increase in technology / intervention		**Decrease in technology / intervention**	
Solar PC	11.7%	**LED Lighting**	-19.8%
Glazing	5.0%	**Electric Vehicles**	-5.4%
Insulation	3.2%	**Boiler**	-2.6%
Air-source heat/cooling	2.7%	**Servers & IT Equipment**	-1.8%
Equipment Upgrade	3.1%	**Refrigeration Equipment**	-0.9%

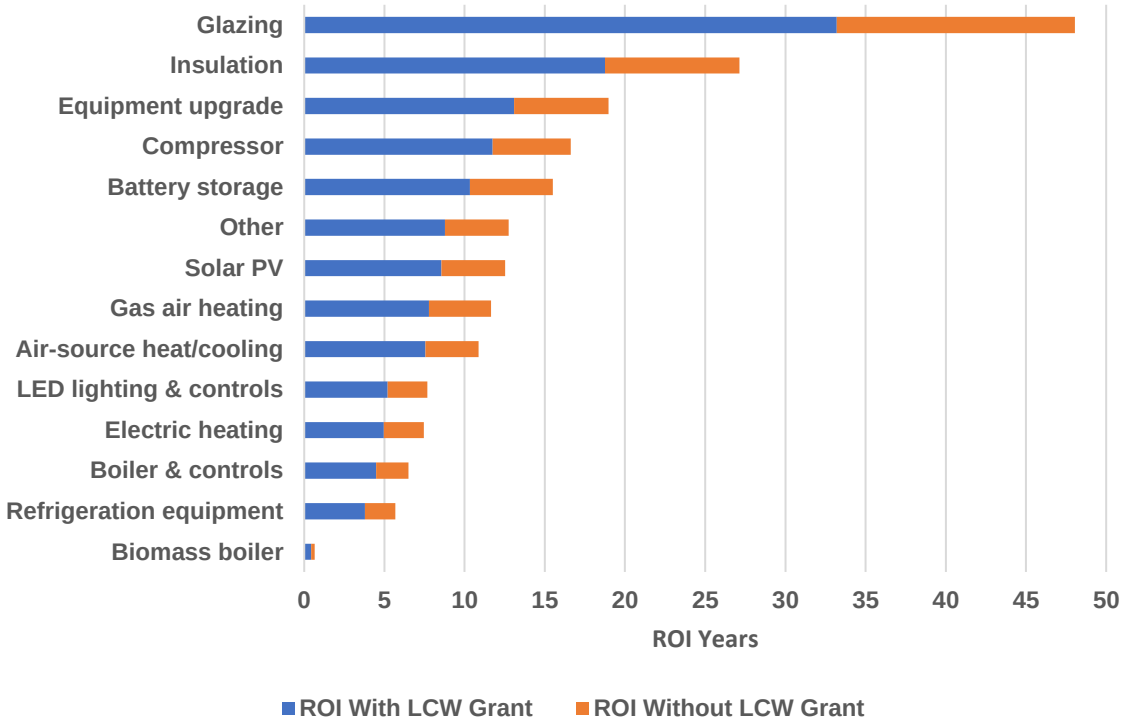
The largest shift is the increase of Solar-PV projects, from 0.9% of applications in phase 1 to 12.6% of applications in phase 2. In fact, only 4 solar projects were approved during 2017-2019, whilst the 2020-21 financial year alone saw 27 solar projects approved. As solar has a much longer ROI than projects such as LED lighting, it could only be assumed that such SMEs have fared much better during the pandemic and are investing in longer-term assets.

Beyond solar, the same argument could be made for both glazing and insulation projects, which also have longer ROIs. The following graphs show all interventions across Phase 1 and Phase 2 to date.

Graph comparing all interventions for phase 1 and phase 2



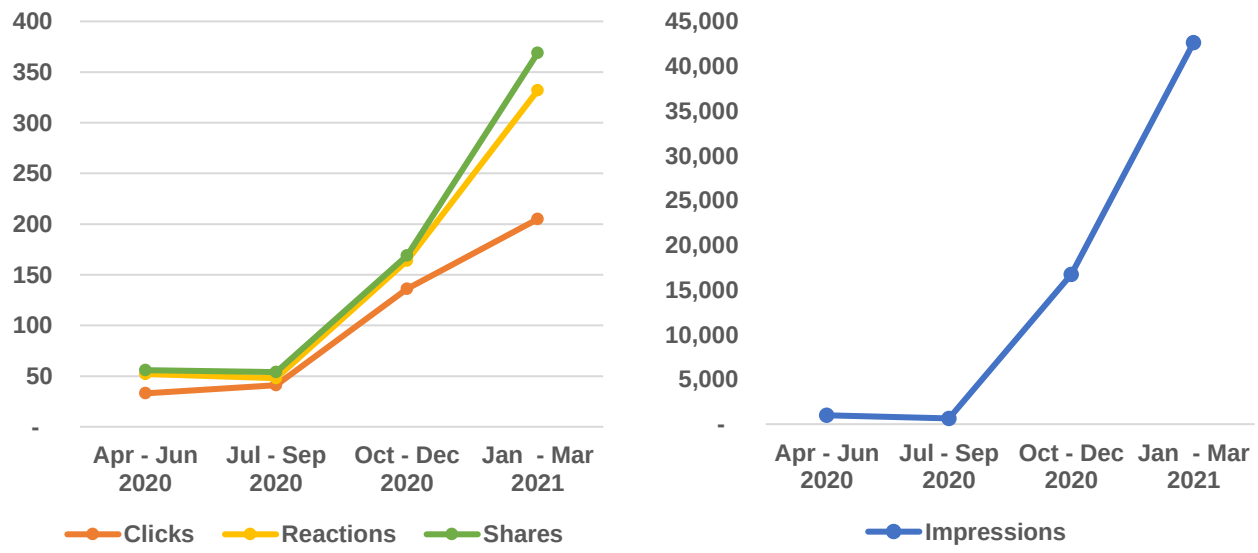
Graph showing ROI for each intervention type in phase 2.



It is still the case that biomass boilers have the greatest ROI, due to the savings in diverting wood from landfill. However, the lucrative Renewable Heat Incentive (which cannot be coupled with a LCW grant) is favoured by SMEs, so applications for this technology are minimal. Glazing and insulation still have a much longer ROI than other interventions, but as mentioned previously, this does reflect an optimism of applicants, investing long into the future.

Marketing

Graphs showing LinkedIn activity 2020 – 2021.



Business
Vale Life : Nov/Dec 2020

DOWN TO BUSINESS *with Philippa Batting*

Could you save energy?

Over recent months I have been reflecting over the many challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought, but I suspect that when we reflect back on this time there will also have been some positive impacts.

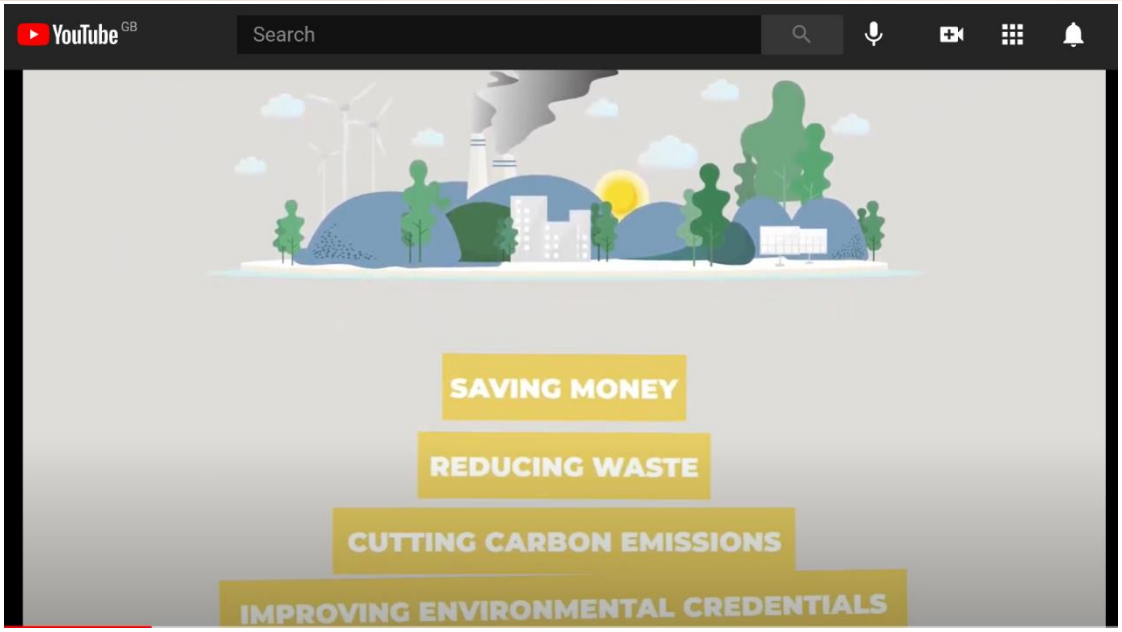
Amidst the anguish and hardship of COVID-19, many of us have taken the chance to pause and think about our impact on the environment. In many ways, there has been some real progress made for the future net-zero economy. Concerns are now being heard with the UK's leading organisations collectively urging the government to accelerate the transition to net-zero, whilst public sentiment can be witnessed in protests, shopping habits and social media posts.

Threats and opportunities often come hand in hand and the long-term threats to climate change can be countered today by the actions we all take to save energy and cut our carbon emissions. Businesses can play their part by enacting green strategies and by investing in energy-saving measures.

Often one of the biggest barriers to moving forward with energy efficiencies for anyone, businesses included, is the cost, but often the savings and benefits from doing the right thing bring unexpected rewards. Benefits to the bottom line are available for most organsations who undertake to make changes in their workplaces and in their processes. Information for businesses on the many different energy-saving measures, funding available and support from energy advisers who can help with decisions on what will work best can be found at: www.lowcarbonworkspaces.co.uk

● Philippa Batting is MD of Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF), working to support and facilitate success within the business community. Membership is free - visit: www.bbf.uk.com

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BUSINESS FIRST



Animated short video commissioned by LCW.

Covid-19 and Consequences for the Project

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has impacted the progress of Low Carbon Workspaces. At the start of the pandemic, numerous government-backed grants were made available to SMEs to assist with immediate and short-term resilience, often 100% funded. As such, application for LCW grants (with a maximum intervention rate of 33%), coupled with a longer-term ROI for environmental improvements, saw demand temporarily drop.

Beyond the initial uncertainty faced by businesses, other impacts of COVID-19 saw an expected downturn in immediate applications due to SMEs focusing on key business activity. In addition, there were also logistical difficulties in carrying out work due to lockdown (i.e., lack of site access, offices temporarily closed etc.). For this reason, the programme currently allows successful applicants 6 months in which to install projects and to claim their grant (to be reviewed post-lockdown).

Lastly, COVID-19 led to reduced opportunities to promote the scheme through the programme's conventional methods e.g., attending events etc. (leaving digital marketing only). Growth hubs, local authorities and LEPs rightly prioritised immediate business support, further restricting our key outlets to promote the scheme.

The final impact of the pandemic is the difficulties in verifying CO_2e savings post-installation. Many businesses have not had regular access to business premises (i.e., through home working). Those who have been on site have often had reduced/inconsistent working patterns, making pre/post-measurements inconsistent.

It is hoped that as the vaccine rollout continues, and the economy comes out of lockdown, applications will continue to increase. The first quarter of 2021 has seen a significant uptake in the grant, highlighted in both the number of EOIs received, and grants awarded between January to March.

Case Studies and Testimonials

This is powerful, disturbing, understandable stuff - I see it now, visually!

Grant Recipient, in response to their CO_2e savings certificate.

Thank you so much for your help regarding the low carbon grant. It has made a huge difference for us and been a very great help indeed.

Buckinghamshire Grant Recipient

Thank you for the payment and for all your assistance with the new lighting /heating. Staff returning from furlough are really enjoying the office improvements!

Grant Recipient

Urban Front Video Case Study **Seymour Taylor Video Case Study**

The Next 12 Months

As the government continues its efforts to vaccinate the population, coupled with a roadmap for removing lockdown restrictions, it is expected that the LCW programme will also continue its recent uplift in applications. March alone saw 140 unique EOIs and 26 applications received.

It is recognised that the programme has both a shortfall to profiled outputs (number of businesses provided grants, and the CO2e tonnage saved). To this end, the programme has put a mitigation plan in place, primarily through submission of a PCR, in the hopes of extending the scheme by a further 6-months (with a proposed activity end of June 2023). Whilst this will not result in any further funding required by Ngage, it will ensure all targets will be achieved. Beyond outputs, the PCR will also redistribute underspend in revenue expenditure, with a stronger focus on marketing in a post-Covid-19 landscape. For instance, less reliance will be placed on physical site visits (reducing travel costs), with an increase in digital marketing and advertising.

The threats COVID-19 brought to the programme have also presented opportunities to many SMEs. Firstly, it is anticipated that the scheme will continue to receive applications from businesses who have been particularly successful, be it due to their industry being unimpacted by the pandemic, or because they provide a commodity in higher demand due to the pandemic. Such businesses have taken the opportunity to invest surplus funds into low carbon technologies, recognising the ROI and value for money they present in the medium to long term. This is highlighted by the dramatic increase of Solar projects supported in Phase 2 compared to Phase 1.

The Build Back Better and Greener message gained significant traction in 2020, whilst the Government will soon turn more attention to COP26 in November, increasing pressure, marketing, and business encouragement towards the net-zero agenda. This too will benefit the LCW programme, requiring marketing to tie up with this them.

9. INNO Industry

Inno Industry is a project which seeks to better understand if and how current regional and national strategies are helping businesses to become more digitalised in order to prepare them for the fourth industrial revolution, also known as Industry 4.0.

The Project

Inno Industry is a partnership between 10 EU countries - Slovenia (Lead), Latvia, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and the United Kingdom, which is represented by Buckinghamshire Business First.

