

Evaluation of the South of Scotland Enterprise Pathways Pre-start Pilot for Under-Represented Groups

Report for

South of Scotland Enterprise



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Executive Summary

Programme Overview and Targets

The 'Pathways Pre-start Pilot for Under-Represented Groups' (the Pilot) provides coaching support, micro funding and access to mentoring and advice services for people starting a company or seeking to expand a fledgling business. Under-represented groups, including women, are a particular target. The Pilot is being delivered from 1 Sept 2024 - 31 March 2025.

The Pilot has exceeded in targets which included:

- deliver enterprise coaching to 250 under-represented individuals
- deliver pre-start grant fund (grants of up to £1,000) to 375 individuals

Evaluation Objectives and Methodology

Frontline was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Pilot focusing on:

- the relevance and level of achievement of project objectives, as well as effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability
- identifying the outcomes that have been achieved, for whom and under what circumstances
- the activities and outputs – what has been delivered, when and to who

This evaluation report draws on evidence from:

- a desk review of secondary data
- qualitative interviews with 24 stakeholders and nine coaches
- e-survey and consultation with 78 clients
- comparator assessment

Key Findings

1. Stakeholder Insights

- the Pilot is seen to target those at a very early stage of considering a business venture, providing personalised support, guidance and funding to progress with their ideas
- it fits well with the overall objectives of SOSE as well as its approach to supporting an inclusive enterprise agenda
- place-based is seen as being important given the rural nature of the area, differences across the region as well as the subtle cultural nuances
- a focus on under-represented groups (with a particular focus on females) is important however it was felt that more could be done to target other groups and areas where there is less uptake
- there is no public sector support equivalent to the Pilot
- indication of the benefits and impact emerging included seeing clients' confidence grow and the number of clients starting a business
- the most frequently mentioned area for improvement was clarifying next steps for clients

2. Enterprise Coach Insights

- the place-based approach was adding value to those who they felt often lacked confidence and were more likely to engage with a coach from the local area
- the under-represented category is self-assessed and not always disclosed making it difficult to know what group clients may fall in
- the tight timescales of the Pilot, and the need to get things up and running quickly, meant there were inevitably some teething problems with process. However, any issues identified and/or suggestions made were quickly and effectively put in place
- the Pilot was seen to be giving clients the confidence, encouragement to start a business and acting as a catalyst for this to happen
- without the Pilot it was felt that clients would either have not progressed at all or their business would have taken longer to establish or fail
- areas for improvement included:
 - earlier marketing

- personalised coaching to continue into the next stage of a client's business
- more time and space to deliver the coaching i.e. over an extended period
- the provision of more networking opportunities for clients

3. Client Insights

Those who had participated in coaching were typically at the pre-start stage or in the early stages of starting a business and reported increases in both the confidence and knowledge to run their own business. 88% of them considered themselves to be a business person at the end of coaching compared to 53% before. 75% also agreed that the things that previously held them back from starting a business were no longer barriers.

Clients who received the grant reported that it made a huge difference and most often used it to purchase equipment and/or essential IT to either help launch or grow their business. Those that received the grant support without coaching were more likely to use the grant to grow a business while those accessing coaching and grant support were using it to help launch a business. This highlights the different stages of the clients enterprise journey, with those accessing the grant only, more likely to be further along than those also requiring coaching.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Pilot:

- exceeded its targets in all areas which not only suggests sound management and operational processes but also indicates a gap in the market for pre-start business support as well as a demand for such support
- achieved an excellent Net Promotor Score of 95
- fits well with the overall objectives of SOSE as well as its approach to supporting an inclusive enterprise agenda
- whilst targeting under-represented groups at large, anecdotally the majority have been female
- there is currently no process for identifying and categorising those in under-represented groups
- was designed and implemented within very short timescales, with a fixed end point. As a result, it is acknowledged that in some cases management processes were introduced a little hastily or late but were refined as the Pilot progressed
- due to its short term nature it has not been possible to assess longer term outcomes or the sustainability of the support provided. However, there are strong indications that with continued effort, Pathways will contribute to a joined up, inclusive and vibrant ecosystem of support for entrepreneurs across the South of Scotland.

Recommendations and learning points:

- clarifying or reframing the term 'under-represented' in terms of the South of Scotland context and to consider this in terms of marketing
- designing a process for identifying and monitoring under-represented groups to inform monitoring and evaluation
- ensuring ongoing or phased marketing to support a consistent spread of activity across time