The key aim of the project is to increase the number of business clusters that are supporting the change to Industry 4.0, and to create a blueprint of best practice to support businesses in clusters to take up new digital technologies, such as Big Data and Artificial Intelligence.

The project partners aim to improve local, regional, and national policies in order to increase the rate of clusters that develop activities to support digital transformation.

Inno Industry is funded by Interreg Europe, a programme funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

What is Industry 4.0?

Industry 4.0 is a name given to the current trend of automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies. It includes cyber-physical systems, the Internet of things, cloud computing and cognitive computing.

What are business clusters?

Inno Industry partners define business clusters as:

'A concentration of interconnected businesses in a particular field, who collaborate together with a wide-range of other institutions in order to network, grow and bring in skilled workers to their organisations. This can be done in a number of ways, from co-locating through to creating industry-wide working groups; with the most effective clusters including representatives from local authorities, research centres, universities and professional associations.'

Covid-19 and Consequences for the Project

The project is designed to consider 3 programmes of delivery from each of the 10 partners in order to identify good practice and opportunities to consider in each respective country. This is undertaken through a number of meetings to partner countries and the first to Vienna had just occurred when the pandemic struck. Meetings have had to go online and as a result conversation and discussion is limited and good practice hard to identify. As a result, the project has now been extended by 6 months. A change of tack in project delivery has taken place and rather than identifying best practice from partners, BBF through the recruitment of a new Project Manager will now map the support available for businesses, identify gaps in delivery and undertake a research project to identify what would work and what is needed in Bucks. This will provide the ongoing evidence which will hopefully influence decision making as to the allocation of future UK funds for business support.

The project will conclude in January 2022.

10. Bid Writing

Bid writing activity within BBF leverages additional funding into the county that helps support SME competitiveness, building local competitive advantages and addressing key barriers to growth in specific sectors and geographies.

Since the launch of the European Social and Investment Fund (ESIF) 2014-2020 Operational Programme, BBF has sought to work with partners to develop proposals that address the needs of the local SME population as evidenced by the Buckinghamshire LEP in their calls for proposals and by our own experience gained from working with local businesses on a daily basis. The ERDF programme itself is designed to assist SMEs as the principal beneficiaries. The 4 ERDF funding priorities (PAs, Innovation, ICT, SME Support and Low Carbon) have all fed into our core delivery model, and we are driven to do more and deliver better quality, tailored support to the business base in the county.

As with many organisations the impact of the pandemic was felt across the range of funders, with money being diverted to the front line and those directly impacted. The Managing Authority (MA) for ERDF, is the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). During the initial months of the lockdown MHCLG indicated that significant resources had been temporarily redeployed from their delivery team to support resilience and emergency crisis response teams. This meant they were not in a position to continue with the appraisal of applications. It also meant that the MA were able to re-direct and repurpose a significant level of funding, including £70m ESIF reserves to focus on resilience and recovery. The upshot of this redirection of funding was that BBF were able to apply for £350k to pay for the Restart Grants for business. The (100%) grant could be spent accessing new technology and other equipment as well as professional, legal, financial, or other advice to help businesses get back on track.

Once the MA was able to redirect its resources back towards the appraisal of applications BBF in partnership with Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) responded to a range of issues MHCLG raised on two projects. In both cases these have now been approved, funding agreements issued and are moving into delivery. This brings an extra £2.5m of business support activity with a PA1 (Innovation) and a PA3 (SME support) project being funded.

Under Priority 1. The Challenge Lab is about the articulation of the (Public sector) demand side for future services that will be required so they address the Grand Challenges they (society) face and then supporting local business to engage and provide, through the development of new products and services, the solutions needed to successfully address these challenges. The challenges include an ageing society, the future of mobility and the need for clean growth. The project is increasingly relevant given the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and the wider challenges businesses must meet to survive and grow in the new “normal” environment they are operating in. Under Priority 3 a project called GLIDE has been developed to support postgraduates and other entrepreneurs into self-employment and start up activity. With the job market young people generally are faced with the project will provide access to a range of new employment opportunities and in particular self-employment. This intensive support might not have been accessible or previously affordable.

Outside of the ESIF programme BBF have been active in seeking further funding to take forward earlier project activity put in place to support businesses likely to be impacted by the construction of the new HS2 line. The line will cut through Buckinghamshire for nearly 60 Kms North to South.

Through a new accessibility focussed project, the aim is to establish Buckinghamshire as the most accessible county in the UK – for tourism and cultural participation. Funding will be used to recruit an Accessibility Adviser, who will work directly with tourism-based businesses. They will visit, review and assess tourism businesses looking to attract overnight stay / visitors and advise and support businesses on accessibility issues. In doing so the project will build from the heritage of innovation in accessibility and mobility, Buckinghamshire is the Birthplace of the Paralympics, and provide the sector with the chance to improve their sustainability and resilience and a way of mitigating the current environment.

11. The Skills Hub

Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) Programme

There were five meetings of the Buckinghamshire Skills Advisory Panel in 2020/21. There were also six meetings of the Panel's sector sub-groups.

Key achievements of the Panel in 2020/21 were to:

- Steer the production of the Buckinghamshire Local Skills Report
- Provide insight into how the Buckinghamshire labour market and education system had been impacted by Covid-19
- Promote and support the Buckinghamshire Skills Show
- Establish the Buckinghamshire Redundancy Taskforce
- Support the development of the new Buckinghamshire Skills Hub website, providing support for job seekers and career changers of all ages.

Local Skills Report

The first Buckinghamshire Local Skills Report and supporting analysis was published in March 2021 and is available to download from the Buckinghamshire Skills Hub website. The report is based on high quality skills and labour market analysis that meets the standards set out in the DfE Analytical Toolkit. DfE feedback on the analysis was positive:

"Annex A [core analysis] is very good, with excellent supporting narratives which thoroughly explore the drivers and implications of trends identified in the data. Additional data in Annex B and local intelligence have been used particularly effectively to add further context and insight into the various topics".

The Local Skills Report includes a Skills Action Plan for the county which is firmly based on the analysis.

In addition, skills and labour market analysis has been made accessible to a range of audiences in a number of formats:

- Presentation at the Buckinghamshire Skills Show (audience = young people)
- Facts and figures on the Buckinghamshire Skills Hub website (audience = career seekers)
- Careers booklet (audience = young people and their parents)
- Careers video (audience = young people)
- Buckinghamshire Skills and Labour Market Analysis 2021 – Q&A format (audience = public sector stakeholders and educators)
- Regular presentations to local leaders and decision makers (Buckinghamshire SAP members, MPs, Buckinghamshire Business Groups, Buckinghamshire Council)

Despite staffing changes, Buckinghamshire has retained strong and sustainable analytical capability. All skills and labour market analysis conducted in 2020/21 has been undertaken in-house, with James

Moorhouse joining the team and receiving training in the role. This has included being provided with time to learn how to use PowerBI software to develop data dashboards.

Project Progress

In 2020/21, the Department for Education (DfE) awarded Buckinghamshire funding of £75,000 to further develop the Buckinghamshire Skills Advisory Panel. The aim of the grant funding was to:

- Continue to build and increase the Skills Advisory Panel's analytical capability.
- Build the influence and local leadership role of the Skills Advisory Panel.

Specific requirements of the funding for 2020/21 were to:

- Produce local skills and labour market analysis which fully meets all seven of the standards set out in the SAPs Analytical Toolkit.
- Turn local skills and labour market analysis into effective action plans.
- Ensure skills analysis is easily accessible and presented in a relevant way to local stakeholders.
- Increase local analytical capability in ways that are sustainable.
- Produce a Local Skills Report by 31 March 2021.

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The Local Skills Report includes a Skills Action Plan for the county which is firmly based on the analysis.

In addition, skills and labour market analysis has been made accessible to a range of audiences in a number of formats:

- Presentation at the Buckinghamshire Skills Show (audience = young people)
- Facts and figures on the Buckinghamshire Skills Hub website (audience = career seekers)
- Careers booklet (audience = young people and their parents)
- Careers video (audience = young people)
- Buckinghamshire Skills and Labour Market Analysis 2021 – Q&A format (audience = public sector stakeholders and educators)
- Regular presentations to local leaders and decision makers (Buckinghamshire SAP members, MPs, Buckinghamshire Business Groups, Buckinghamshire Council)

Despite staffing changes, Buckinghamshire has retained strong and sustainable analytical capability. All skills and labour market analysis conducted in 2020/21 has been undertaken in-house, with James

Moorhouse joining the team and receiving training in the role. This has included being provided with time to learn how to use PowerBI software to develop data dashboards.

There were five meetings of the Buckinghamshire Skills Advisory Panel in 2020/21. There were also six meetings of the Panel's sector sub-groups.

Key achievements of the Panel in 2020/21 were to:

- Steer the production of the Buckinghamshire Local Skills Report.
- Provide insight into how the Buckinghamshire labour market and education system had been impacted by Covid-19.
- Promote and support the Buckinghamshire Skills Show
- Establish the Buckinghamshire Redundancy Taskforce.
- Support the development of the new Buckinghamshire Skills Hub website, providing support for job seekers and career changers of all ages.

Research Findings

Skills and Labour Market Strengths

- Clear long-term economic growth aspirations set out in the Buckinghamshire Local Industrial Strategy.
- Significant job growth anticipated in a variety of sectors.
- High levels of employer involvement in the local skills agenda.
- A strong collaborative culture (between education institutions, and between employers and educators).
- Further and Higher Education Institutions with a strong history of business engagement, and a focus on applied learning and employability.
- A top performing Careers Hub.
- High performing schools.
- High levels of qualifications amongst residents.
- Individuals with cutting edge engineering, technology and creative skills that cross sectors and can create opportunities for innovation.

Skills and Labour Market Challenges

- Retaining and attracting talent (school leavers, graduates and high skilled residents).
- Greater gap between the demand for skills and labour within the local economy, and the skills and jobs sought by local residents than elsewhere in the country. Particularly at 'associate professional' level.
- Low take-up of apprenticeships.
- A lack of engineering training provision within the County.
- Low levels of interest in construction and health and social care careers, resulting in employers struggling to fill vacancies.
- The 'work-readiness' of young people, exacerbated by Covid-19.
- Temporary and permanent shifts within the labour market (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) and related changes in skills requirements.
- Pockets of inequality and poor social mobility.
- A wider than national average gender pay gap.
- Lower that average levels of training by County employers.

- A large proportion of SMEs, who often do not employ learning and development professionals and can therefore find it more difficult to navigate government funded training provision.
- Slow productivity growth in recent years.
- The ever-growing and evolving demand for digital skills.
- The need to ensure strong talent pipelines for growing sectors (including life sciences, health and social care; creative industries; construction; high performance engineering and space).
- A need to ensure opportunities in growth sectors are accessible to all.

Skills Priorities

The research findings led to the SAP identifying five broad skills priority areas for Buckinghamshire.

1. **The Future Workforce**. Including young people, career seekers and career changers	• Recovery support to help individuals navigate the impact of Covid-19 on the job market. • Ensure those seeking jobs and careers have access to comprehensive, high quality information about the opportunities available in Buckinghamshire. • Improve the work-readiness of students leaving education. • Increase local take up of pathways leading to in demand occupations.
2. **A Skilled and Productive Workforce**. Programmes to support employers and the existing workforce	• Ensure businesses have access to the information they need to manage their workforces effectively during the Covid-19 pandemic. • Strengthen the talent pipeline for strategic growth sectors and key skills shortage occupations. • Workforce development support for SMEs, start-ups and the self-employed
3. **An Inclusive Workforce**. Cross-cutting themes to support the entire population	• Ensure residents have access to the information they need to gain access to opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills for both work and life. • Mobilise potential of current population. • Attract and retain talent. • Promote skills for green growth.
4. **An Informed Approach**. Maintaining up to date information on skills needs through research and employer networks	• Maximise the impact of national skills policy on the local economy. • High quality LMI and research. • Maintain sector sub-groups to inform policy, strategy and actions plans and share good practice. • Update Skills Strategy.
5. **A Digitally Able Population**. Ensuring access to digital programmes for the whole population for work and life	• Ensure residents are able to develop their digital literacy so they can access the services they need to meet their basic health and well-being needs. • Ensure residents have access to education and training programmes enabling them to develop their digital skills and take up emerging digital careers.

	• Champion the adoption of new technology and development of employee skills amongst SMEs as a lever of growth.

The priorities above have been developed into a Skills Action Plan which is set out in the Local Skills Report and will be refined further to provide objectives for the Bucks Skills Hub Workforce Skills and Under 19 Teams.

Next steps:

Two stakeholder events will be held in April and May 2021 to launch the Buckinghamshire Local Skills Report with key local stakeholders. The events will also be used to showcase local employer / education collaboration activity that is developing provision that meets the needs of the local economy.

It is expected that the DfE will continue to fund the SAP programme in 2021/22, and that a second iteration of the Buckinghamshire Local Skills Report will be required to be published in November 2021.

Workforce Skills

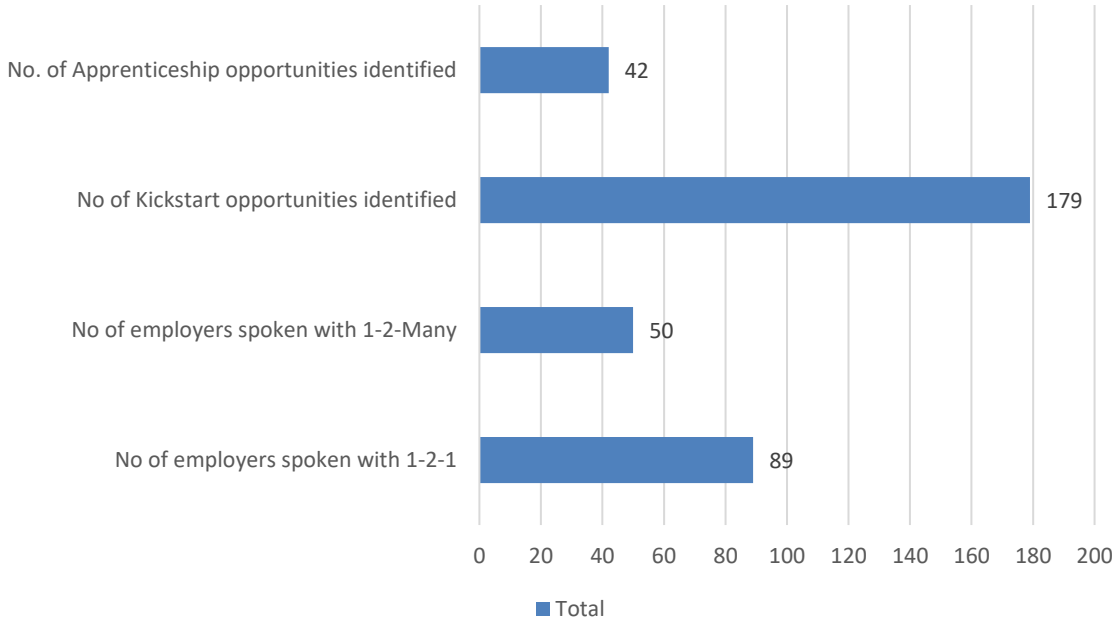
Workforce Skills is based in the Buckinghamshire Skills Hub, working alongside Buckinghamshire Business First Business Support team. Activities linked to workforce skills include apprenticeships, recruitment and training and development and are led by a Workforce Skills Manager who is responsible for driving the skills agenda in Buckinghamshire including spreading knowledge among key stakeholders, growth sector and enterprise zone engagement and supporting employers of all sizes. The current incumbent, John Browning, was employed in August 2021, so this report represents the six-month period since then.

The Workforce Skills Manager also has responsibility for:

- Co-ordinating the outputs from the Redundancy Taskforce
- Co-ordinating the Construction Sector Employer Group
- Supporting the work of the Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) including the development with the BLEP Research Manager of the Buckinghamshire Local Skills Report.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on skills activities and on the way Workforce Skills is able to interact with businesses. Nevertheless, a substantial amount of employer business engagement has taken place and government initiatives to support businesses such as the Kickstart Scheme have generated a lot of interest. In addition, close working with the Business Support Team has identified many businesses needing support with recruitment and training needs, with an encouraging number enquiring about apprenticeships. This close working has seen a steady increase in the number of referrals to Workforce Skills over the last six months. National Apprenticeship Week in February 2021 saw a boost in demand for support after a very successful Apprenticeship Event for employers.

Supporting Businesses with Workforce Development



Employer 1-2-1 enquiries have focused largely on apprenticeships and the government's Kickstart initiative. Generally, these have been from SME businesses looking to recruit new staff and not knowing how to go about it. Understandably small businesses, which only recruit infrequently, do not always keep up with the latest government employment and training initiatives. BBF does its best to keep members informed about these things through its website and newsletter and encouragingly, as can be seen from the above numbers, many businesses have come to BBF for advice on recruitment.

Kickstart Scheme

This was announced in July 2020, with applications opened in October 2020. The scheme was launched with a requirement for a minimum of 30 work placements, ruling out small businesses from applying direct. In order to cater for those businesses wishing to recruit fewer apprentices, the DWP invited applications from "gateway" organizations which could represent a number of smaller businesses in order to put together a cohort of 30. Initially BBF considered the idea of becoming a gateway and invited expressions of interest from members. This quickly received EOIs from 80 businesses representing 160 work placement opportunities. However, when it became clear that other more suitable organizations had also applied to become gateways, BBF withdrew its application.

Many enquiries were taken from businesses about the Kickstart Scheme. Businesses recognized the programme as an opportunity to provide young people with a good way to start their careers, a way of getting extra help into their businesses at a very uncertain time and a very welcome financial boost from the government. All enquiries taken by BBF wanted to understand how the programme works and how to apply. Between October 2020 and February 2021 this meant finding a suitable gateway. However, the DWP was slow in getting the scheme off the ground and by February 2021 had only placed 30 young people with businesses. The gateway requirement was dropped in March 2021 and

it is understood the programme is now working well in Bucks. However, a steady stream of businesses still contact BBF for advice on the programme regarding:

- How the scheme works – risks versus benefits, financial incentives, recruitment process e.g. businesses want to understand if they will get a choice of individual or whether the Jobcentre Plus will simply allocate a young person
- How to apply – this is done online but it is not clear to businesses exactly what they have to do and what is the process once they have applied
- Whether to go through a gateway or apply direct – some very small businesses may benefit from the support of a gateway to meet some of the Kickstart requirements for training and career support
- What to do if rejected – the DWP does not give reasons for rejection and local DWP management is itself frustrated that good businesses are being rejected. This is being investigated, but it seems that some businesses are not making it clear in their application that the placement is additional to existing staff and not replacing a full-time role.

Apprenticeships

The number of enquiries regarding Apprenticeships has been very encouraging. Most of these have been coming from SME businesses who, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, are growing and considering recruiting new staff. The reasons for recruiting are generally due to one of the following reasons:

- Wanting to recruit the next generation to their business
- They see it as an economical way of bringing in new staff who will receive training
- Micro businesses who see it as a low-risk way of growing their business
- Keen to put something back into the community.

So far none of the enquiries has been from businesses who see apprenticeships as a way of upskilling existing staff. Also none of the enquiries handled so far has come from a Levy-paying business. All of the enquiries have been from businesses who have little or no experience of employing an apprentice. Guidance provided has therefore been mostly educating employers about:

- Apprenticeship standards and structure – which can seem very complicated especially the end point assessment system (EPA)
- Finding an apprenticeship provider – which can be problematic in Bucks because of the relatively few providers who are actually based in Bucks
- Apprenticeship funding
- The recruitment process.

Interestingly few of the enquiries have come from businesses motivated by the government's incentives payments. Most are more concerned about getting the right person, but all have been very positive about employing a young person.

Regarding job roles, many small businesses are looking for support on digital marketing, social media and other digital support activities such as database administration. There is adequate provision in the County for digital marketing through the Bucks College Group and through several very good private training providers. However there seem also to be significant numbers of SME businesses with very niche requirements – recent examples include: Signage Technician, which is only provided by one FE college based in the West Midlands, and a role combining aspects of production management and sales support for which there is no obvious apprenticeship standard. Another area which has been problematic to resolve is for Manufacturing Technicians for which there is a dearth of provision in the County.

National Apprenticeship Week

National Apprenticeship Week in February 2021 provided a great opportunity to promote the benefits of apprenticeships to employers. A highly successful Employer Event was held involving four key local businesspeople and Anna Morrison of Amazing Apprenticeships. The event attracted 32 employers and several subsequent enquiries. John Browning devised an apprenticeship workshop to provide a practical guide for employers considering taking on an apprentice. So far four workshops have been held with 18 businesses attending.

Event Feedback

"This was a really useful workshop; I definitely got the information I needed and will message John after I decide what type of apprentice I need".
Home Instead Aylesbury

"I really enjoyed the session and thought John presented the subject very well, making the process very clear" Aston Commercial Cleaning Ltd.

Sector Employer Groups

Active engagement with employers has also taken place through the Sector Employer Groups:

- Construction - The Construction Sector Employer Group was very active earlier in the year as part of the Redundancy Taskforce but had since struggled to carve out an obvious role for itself. It was previously intended for the Group to become a CITB training group but a bid earlier in the year to CITB was unsuccessful. Since then the CITB has decided to create its own training group which will have a complementary role to the Employer Group allowing the Employer Group to focus on strategic issues and reflect the concerns of the sector to the LEP. The two groups will have different memberships but report to each other. Significant work has gone on to define an action plan for the Employer Group and, under the guidance of a new Chair for 2021/22, the Group will focus on identifying sector skills issues enabling the training group to identify practical local solutions. This new remit will also allow the group to consider wider issues such as sub-contracting for projects taking place in the County.

- Space – Discussions are ongoing with Westcott Venture Park to secure a slot on their regular Space Innovators meeting and it has been agreed that in early 2021 a meeting will be dedicated to skills.
- High Performance Engineering – work is continuing to engage employers at Silverstone Enterprise Zone with three meeting set up in April 2021 with employers to discuss skills.
- MedTech, Health and Social Care – BHSCA Board has now taken this role with Heather Dean attending meetings
- Digital – work continues to establish a Digital Group although this will now form part of the work currently being undertaken by Buckinghamshire Council and BLEP to develop a digital strategy for the County.
- Creative Industries Action Group.

Redundancy Support

In July 2020, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the SAP set up a Redundancy Taskforce to identify all the resources on offer in Buckinghamshire to support businesses having to make redundancies and individuals newly redundant or at risk of redundancy. The Taskforce sought to create an online resource to bring together all partners, resources and offers, identify any gaps in provision and encourage collaborative working between agencies, voluntary groups and education providers to help the local economy get back on its feet. The taskforce established sub-groups to consider six key areas:

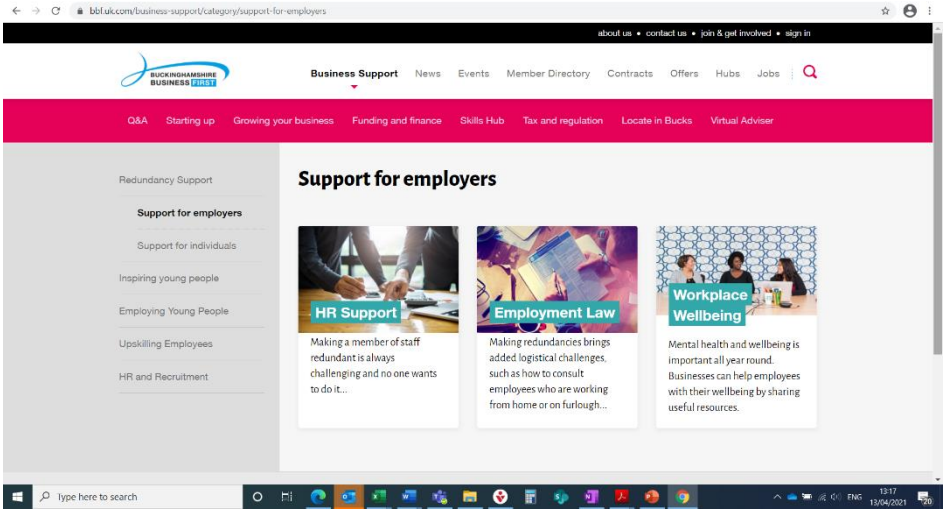
- Young People
- Construction
- Health and Social Care
- Training and Reskilling
- Support for Employers
- CV Writing and General Support for Individuals

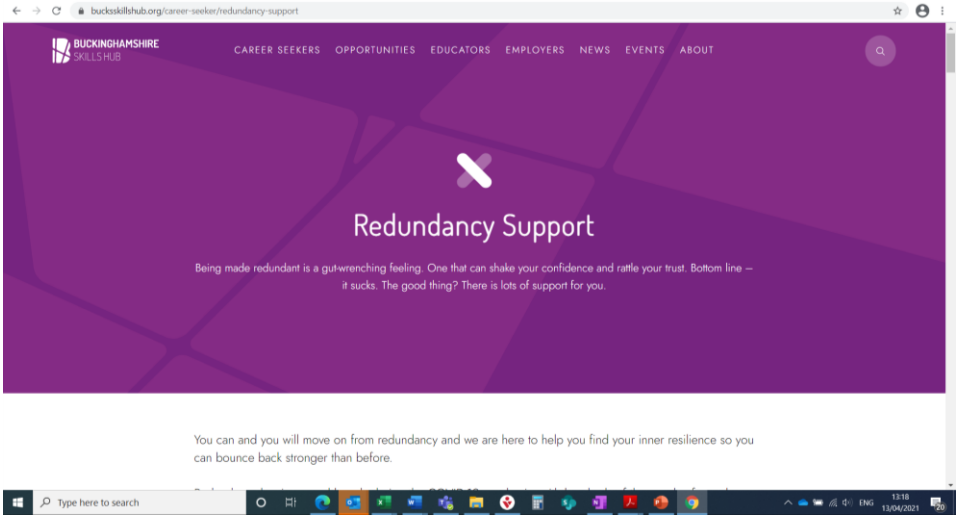
The sub-groups met during the course of 2020 and resources of all kinds were brought together through a new portal on the BBF website. The website now provides and one-stop-shop for businesses seeking support to make or avoid making redundancies. It has a wealth of information and links to organizations able to provide support including:

- HR support
- Employment law
- Health and wellbeing
- Job brokerage

Support for individuals has now been incorporated into the new Bucks Skills Hub website where those seeking support will find advice on:

- Personal support
- Careers advice
- Training and reskilling
- Searching for a new job
- Starting a business
- Support for apprentices





Redeployment

An idea which arose at the Health and Social Care Redundancy Taskforce Sub-group was the creation of a programme to support people made redundant from sectors badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic with relevant skills to sectors which have significant vacancies. The Health and Social Care sector has vacancies in key areas and is keen to recruit people with customer service experience. The hospitality and retail sectors are likely to be making substantial redundancies and a service to

help these people find new careers in the Health and Social Care sector could have significant potential.

Contact was made with People 1st International, the sector skills council for hospitality, retail, leisure and passenger transport, who have devised a scheme at the request of their members, and discussions took place with key stakeholder in the sector to asses the viability of such a scheme. It quickly became clear that there would be demand for the scheme. A bid for pilot funding was made to DWP but was not successful however, discussions have taken place with Seetec Plus, the DWP main contractor for the Work and Health and JETS programmes who are willing to support a pilot in Bucks. The first 15 candidates should enter the scheme in April 2021.

Discussions have also taken place at the Construction Sector Redundancy Taskforce Sub-group regarding the idea of a similar scheme for manufacturing to Construction. Due to majoe infrastructure schemes in Bucks such as HS2 and East-West Rail, there are a large number of jobs needed in the construction sector. The manufacturi9ng sector in Bucks has been hit hard by the pandemic with 2000 jobs furloughed and an estimated 1000 jobs at risk. Discussion shave taken place with CITB and Make UK, the sector body for manufacturing, regarding the idea and it is clear there would be initial support for a scheme in these sectors. Whilst and a much earlier stage than the Hospitality to Care redeployment scheme, this idea will be explored further during 2021.

T Levels and Work Experience

A key role for BBF Workforce Skills is to encourage employers to offer work experience placements to young people, students and people seeking new careers. Persuading employers to offer work placements is a challenging task for education providers in Bucks due to the SME nature of the economy. The advent of T Levels with its emphasis on work experience, means that the issue is more pressing than ever. BBF initiated a meeting with Bucks College Group, Bucks New University, the University of Buckingham and Bucks Adult Learning to discuss the issue. It was agreed that a joined up, cross-county approach would be worthwhile and a campaign amongst employers to support the introduction of T Levels in September 2021 should be initiated. Work on this will continue in 2021.

Under 19 Skills

What do the Under 19s Skills Hub team do?

The Under 19s Skills Hub support schools and colleges to inspire and prepare young people for the fast-changing world of work. The Enterprise Coordinator team facilitate the strategic coordination of careers provision across Buckinghamshire to improve opportunities for young people by working closely with careers leaders in schools and colleges to develop effective employer engagement. The hub works in partnership with The Careers and Enterprise Company to help young people reach their potential and attain the relevant skills and competencies ready for the world of work, supported by the Enterprise Adviser volunteer network who help unlock relationships with other local businesses.

What have the Under 19s Skills Hub team been doing?

The government's Careers Strategy and statutory guidance require schools and colleges to deliver quality careers support for their students. The network connects schools and colleges with businesses and careers activity providers supporting schools to meet the requirements of the statutory guidance

enabling young people to be prepared and inspired for the world of work. The Under 19s Bucks Skills Hub supports 37 mainstream state-funded secondary schools in Buckinghamshire and 10 secondary special schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). Strong and positive relationships have been developed with all these schools and schools are supported at every step by a trained Enterprise Coordinator providing support, advice, sharing of up-to-date information on the skills local and national employers need, whilst liaising with local employers to coordinate encounters for students.

Careers Hubs, a central part of the government's Careers Strategy, aim to help secondary schools and colleges implement a high-quality careers program to help young people make informed decisions around their future. As part of the first pilot in 2018 in 20 areas across England, the Buckinghamshire Careers Hub was expanded in 2020 from 21 schools to 37 schools to include all mainstream schools in the area to transform careers education across Buckinghamshire by linking the education sector and businesses and helping schools and colleges achieve the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Enterprise Adviser Network

Enterprise Advisers are business volunteers who work in senior roles. They volunteer their time to help school and college careers leaders to increase their engagement with businesses and to access local careers resources. They work with headteachers and careers leaders to make sure these encounters between students and employers are the basis of a structured careers plan. This means that young people from all backgrounds can access the opportunities that Buckinghamshire has to offer. The project now has 82 Enterprise Advisers from different industry sectors and professional backgrounds e.g., Cisco, McAfee, IBM, Align, EKFB, BLEP, John Lewis, Metrobank, HEE to name but a few. The group meets every half term to train, network and share good practice. These meetings have been virtual since March 2020. The Enterprise Advisers meet with their school every half term (currently virtually) as a minimum to support their Careers Leaders with their Enterprise Coordinators and with Headteachers at least once a year.

The programme is guided by the Gatsby Benchmarks, a framework of 8 guidelines that define excellent career provision in secondary schools, supported by the Department of Education (DfE). The Careers Strategy is built around them, and they make a great place to start for planning or improving a school's programme.

The Compass tool, provided by the Careers and Enterprise Company for schools and colleges in England, quickly and easily helps the team to evaluate the school's careers activity against the eight benchmarks of best practice. This year the team are encouraging schools to upgrade to Compass+ which is powered by pupil-level data integrating with the schools Management Information System data for effective and targeted careers programme planning and delivery. Careers Leaders have found it to be simple and intuitive to use: a one-stop-shop for completing Gatsby Benchmark evaluations, creating activity plans, and managing engagement with employers and partners. 42 (100% of eligible schools) schools have now onboarded or are in the process of onboarding to the new system. The impact of this on young people is increased motivation, resilience, problem-solving, goal setting for the next 5 years and awareness of options after school, incl apprenticeships (taken from the Future Skills Survey results 2019).

The table below shows benchmark performance in Buckinghamshire against the national average demonstrating very strong comparative performance.

School and college Gatsby Benchmark achievements, March 2021

Benchmark	Buckinghamshire	National
1 - A stable careers programme	64%	41%
2 – Learning from career and labour market information	84%	63%
3 – Addressing the needs of each pupil	47%	35%
4 – Linking curriculum learning to careers	78%	58%
5 – Encounters with employers and employees	80%	58%
6 – Experiences of workplaces	44%	40%
7 – Encounters with further and higher education	60%	32%
8 – Personal guidance	58%	64%

The result of which is an above average performance against the eight Gatsby Benchmarks in 2021:

Bucks Skills Hub average number of benchmarks achieved **5.2.**

National average of benchmarks achieved **3.8.**

Source: March LEP Report, The Careers and Enterprise Company.

Careers Hub

In academic year 2020/21, the Buckinghamshire Skills Hub remains one of the country's best performing hubs. Progress can be seen in the table below. National data not available yet.

	BM1*	BM2	BM3	BM4	BM5*	BM6*	BM7	BM8
Benchmarks achieved TOTAL	64.4%	84.4%	46.7%	77.8%	80.0%	42.2%	60.0%	57.8%
Benchmarks achieved Wave 1	71.4%	90.5%	52.4%	81.0%	81.0%	42.9%	47.6%	76.2%
Benchmarks achieved Wave 3	75.0%	93.8%	50.0%	75.0%	87.5%	43.8%	75.0%	56.3%

*BM1: = Stable careers programme, BM5 = Encounters with employers and employees, BM6 = Experiences of workplaces

……and against targets:

	March 2021 Wave 1	March 2021 Wave 3	Hub wave 1 Target to August 2021	Hub wave 2 Target to August 2021
Average number of benchmarks as achieved	**5.2**	**5.4**	**5**	**4**

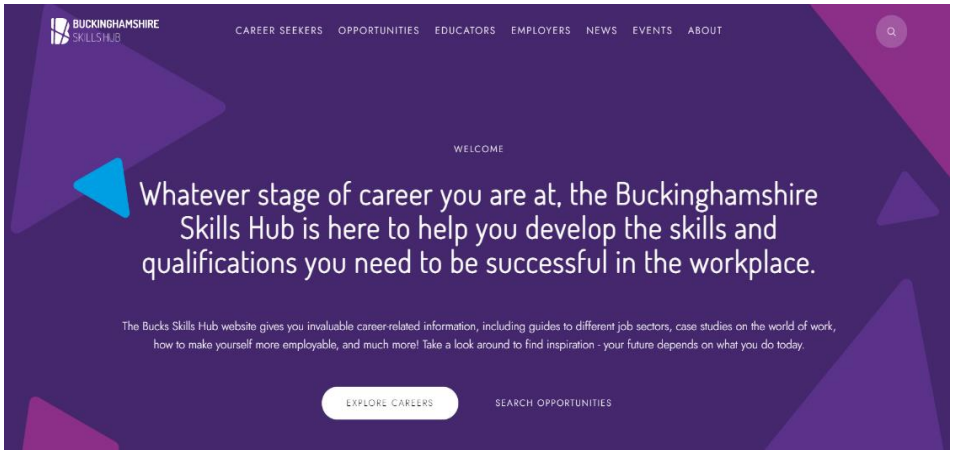
Percentage of establishments reporting achieving BM1	**71%**	**75%**	95%	75%
Percentage of establishments reporting achieving BM5	**80%**	**81%**	75%	65%
Percentage of establishments reporting partially achieving BM6	**100%**	**100%**	100%	100%

SEND Schools (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)

Spring 2020 saw the launch of the SEND Community of Practice, including secondary schools with Additionally Resourced Provision (ARPs). The Careers and Enterprise Company have awarded a small fund to support schools in the forum which is being used on projects which support the schools to progress against the Gatsby benchmarks. Engagement with SEND schools

A half termly newsletter with a SEND focus is produced and distributed to keep schools up to date and connected.

Career journeys begin at bucksskillshub.org .

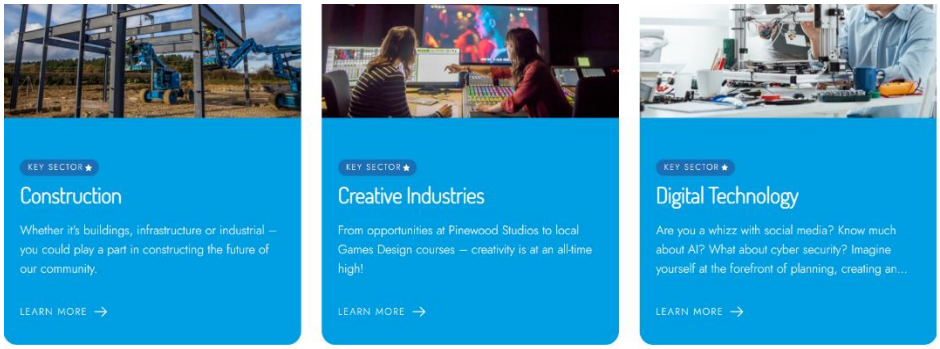


A new Skills Hub website was launched in Spring 2021 - Bucksskillshub.org aims to be the local one-stop shop for information and advice on skills and careers. It is designed to inspire, support, and inform different audiences: career seekers, career changers, educators and employers.

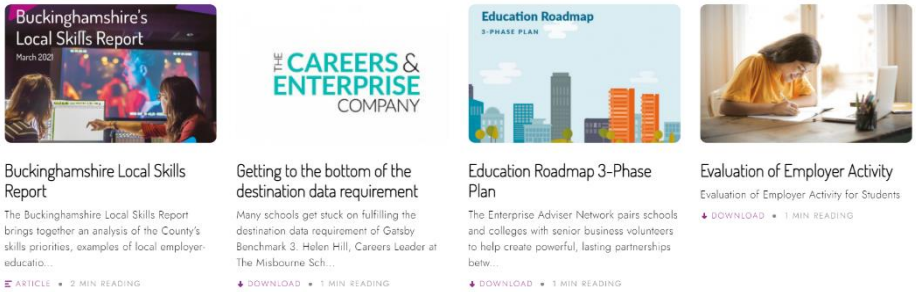
The website highlights job possibilities in key sectors across Buckinghamshire and shows 1,000s of live jobs. (Live apprenticeship opportunities will follow soon). It contains the latest resources and advice on career choices and skills development, as well as redundancy support. Whatever career stage of career journey, Bucksskillshub.org will help support future decision making.

Inspiration on working in key sectors in Buckinghamshire:

The website will open all job possibilities in key sectors across Buckinghamshire.



- Showcases the priority sectors for the Local Industrial Strategy.
- Highlights top employers in the county.
- The Career Profile hub gives an insight into each career, with detailed Labour Market Information direct from LMI for all.

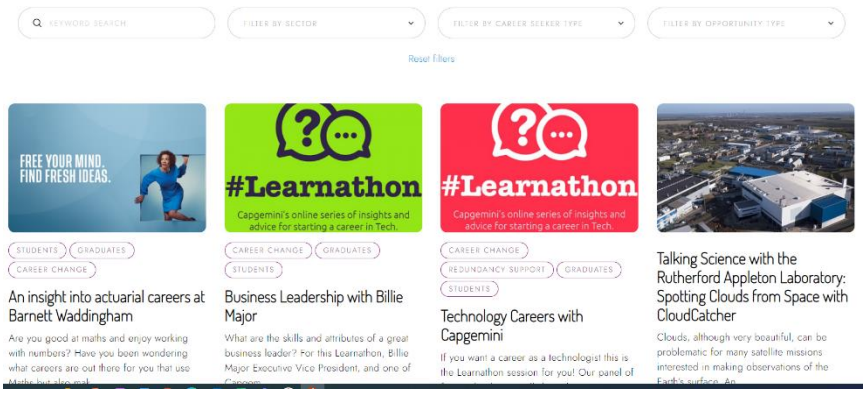


Here to help Educators…

Includes a compilation of resources to assist educators in delivering or supporting the best Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance possible.

The latest news and events for both career seekers and educators:

- seekers at all stages in their journey.
- All able to be filtered by keyword, sector, career seeker and opportunity type.



Feedback from schools on the new site has been very favourable and links have been sent out to parents and young people as well as a strong presence on social media platforms.

My Choices

In summer 2020, the Careers and Enterprise Company launched the My Choices project aimed at responding to the altered choices and options that young people face when leaving education this summer or next. The national strand kicked off in early August, focusing on standard pathways available for young people and national support services and resources available to help them. £20,000 of funding was awarded to support young people in Buckinghamshire. Thus 'What's right for me?' campaign was launched in August 2020, offering 1:1 expert carers advice for young people in Buckinghamshire. The careers advice has been sub-contracted to Adviza who provide personalised careers information, advice, and guidance to our young people. Although off to a slow start, momentum is picking up for this service amongst young people. This project has been extended to end June 2021.

Labour Market Information

Spring 2021 will see the launch of a new suite of resources to support young people's careers decisions. This will include:

- Three-minute video focused on the career opportunities in Buckinghamshire.
- A set of lesson resources for each year group and one specifically aimed at SEND. There is a lesson plan and resources PowerPoint presentation for each year group and one general one for use in schools.
- A full guide to careers and priority sectors.

Competitions

Organising inter-schools' competitions with key employers which develop both curriculum-linked skills and softer skills in our young people making them more work ready.

National Film & Television School Commercials Challenge was adapted for a virtual environment which allowed for expansion to include 10 schools launched in September 2020. The challenge presents students with an opportunity to tell the world what is special and unique about their school - what would they 'advertise' about their school to get the attention of local parents and young people. See press release. *[Clip of video from Sir William Borlase Grammar School video entry]*

Other regular competitions were cancelled due to Covid schools' closure in January.

Teacher CPD

Organised on a more regular basis since March 2020 as Career Leader virtual meetings have been every 2 weeks (returning to half-termly in September). Sessions on Gatsby benchmark achievement, the post-covid economy, writing a strategic careers plan, using careers management tools etc. have been well attended and have received excellent feedback.

Well done Marina and team for all their hard work on this, great job all of you, kudos from across the network for leading the way! - Kerry Senatore, Regional Lead, CEC

Thanks for the careers in the curriculum training - I thought it was absolutely inspirational and would love to do more. - Naomi Rogers, Holmer Green School

In March, a session on LinkedIn was held to encourage schools to develop their own school page. This helps young people to develop their online networks but also gives schools access to an amazing alumni network which can be used to build employer encounters.

A staff CPD workshop with supporting resources (subject leader planner and subject audit) on benchmark 4 is available for schools and this has been delivered by ECs on an individual basis.

Engaging with Headteachers

The Bucks Skills Hub Under 19s yearly headteacher event went virtual in 2020 and had more engagement than ever! The team were honoured to welcome Sir John Holman, author of the Gatsby Benchmarks, as a guest speaker along with Nicola Hall, CEC Head of Education, industry leaders and headteachers, introduced by Professor Gavin Brooks, Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, BNU and Chair of the Skills Advisory Panel, Buckinghamshire LEP.

That was a really useful & insightful session. Thanks for having me- I took away a lot from it! Much appreciated!! - Elaine Pope, Interim Workforce and Organisational Development Lead, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust

This was such a great event, thank you for organising. So encouraging to see the momentum that is building with both schools and businesses in Bucks. Thank you for all of the work that you are doing - it is appreciated. – Sweta Thakrar, Careers Department Dr Challoner's High School

The 6th annual headteacher event is currently being planned for July 2021.

Newsletters and Resources

A half-termly newsletter aimed at careers leaders highlights main local resources and events which receives excellent feedback and engagement.

Following suggestions from Careers Leaders, a new 'Classroom to Career' monthly newsletter was launched for families distributed via schools and funded through the Hub Fund. This has been very positively received by careers leaders. Issue one of Classroom to Careers newsletter for families here.

> The newsletter looks fab! Thanks so much for that. It is a good list/reminder for Career Leaders as well, to get information out into the school. Thank you! - Christine Sanders, Chalfonts Community College

> It really is a great timesaver for me as I was circulating a lot (but not all) of this material separately and it takes a lot of my time and if it can be collated centrally, it saves us all reinventing the wheel. I think it is a valuable resource for schools and parents. It also really brings home the wide range of opportunities and support available to our students. - Rob Evans Careers Leader and Learning Resource Centre Manager, Highcrest School

Also distributed were:

- Understanding the Job Market – lesson slide deck to be delivered by EAs as an employer encounter, plus parent overview.
- LinkedIn for Sixth Formers – two-part slide deck to be delivered by EAs as an employer encounter.
- Developed sample annual careers programme for Careers Leaders.

In the first lockdown, a suite of resources were produced for young people and for schools to share to help them get through lockdown from a careers perspective. There were:

Isolation Inspiration 1

Isolation Inspiration 2

Isolation inspiration 3

These resources were refreshed in the January 2021 lockdown and re-sent to schools.

ISOLATION INSPIRATION #1

10 steps to exploring careers in lockdown

Now more than ever, it's time to think about your future and **set exciting goals** to aim for. Lockdown won't last forever!

After all, that's what school should be about: giving you the right skills and qualifications to **get a job that you love**.

But where do you start? Here's a quick and easy plan to follow without feeling overloaded. All the resources are free to use. Mix things up or pick the bits you're interested in – you don't have to do everything. It's your future. **Enjoy exploring!**

The resources received praised from across the network nationally:

Marina, the Isolation Inspiration is great - thank you to you and your colleagues for compiling. - Andrea Gilby, Chalfonts Community College

This is a brilliant piece of work – Sally Beevers, Careers Hub Lead, Liverpool Growth Platform

Your resources are amazing and really student-friendly.
It is great to see such good work out there demonstrating the good practice that Enterprise Coordinators/Advisors are working on, our region's young people will benefit from this. - Terry Exell, Enterprise Coordinator, Devon

Youth voice

The **Buckinghamshire Student Careers Leader Forum,** made up of representatives from Bucks schools, fed in their opinions on all things careers and act as careers ambassadors in schools, meeting once every half term. Schools take it in turns to host so that all participants have the chance of organising, hosting and minute taking thus building work skills.

Careers Leader Training

In line with the recent Skills for Jobs White Paper, Careers Leaders are encouraged to complete Careers and Enterprise Company Career Leader Training to better understand their role and to develop the skills required to help strategically and successfully embed a careers program in their school or college. A high proportion of Carers Leaders have taken up training bursaries to undertake this training.

Enterprise Coordinator Training

The CEC has focused on training for Enterprise Coordinators this academic year. The Under 19 Skills Hub team have embraced this and have attended all possible opportunities for CPD e.g. Managing Opportunity and Challenge, Upgrade to Compass+, Curriculum Masterclass BM4, Creating a stable careers programme BM1, EC Competency Framework, How to deliver effective group training interventions, Delivering Training in Groups Online CPD Day, Getting Ready for Ofsted masterclass to name but a few.

The Bucks Skills Show 2020

BUCKS SKILLS SHOW Online 2020

The annual Bucks Skills Show is the county's largest interactive and experiential skills festival. In 2020, it took place entirely online with a focus on careers in the curriculum and was attended by over 5,000 attendees across the week.

The Bucks Skills Show Online 2020 aims were:

- Help remotivate students after lockdown.

- Show students why subjects are relevant to real life – and why it all really does matter!
- Encourage students to be positive about their futures.

The two-part event ran from 9th – 13th November 2020 entirely virtually and consisted of two parts:

- Bringing lessons to life in-school.
- Student/parent webinars and 1:1 careers advice. Plus, the opportunity to book free 30-minute 'What's right for me?' 1:1 advice and guidance sessions with a careers expert.

It even had a recent mention in Parliament:

Can I also welcome the Secretary of State's statement? This year, from 9 to 13 November, the Bucks Skills Show goes online by live-streaming employers into classrooms across the county. They will bring lessons to life by showing how curriculum subjects can be applied in the workplace. Will my right hon. Friend welcome this initiative and the work of Buckinghamshire Business First, as well as the Bucks careers hub, which was named the top performer in the country? Does he agree that their support for young people facing increasing challenges to kickstart their career post-virus shows what can be achieved by a successful partnership between business, the Bucks local enterprise partnership, the council and the Careers and Enterprise Company? - Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham)

'My right hon. Friend lists a lot of people who I want to thank and congratulate, whether at the Bucks LEP or the skills hub that has been created. This shows that we should not see education in isolation from the rest of the economy or the rest of the community, because all those elements, by working together, provide so much more opportunity. That is a brilliant example of how people can inspire children to make them understand that what they are learning in the classroom has a real relevance to the world of work, giving them the enthusiasm to look at different careers and different opportunities that they might not have considered before' - Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education

Thanks Marina - what a great job. We're going to watch a lot of these in the next couple of weeks. I'm also sending home to parents – Helen Hill, The Misbourne School

Marina, this is superb. Really brilliant. Well done to you and the team. What an excellent event and blazing the trail as usual…..! - Paddy Patterson, EKFB

All sessions have been recorded and can be used at any time. This was a great advantage in the January lockdown where schools had ready to go resources to use. Schools are able to watch the recorded sessions and then follow up with live Q&A with the employer to boost employer encounters in a meaningful way.

Careers Education in Bucks special schools during the COVID crisis

SEND means Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities. Children and Young People (CYP) who reach a threshold of SEND needs are issued an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which is reviewed annually. Every young person in a Bucks special school has an EHCP.

When referring to careers' education for young people with SEND, there are two groups:

- Career group 1 - students who will typically **NOT** be taking GCSEs. They have an EHCP, have a range of moderate to complex needs and are placed in a Bucks special school.
- Career group 2 - students who typically **DO** take GCSEs with a range of moderate needs. They may or may not have an EHCP and are normally placed in a mainstream school.

Almost all students in Bucks special schools are in careers group 1.

Background to special schools in Bucks

Special school provision in Bucks has reduced significantly in the last 20 years. Penn School was closed in 2001, boarding provision has been reduced to nothing over the past 10 years, Chiltern Gate and MapleWood School merged in 2016 to create Chiltern Wood School, with admissions now limited to SLD (Severe Learning Difficulties).

There are 8 special schools in Bucks in comparison to the following in neighbouring authorities:

- 22 in Hertfordshire, including a specialist hearing impairment school
- 14 in Oxfordshire
- 10 in Northamptonshire

Because of the reduction in placements and the national increase in EHCPs, Bucks special schools only typically admit students with moderate to severe learning difficulties, with two schools (Heritage House and Chiltern Wood) only admitting SLD and complex medical needs. Outcomes for a high percentage of students from these two schools are community-based voluntary work or supported living. Because of the lack of placements in Buckinghamshire, many pupils are placed out-of-county.

Those students with EHCPs who do not gain a placement in a local special school are placed in a mainstream Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP). There are seven upper schools in Bucks which have an ARP, a specialist provision for particular learning difficulties, for which they receive additional funding from the local authority. Those students who cannot be placed, or whose needs cannot be met at a special school or mainstream ARP are placed out of county.

Challenges for special schools during CV19

- **Independent 121 careers advice:** Local authority funding for this was withdrawn from special schools in 2016. Most schools cannot afford to pay for independent careers advice, so their own staff conduct these 121 interviews themselves, regardless of the benefit of unbiased guidance.
- **Health and mental health issues:** SEND YP have been disproportionately affected by the CV19 crisis. They are generally more vulnerable, isolated, have complex medical needs, and many associated mental health issues. MENCAP data shows that younger adults aged 18-34

with a learning disability are 30 times more likely to die of COVID than young adults in the general population [3].

- **School resource:** Careers staff are mostly senior leadership and have many priorities, particularly supply teaching during CV19.
- **Virtual Employer engagement:** Unlike in mainstream settings, meaningful employer encounters simply cannot take place virtually. Not only is online engagement difficult, given their learning needs, the sensory and physical aspect of engaging with an employer is key to building their confidence and understanding of the workplace. This is likely to be an ongoing problem with the additional competition for placements from T-levels, and the recovery of businesses generally. Schools also rely on community engagement for WEX and work placements, which has been cut due to the pandemic.
- **Home-learning during lockdown:** Students with more complex needs cannot engage with online learning, which is also limited by low levels of parental engagement compared to mainstream schools.
- **Compass:** Special schools typically do not follow the standard national curriculum as all learning is person-centred toward independent living skills. Work-related learning is embedded throughout the whole school, so CLs do not see the value of completing Compass reports. The CEC have recognised that Compass for special schools with its focus on specific careers education does not reflect this in its current format and a review is to be undertaken from March 2021.
- **Compass Plus:** Special schools report directly to their Local Authority on individual students via the process of EHCP annual reviews. Consequently, there is no need for a tool to track individual students' careers activities and schools do not see the value in upgrading. Only 60 special schools across the country have upgraded thus far. The CEC have recognised this as a national issue and a review of Compass Plus's suitability for students with EHCPs will be undertaken in the 2021/22 academic year.

  Parental engagement: Parental engagement is typically low. Many parents look to schools as a respite from the challenge of raising of a young person with SEND. There are often additional issues in the home where other services may be involved (social services, mental health services etc). A higher-than-average number of parents of a child with SEND also have additional needs and a higher number than average have never had a long-term job. A higher proportion live in the more deprived areas in Buckinghamshire [4]. This makes it difficult to engage them with the benefits of WEX or skills related learning.
- **Staff absence:** Two schools have lost their named careers leaders with no current replacement in one school and one currently being recruited. One school has a career leader on long-term sick leave with no replacement, and one school has a career leader due to retire after Easter.
- **Historical challenges:** In 2014 and 2017, Buckinghamshire County Council Services for children in need of help and protection, looked after children and care leavers were rated inadequate by Ofsted and the council have been subject to 6-monthly monitoring visits. This has been on hold during the CV19 crisis but it forms the backdrop against which the local authority is battling to improve all outcomes for young people in care. This is an important point to note as 17.9% of CYP in care have a disability and are already disadvantaged [5].

[3] https://www.mencap.org.uk/press-release/eight-10-deaths-people-learning-disability-are-covid-related-inequality-soars
[4] http://www.healthandwellbeingbucks.org/Resources/Councils/Buckinghamshire/Documents/JSNA/6.11.pdf
[5] https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/825

How has the Bucks Skills Hub been helping?

- **CEC SEND Gatsby Toolkit:** We disseminate the benchmarks to help schools focus their delivery in a way which is proven to improve career outcomes for all young people. This is successful when disseminating statutory requirements.
- **Talentino Digital Programme**: This package has been provided to interested schools, to help them deliver skills lessons in the classroom targeted to career group 1.
- **What's right for me Adviza 121 careers guidance**: This offer has been well-received.
- **Specific SEND resources and training:** We broadcast LearnLive post-16 sessions, Thames Valley SEND webinar for employers, three specific SEND sessions as part of the Bucks Skills Show, SEND specific LMI presentation and the up-coming Thames Valley SEND Resources webinar.
- **Resources:** We have researched and shared many resources with careers leaders, including specific Bucks disability LMI data, in-school WEX projects, employer WEX opportunities, videos and worksheets.
- **Raising awareness of SEND within the wider community:** We sit on the following impact groups: DWP Workability, Bucks Council Education and Employment, Bucks Council Local Offer for SEND and Bucks Council Preparation for Adulthood Group, and advocate for the importance careers education.
- **SEND Community of Practice:** We provide a forum for special schools via the SEND Community of Practice. Grammar schools and upper schools run their own careers leaders' meetings, but special schools do not, so this is the only forum they have to engage with one another and share best practice. The first CoP meeting held in June 2020 was well-received, with over 30 attendees. The autumn meeting was less well attended due to the challenges of CV19.
- **SEND Newsletter:** We have published this focussed newsletter once a term.
- **CEC partnership:** CLs have access to national training, webinars and resources. Five careers leaders have completed the Career Leader training and one is registered to a course.

What next?

Special schools have struggled disproportionately during the COVID crisis. Coming out of lockdown will leave schools with many long-term effects to deal with, particularly mental health issues and competition for work placements. We can continue to advocate on their behalf, and work with businesses to create meaningful WEX opportunities where possible. The percentage of adults with a learning disability in paid employment in Bucks in 2019/20 (pre-pandemic) was 6.2%, compared to the 5.2% mean across all English counties [6]. Although above the national average, employment outcomes for people with disabilities in Bucks continues to be a challenge.

[6] Local Area SEND report for Buckinghamshire up to April 2020: https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/send-research/local-area-send-report?mod-area=E10000002&mod-group=AllCountiesInCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup

12. Business Engagement

Buckinghamshire Business First's engagement with the business community is greater than ever and has grown, with over 13,000 businesses involved with the Growth Hub. The website averages 10,440 users per month and engagement and followers across our social platforms has grown with 6,800 Twitter followers, 5,800 Facebook fans, 2,400 connections on LinkedIn and 1,700 followers on Instagram.

Support for businesses continues to be crucial during the pandemic. The support hub created at the start of the pandemic has become one of the most popular sections of the website (COVID-19 advice page) providing centralised resources, guidance, webinars and funding and support schemes.

Buckinghamshire Business First continues to work closely with Buckinghamshire Council and Buckinghamshire LEP to ensure consistent and efficient messaging. Particularly successful has been the close relationship with Buckinghamshire Council and communicating the latest grant information to the business community. Buckinghamshire Business First has supported with a regular and extensive communication plan consisting of emails, newsletter highlights, web and social media activity.

Examples of some of the organisations we have worked with:

Buckinghamshire Business First
@bbfuk

Have you had your rapid #COVID test? @BucksCouncil are now rolling this testing out further for anybody who needs to leave home to work or volunteer. Testing sites are open in #Aylesbury, #HighWycombe, #Buckingham & #Amersham: buckinghamshire.gov.uk/coronavirus/bo... @MATatBucks @RobBAylesbury

Buckinghamshire Council and 4 others

Buckinghamshire Business First
@bbfuk

SCAM: We're aware of businesses being asked to pay a fee to access grant funding. This is a scam and you will lose any fee you pay. Neither @bbfuk nor @BucksCouncil will ask you to pay a fee to access grant funding related to #COVID19. #coronavirus @bizsupportgovuk @TheFCA

3:00 PM · Apr 22, 2020 · Hootsuite Inc.

View Tweet activity

13 Retweets **1** Quote Tweet **9** Likes

Buckinghamshire Business First
@bbfuk

The @FremantleTrust have an urgent need for support with domestic care and nursing staff, cleaning and catering provision. If you are able to help please submit details here: bbf.uk.com/forms/local-bu... #COVID19 #Coronavirus #SupportLocal @BucksCouncil

5:05 PM · Apr 15, 2020 · Hootsuite Inc.

View Tweet activity

15 Retweets **11** Likes

Buckinghamshire Business First
2,445 followers
1yr

#ProudOfBucks

After Global Infusion Group effectively lost £9.4 million of business in three days due to cancelled events, they sprang into action to pivot their activity into supporting the NHS and are now catering for 15 NHS sites across #Buckinghamshire, providing over 1,000 meals a day.

Read the full story here: https://lnkd.in/d6YkstR

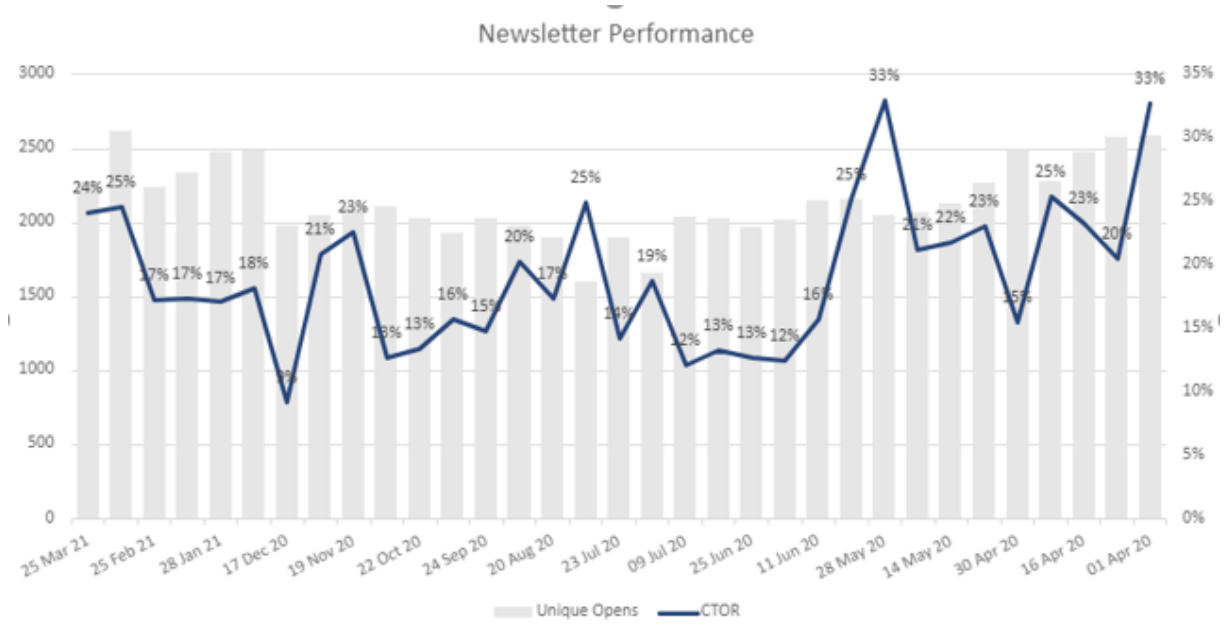
#COVID19 #Coronavirus #BusinessContinuity Cabinet Office

Newsletter

Members continue to receive bi-weekly newsletters containing the latest news, member offers, jobs and available support. This year 33 newsletters have been distributed. Performance has fluctuated across the year, but open rates were higher at the start of the pandemic when businesses needed the latest information.

We also distribute a bi-weekly events newsletter promoting the latest BBF and Members events. Our newsletter open rate is on average 20%

Newsletter Performance across the year



Example newsletters - the most popular articles across the year were the Covid updates and the latest grant information.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BUSINESS FIRST

YOUR LOCAL GROWTH HUB

Business News

11 March 2021

Buckinghamshire Business Festival 2021 - sponsorship opportunities available!

The annual celebration of business in the Entrepreneurial Heart of Britain runs from April 19th - 30th. Get your name heard far and wide by becoming a valued sponsor, with discounts on packages available. And host your own event during the Festival for maximum effect.

Read about the Buckinghamshire Business Festival >

Brexit - new funding and guidance

SME Brexit Support Fund; a guide to travelling to Europe for work; making sure you have the correct EORI number; webinars; a useful toolkit for all things related to trading with the EU.

Read more >

Budget 2021 overview

This was a budget like no other, for a time like no other. Read an overview of the Chancellor's announcements that affect businesses and the government's 'Plan for Growth'.

Read more >

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BUSINESS FIRST

YOUR LOCAL GROWTH HUB

Business News

01 April 2020

New funding available to support you through COVID-19 crisis

We have new grants available to support businesses at this time. Read all about the funding and how to apply.

Read more >

Please note: Our Business Advisers are extremely busy supporting businesses through this time. They are working hard to follow up with all enquiries as quickly as possible.

Additionally, we are experiencing high volumes of traffic to our website, which may cause webpages to open slower than usual. Please keep trying if you receive an error message.

Join our Twitter Hour on COVID-19 business advice & support

Ask our team of advisers and local businesses any questions you have about how COVID-19 is affecting business. Join us at @bbfuk on Twitter with #BucksBizHour at 2pm on Thursday 2nd April.

Read more >

The place with all the latest information and support

We are updating our COVID-19 page on a daily basis with the latest government and non-government information, support and advice for businesses and the self-employed. Bookmark the page and keep checking in.

Read more >

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BUSINESS FIRST

YOUR LOCAL GROWTH HUB

Business News

28 May 2020

Buckinghamshire Recovery Investment Fund launched

Grants of between £3,000 and £120,000 are available to support businesses with projects that contribute towards new income streams, product development, safeguarding jobs, COVID-19 recovery, future resilience, or productivity, profitability or jobs growth.

Read more >

Do you know the five steps businesses must take before reopening?

If your business is allowed to reopen now or in the near future, you must ensure your workplace is safe for everyone involved. Read official guidance on social distancing, shift patterns, cleaning, handling goods, PPE, and much more.

Read more >

Support available now for tourism and hospitality businesses

Discover a new programme of support aimed at helping businesses in the sector survive and be ready to bounce back when the time comes. Connect with other business owners, plan for the future with expert advisers, and hear from inspirational speakers.

Read more >

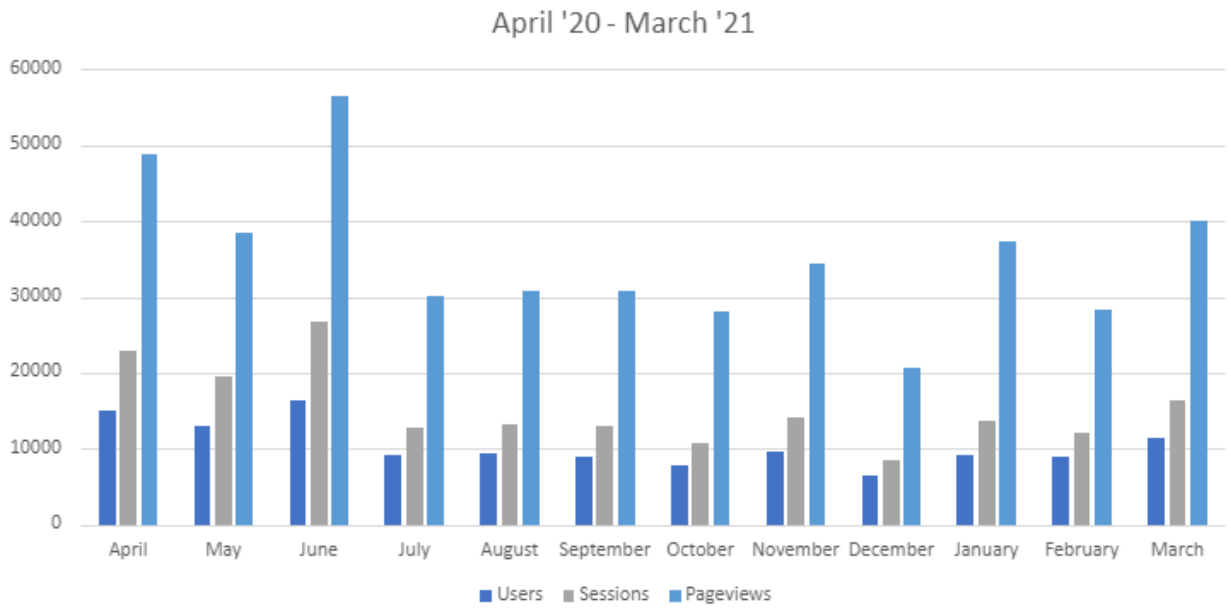
Business Hubs

The Business hubs were closed on Tuesday 17th March 2020 in advance of the national lockdown, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and have remained closed for the year. BBF plans to re-open Buckingham, Chesham and Great Missenden hubs as lockdowns eases in 2021. The High Wycombe Business Hub is now permanently closed.

Buckinghamshire Business First Website

Following the large increase in pageviews, users and sessions across the Buckinghamshire Business First website during the height of the pandemic, the figures for the rest of the year have started to level off. Across the year, we had an average of 10,440 users per month and 35,341 page views.

Website Overview for the Year



Digital Developments

As there has been a strong online focus due to the pandemic, there have been a lot of digital developments to the Buckinghamshire Business First website this year. The following were launched on the website: a new Skills Hub section for businesses, a new online application for the Buckinghamshire Business Awards to simplify the process, monthly payments process for our members and a webinar library.

New Skills Hub Section

Redundancy Support

Support for employers

Support for individuals

Inspiring young people

Employing Young People

Upskilling Employees

HR and Recruitment

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE SKILLS HUB

The Buckinghamshire Skills Hub promotes and optimises links between the business community and education/training providers to enable young people and adults to develop the skills and qualifications they need to progress in the workplace, at whatever stage of their career they are in. Skills development is central to creating the conditions for sustained innovation, excellence and growth for our Buckinghamshire businesses, particularly in priority sectors as described in our Local Industrial Strategy.

We coordinate a number of programmes including an Enterprise Adviser Network and Careers Hub working with schools, the annual Bucks Skills Show, sector-focused employer and stakeholder groups, apprenticeship support for businesses and a Skills Advisory Panel for Buckinghamshire.

New Buckinghamshire Skills Hub website

The new **Buckinghamshire Skills Hub website** is a one-stop shop for all skills and career-related advice in Buckinghamshire. The new website is the first of its kind in Buckinghamshire and is designed to inspire, support and inform career seekers, career changers and educators.

For businesses, this website is where you can advertise your latest full and part-time job vacancies, as well as any work experience, apprenticeship and internship opportunities – all for free.

Get started by **posting your vacancies here**. Vacancies are posted to the Buckinghamshire Business First website for free and are automatically added to the new Bucks Skills Hub website – also for free.

New Online Entry Form for Buckinghamshire Business Awards

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BUSINESS FIRST

Business Support | News | Events | Member Directory | Contracts | Offers | Hubs | Jobs

Buckinghamshire Business Awards 2021

Submit your entry for the Corporate Social Responsibility Award by midnight on 19th February 2021.

Welcome to the Buckinghamshire Business Awards 2021

Given the immense difficulties faced by people over the last year, we feel it is vitally important to recognise as many of the wonderful businesses as possible that have supported people along the way. That is why we are still open for entries for this **one** category.

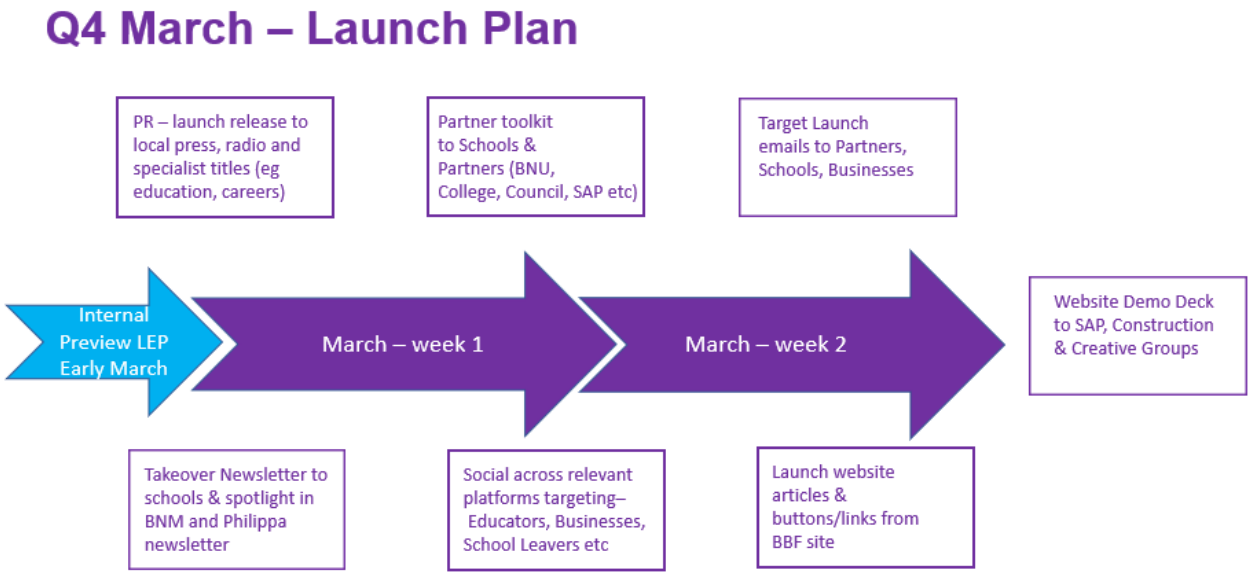
We appreciate the time and effort that you put into your entry, so before starting – you may like to read through '**Your Guide to Entering the Buckinghamshire Business Awards**' and also the '**Category Guide**' to ensure that you make the most of this opportunity.

Get started on your application for the Corporate Social Responsibility Award below.

The closing date for receiving entries is midnight on 19th February 2021.

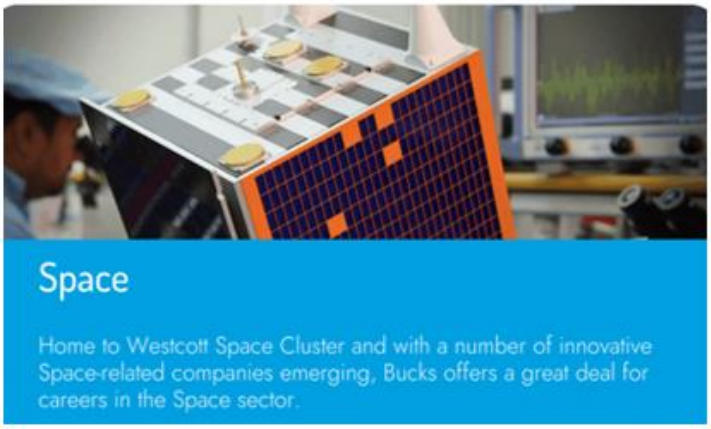
Other Digital Activity

The team also delivered the new Low Carbon website in October and the New Skills Hub website, which launched in early March 2021. The Skills Hub website was supported with a marketing launch plan incorporating press, emails, newsletters, social and partner activity.



Skills Hub Digital Leaflet

Skills Hub Graphics



13. Future Plans

Business Plans

Covid and Brexit have tested the resilience of our companies in the last year, more than we could ever have predicted or imagined. 2021 / 22 will be a year (hopefully) of recovery, picking up the pieces and getting literally 'back to business'.

With that in mind, plans for 2021 / 22 have changed significantly. New or additional support will be provided, such as:

- ✓ New masterclasses – to include Strategic Planning, Digital Marketing and Finance
- ✓ Mentoring for all businesses (not just those starting up or on the Growth Programme
- ✓ More Peer Networking which has proved so valuable in the last year for businesses
- ✓ Digital support – including the take up of the new technologies or with digital skills
- ✓ Workforce skills – recruitment, support with training plans, apprenticeships and redundancy
- ✓ More advisers offering more support
- ✓ An extended Be Your Own Boss programme
- ✓ A new Challenge Lab prob providing opportunities and support with innovation (in partnership with BNU)
- ✓ More Enterprise Advisers working in all schools across the county to support their students' transition to further/higher education and the world of work
- ✓ …….and even more!

Detailed plans for delivery are on the next 2 pages, and it must be remembered that whilst these have been scoped out, our delivery will always remain flexible, responsive and informed and as such open to change if or when required.

Business Support – A Plan to Support Business Recovery 2021 / 2022

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BUSINESS FIRST | YOUR LOCAL GROWTH HUB | ngage

Business Support Programme Delivery

- Growth Programme
- Low Carbon Workspaces
- Workforce Skills
- Be Your Own Boss
- INNO Industry
- Digital Support
- Hotline
- Peer Networks

- Digital support NEW!
- Virtual support NEW!

Changes to Delivery 21/22

- Pro-actively drive the demand for Business Support in order to ensure businesses are fit to recover from the pandemic and equipped to deal with the consequences of EU exit.
- An additional Adviser will be employed to support the additional activity due to pandemic and EU exit.
- Peer Networking to be continued with yr 2 of the national Peer Network programme and MD Ngage Workshops will be undertaken on demand by the Advisers or specialists on a 1:many basis
- INNO Industry to provide a salary for specialist digital for businesses (8 months only)
- A re-energising of the Growth Champion mentoring which was started in 2019 but stalled in 2020 due to Covid.
- Finance masterclasses to remain ongoing throughout year.
- Enterprise zones to be account managed
- Where new grant schemes to be taken on – a separate Grant Team will be created for their delivery which will sit alongside the Adviser Team.
- Workforce Skills to be an active specialism working alongside the Growth/Adviser team
- Create strong stakeholder links with the new companies creating new infrastructure ie EWR, HS2
- A renewed Virtual Adviser providing addition 24/7 support

Budget 2021 2022

– See separate doc

Organisational Chart

Organisation%20Chart%202021%2022.

Key Strengths

- Knowledgeable and professional business advice
- 1:1 account management of companies, ensuring as a business completes one programme another is introduced
- Proactive business engagement
- Engagement with over 65% of the private sector workforce and over 35% of the businesses
- Strong partnership relationships with the local authorities, HE, FE, DIT, IPO, Innovate UK, HMRC, EEN, British Business Bank, banks etc in order to provide a quality driven 'Growth Hub Plus' service
- Streamlined customer journey, joining up public and private sector 'marketplace' for business services
- Provision of IDB using multi channels (web, phone, social media, face to face, events and peer to peer)
- Businesses facilitated by BBF to learn and grow through each other's shared knowledge via networking, forums, Think Tanks, MD Ngage, Peer Networks etc
- Scale up / High Growth Plan is fully operational
- Promotion of government pre-procurement market engagement and procurement opportunities
- Negligible duplication of business support in the county
- Support provided for all workforce skills
- A comprehensive and dynamic website providing links to over 350 organisations offering support for businesses
- Energy Advisers helping businesses to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions

Supporting Recovery and Growth

- Face to face advice
- Virtual Advice 24/7
- Workshops on demand
- Grants
- Access to Finance
- Mentoring
- Workforce Skills support
- Digital support
- Leadership and Management support
- Networking

Targets 2021/22

	Target
Light Assists (to include unique web users and all engagement lasting less than an hour)	35,000
Medium Assists (Engagement with a business of 1hr plus)	500
Intensive Assists broken down into.....	250
Grants	200
12 hours of support	50
Tonnes of CO2e reduced	1,260
Projected jobs creation	50
No of new products / services supported	16
People supported to start own business	40
No of businesses supported with workforce skills	200
No of apprenticeship / T Level opportunities identified	175

Specialist Areas of Work

- Engineering / Manufacture
- Food and Drink Manufacture
- Rural
- Tourism
- Environmental
- Enterprise Zones
- Retail
- Start Up

Growth and Start Up

Key Features

1. Telephone hotline and triage service
2. Masterclasses in Finance
3. Grants up to £2,500
4. Bespoke 1:1 support in Intellectual Property
5. A named business adviser
6. Mentoring with Growth/Start Champions
7. Peer to peer networking
8. Digital support
9. Focussed specialist advise on Intellectual Property
10. Enterprise and Graduation Days
11. Start Up short courses and Enterprise Days
12. On demand workshops
13. Fully trained advisers – 1:1 support
14. Webinars, virtual meetings, and workshops

Rural

Key Features

1. Support for rural businesses – online, by phone and 1:1
2. Help in brokering funding solutions
3. LEADER monitoring and support
4. LEADER evaluation

Low Carbon

Key Features

1. Grants provided up to £5,000 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
2. 1:1 support and advice on reducing carbon, waste and water
3. Support Bucks to becoming Zero Carbon
4. Working across Bucks, Herts, Berks and SEMLEP
5. Member of the South East Energy Board

What else? – See this paper for some solutions and ideas that will require funding

Low%20Carbon%20Opportunities%20-9

Tourism

Key Features

1. Be the Business masterclasses
2. Grant funding
3. Peer to peer programme
4. Growth programme
5. See Visit Bucks business plan

Workforce Skills

Key Features

1. MD Ngage / Peer Networks
2. Apprenticeship, T Level and
3. Recruitment and skills support in the workplace
4. Redundancy support for employers incl redundancy payments
5. 1:1 support for employers with training plans
6. Comprehensive website designed for students, training providers, parents and employers
7. Support for redundancy
8. Work on social legacy from procurement
9. Support with Green Skills

Digital and Sectors

Key Features

1. Working with EU partners to develop a new blueprint for business clusters and getting them to take up the new technologies
2. Working with 5 key sectors and business representatives (creative and Media, Med Tech, High Tech, Space and Construction) to ensure delivery of the aspirations identified in the LIS
3. 1:1 advice and support
4. Active brokerage to solution providers
5. Close collaborative working with universities, catapults etc

Virtual Support for Businesses

24/7

Key Features

1. A new enhanced Virtual Adviser with increased interaction
2. Sharing Platform available to all business
3. Online applications
4. Linkage with a new Skills Hub website
5. Subject to funding an online "chat service" with an Adviser being provided during office hours

Business Plan 2021 / 2022

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE SKILLS HUB

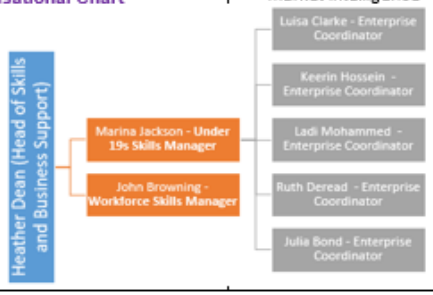
Under 19s Programme Delivery

- CEC core programme delivering the Enterprise Adviser Network to all schools
- Careers Hub started in September 2018 with 21 schools and expanded in 2020 to include all 37 mainstream schools/colleges
- Community of Practice to support SEND schools

Key Strengths Under 19 Team

- Excellent relationships with schools/colleges and SLT engagement
- A strong, motivated and well-informed team providing specialist knowledge
- Key events have become part of county calendar for schools and businesses e.g. Bucks Skills Show
- Amongst best performing LEP areas in country for Gatsby Benchmark achievement
- Support from Cornerstone Employers group
- Number, range and commitment of over 80 Enterprise Advisers
- Agile and responsive to environment

Organisational Chart



Workforce Skills Programme Delivery

- Developing training and development plans to support business growth.
- Supporting businesses making redundancies
- Delivering support to employers in the county with their HR and recruitment issues
- Skills needs analysis – identifying gaps and developing solutions
- Provision of information on suitable training provision
- Provision of LMI to help businesses plan for the future

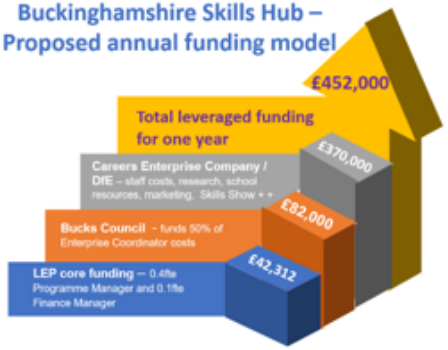
Key Strengths Workforce Skills

- A comprehensive and dynamic skills website providing links to a large range of organisations providing support for businesses

Expertise in:

- Apprenticeships, traineeships and work placements
- Learning and development
- Recruitment
- Inclusive employment
- Engaging with schools and colleges.
- Evidence based strategy development through up-to-date and transparent labour market intelligence

Buckinghamshire Skills Hub – Proposed annual funding model



Targets

- ✓ To maintain current Gatsby Benchmark achievement
- ✓ 175 Apprenticeship opportunities supported
- ✓ 200 medium assists supporting businesses with workforce skills
- ✓ Creation of a single portal for Work Readiness programmes
- ✓ Broaden and establish the redeployment scheme from hospitality and leisure to health and social care
- ✓ Launch new website
- ✓ Bucks Skills Show - virtual version plus a live version
- ✓ To run the first virtual STEM event
- ✓ To hold annual Headteacher/SLT/Careers Leader/Enterprise Adviser/Employer event

Key Areas of Focus

Workforce Skills

Key Features

Practical support for businesses:

- ✓ Skills needs analysis – identifying gaps and developing solutions
- ✓ Information on suitable training provision
- ✓ LMI to help businesses plan for the future
- ✓ Developing training and development plans to support business growth.
- ✓ Workshops: eg How to take on an Apprentice and How to create a learning and development plan

Redundancy Support

Key Features

- ✓ Redundancy Taskforce established with six sub-groups: Health and Social Care, Construction, Young People, Support for Individuals, Support for Businesses and Training and Re-skilling
- ✓ Single point of contact - comprehensive website signposting to all services, resources and support for individuals and businesses facing redundancy
- ✓ Collaborative working with all agencies, organizations and charities providing support to businesses and individuals in the County
- ✓ Supporting businesses making redundancies

Sectors Groups

Key Features

- ✓ Working with 5 key sectors and business representatives (Creative and Media, Health and Social Care, High Tech, Space and Construction) to ensure delivery of the aspirations identified in the LIS
- ✓ Covid-19 response - development of redundancy support plans including redeployment programmes

Skills Advisory Programme

Key Features

- ✓ Established Skills Advisory Panel bringing together knowledge and expertise form across the County's businesses, education and training establishments, professional bodies,
- ✓ charity groups and Buckinghamshire Council
- ✓ Development of County Skills Strategy and action plans
- ✓ Regular Panel meetings enabling scrutiny and monitoring of Skills Hub progress

- Open transparent reporting through annual Local Skills Report

Skills Under 19s

Key Features

- ✓ Expanded Careers Hub – maintained as one of top performing in the country
- ✓ Enterprise Advisers in each school, now with 2 EAs per school
- ✓ Skills Show
- ✓ Virtual work experience
- ✓ Comprehensive new website designed for students, training providers, parents and businesses
- ✓ Skills competitions
- ✓ Youth voice
- ✓ CPD for schools
- ✓ Embedding careers into school curriculum

Sustainability Fund

Key Features

- ✓ Provides some core funding for the Under 19s Adviser Network

Careers Hub Fund

Key Features

- ✓ Funding is calculated on £1000 per school in Hub
- ✓ Supports Hub in delivering its goals to fund activities which benefit schools/colleges across the Hub

Future Areas of Work

- ✓ To become a Skills Hub providing brokerage to all skills support, advice and training in the county including the aligned services of DWP
- ✓ Primary schools – support with early careers education
- ✓ Covid-19 recovery including Redundancy Taskforce, critical redeployment schemes and website support
- ✓ Development of Skills Hub website to provide comprehensive high-quality information on career opportunities in Bucks
- ✓ Campaign to increase opportunities for work experience and Apprenticeships
- ✓ Development of a Buckinghamshire work-readiness programme
- ✓ Development of digital skills programme for all Bucks residents
- ✓ To support a Green Skills offer

Future Events

The Business Festival is taking place between 19th and 30th April 2021 and is a celebration of business in the Entrepreneurial Heart of Britain. This year, we are taking the festival online!

Businesses were able to get involved through sponsorship opportunities which will raise their profile, show off their products, services and innovations and develop those all-important new business relationships and collaborations. A total of 45 members have taken up the opportunity of sponsorship.

During the festival, there will be a wide-ranging programme of events hosted by Buckinghamshire Business First, our partners and our members which we hope many will take advantage of. Promotion of our sponsors and events will continue throughout the fortnight to maximise exposure of our sponsors and event hosts.

Buckinghamshire Business First
2,445 followers
1w •

What are you doing between April 19-30th?!

Fill your diary with brilliant events hosted by your fellow #Buckinghamshirebusiness members, or join the #BucksBizFest line-up and host your own events to share your expert advice and promote your #business.

Take a look at what's planned so far here: https://lnkd.in/dR2UakN

A big shout out goes to this year's sponsors: Modern Leaders Ltd | Hazlemere Community Association | #GrowthProgramme | Low Carbon Workspaces | #PeerNetworks | Buckinghamshire Skills Hub | Ngage Solutions | CUBE™ | Consciam Limited | Epoq IT - Managed IT Services | Framework Digital Ltd | CSR Accreditation | Transworld Business Advisors UK Ltd | Business Locksmith | Haines Watts | ActionCOACH Chilterns Central | Working the Future | Calibre Quality Care | Yellowyoyo | Form Workplace Solutions Ltd | The Building Performance Hub | CRESSEX EMBROIDERY LIMITED | SYLO | Beyond HR. | Kidd Rapinet LLP | Alcom IT | CARDS.UK LTD | Heart of Bucks | 24X7 (BUCKINGHAMSHIRE) LIMITED | Alcom IT | Jordan-IT-Solutions | Bongo IT | Simon Warnford-Davis | Verlingue UK | Cerub PR | delilah | Good Endeavours | Take One Business Communications | The Bot Forge Ltd | Dimension Eighty Eight | HR and Training Limited | Sales: Untangled

Buckinghamshire Business Awards – May 2021

The Buckinghamshire Business Awards are an opportunity for local businesses to show that they are leaders in their field who excel through hard work and entrepreneurial vision.

Due to the pandemic, the decision was taken to postpone the 2020 Buckinghamshire Business Awards which would have culminated in a ceremony in May 2020. Entries for the 2021 Business Awards opened in November 2021 with our new online entry process. The finalists are due to be announced in May 2021 in a week-long celebration and we will be making surprise doorstep drop offs to winners to present trophies, champagne and certificates. The aim is to create exceptional media interest with ramped up PR through press, radio and social media.

There are 9 categories in 2021 with each business having the opportunity to enter up to 2. The prestigious Company of the Year will be awarded to a company chosen from all the finalists across all of the awards.

1. **Apprentice and Young Person Employer** sponsored by Buckinghamshire Council.
2. **Corporate Social Responsibility** sponsored by Chandler Garvey.
3. **Excellence in Customer Service** sponsored by Cube Video.
4. **Family Business of the Year** sponsored by Ashridge Group.
5. **Growth Business** sponsored by Richardsons Chartered Accountants.
6. **Covid Innovation Award** sponsored by Bucks LEP.
7. **New Busines**s sponsored by Bucks New University.
8. **Small Business** sponsored by B P Collins.
9. **Young Entrepreneur** sponsored by the University of Buckingham.

The Buckinghamshire Business Awards 2021 timetable

Thursday 26th November 2020	**Categories launched and entries open at our AGM**
Sunday 31st Jan 2021 - midnight	**Closing date for entries**
15th Feb - 31st Mar 2021 (7 weeks)	**Judging by sponsors**
Friday 23rd April 2021	**Judging panel**
Thursday 29th April 2021	**Finalists announced**
24th – 28th May 2021	**Winners announced**

Business Leaders Network / Dinners – July/Oct 2021

The next face to face event is scheduled to take place in October 2021 with a further event taking place in mid-July which will be online.

Meet on your Feet – July 2021

The plan is to schedule 3 of these new style events between July and the end of the year encouraging our members to network and make new connections whilst walking outside. These events will combine the wellbeing benefits of being outside and exercising with the business benefits of expanding networks by meeting new contacts.

Simply Networking / Young Directors – Sept/ Oct 2021
These events will start up again in September and October 2021 and will be face to face.

Latest Case Studies and Videos

Buckinghamshire Business First has helped businesses to grow, innovate, diversify, and create new jobs despite the pandemic. Find the latest case study highlights below for 2020/21.

Growth Programme

Autocanteen – Targeting catering firms with new AI technology.

Offering a new solution, Autocanteen launched a new AI powered self-checkout for catering with no need for barcodes. This new technology has significant benefits in reducing queues, staff costs, less food waste and increasing revenue with the help of the Growth Programme.
Read more here

Restart Grant

Malt The Brewery - Restart Grant allows Malt to innovate.

Malt The Brewery is a micro-brewery, shop and tasting bar established in 2012. During the pandemic Malt had to stop running their popular brewery tours. With help from the Restart Grant they developed a new product – The Virtual Brewery Tour in a box.
Read more here

Rumsey's chocolate Santa hits the top spot thanks to Restart Grant.

From its early beginnings when Nigel Rumsey started selling handmade chocolates from the
kitchen table, to opening his first shop in Wendover, Rumsey's has grown into a business that now employs 43 people. When COVID-19 forced the cafes to close and there was a huge number of chocolates to sell Rumsey's turned their attention online. Read more here

The Pilgrim Pub – The village pub uses grant to diversify.

When The Pilgrim was forced to close down its popular village pub in March 2020, no one could have known how long the pandemic would last. Wanting to offer customers a taste of the Pilgrim experience, they came up with the idea of selling trademark Pilgrim sauces for the flavours that people were telling staff they were missing. Read more here

Siyan – Event specialist diversify and plan ahead.

A significant player in the live entertainment sector that regularly supports well-known events, Siyan had to look at diversifying into livestreaming events and planning ahead. A Restart Grant helped them fund bespoke financial planning services.
Read more here

Jig Joinery – investing in new tools helped Jig Joinery diversify

Jig Joinery design and manufacture timber joinery for residential homes. The pandemic meant they couldn't go into customers homes and they had difficulty securing materials with many suppliers forced to close down for a period of time. The Restart Grant helped investment in new tools to develop a new product and increase revenue by 15%.
Read more here

Five on a Bike – caring and growing into a new market.

Prior to the pandemic, Five on a Bike was a busy production company creating videos for various companies. Five on a Bike found a new opportunity to target the care sector with their service and the Restart Grant helped them develop a new innovative marketing campaign. The business is now stronger than it was pre-pandemic and is employing more staff.
Read more here

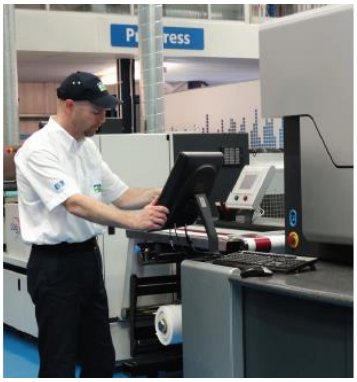
Alpha Anodising – Restart Grant helps generate new ideas and improve efficiencies.

Manufacturing company Alpha Anodising were appointed as a key supplier to complete parts for medical respirators for Hospitals during the pandemic. The Restart Grant has helped them to operate more effectively during the pandemic.
Read more here

Low Carbon Workspaces

Big Wipes – A big win for the environment is a big win for business.

The team at Big Wipes wanted to generate their own renewable energy sensing multiple benefits of doing so. Installing solar panels with the help of the Low Carbon Workspaces grant has helped make annual electricity savings and reduce Co_2e emissions.
Read more here



Berkshire Labels – LEDs light up the path to sustainability.

A label making company in Berkshire took another step in its environmental vision by implementing a very popular energy-efficient product - LED lighting. The grant enabled them to move forward and install the LED lighting making a saving on their electricity bills
Read more here

Thermatek – Things are heading up in the cold store industry.

Thermatek manufactures products for the cold store industry, which has been particularly busy during the pandemic. The company wanted to reduce waste and update the heading and lighting fixtures on the premises and the Low Carbon Grant helped to achieve this.
Read more here

Westies Dry Cleaners – how an essential small business survived during hard times.

Classed as an essential business, Westies Dry Cleaners faced a problem when its steam-generating boiler needed replacing. This piece of machinery is at the core of the business's services of in-house washing and ironing. The Low Carbon Grant grant gave a helping hand.
Read more here

Buckinghamshire Recovery Investment Fund

ViewPoint Videos – Brif Grant helps takes ViewPoint Videos global.

Viewpoint Videos was founded in 2014 by former racing driver David Humpston. By the start of 2020, the business was growing nicely within its niche of souvenir video systems and then the pandemic hit. A Buckinghamshire Recovery grant helped scale up the business, take it into new global markets and employ more staff.
Read more here

Renovatio Sytems Ltd – Buckinghamshire Investment Recovery Fund helps speed up product development.

Renovatio Systems Ltd, an electrical engineering and software consultancy, experienced a significant reduction in business due to COVID-19. The team applied to the Buckinghamshire Recovery Investment Fund (BRIF) to part-fund of the design and prototyping of a new product for cyclists and fitness enthusiasts. The product has received a lot of publicity and been picked up by the BBC for new tech to watch out for. Read more here

No2 Pound Street

No2 Pound Street in Wendover was thriving as a deli. In response to COVID-19, the shop closed its retail space and launched a click and collect option. The Buckinghamshire Recovery Investment Fund (BRIF) helped convert part of the store buildings into a teaching space and cheese workshop. This has helped grow the business and employ two more people. Read more here

Giggabox Ltd – Investment helps production company create news jobs and diversify.

An Aylesbury based production company is expanding its offering thanks to investment through the Community Investment Enterprise Facility (CEIF) and the Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF). Giggabox approached Buckinghamshire Business First for support in navigating the funding landscape. Read more here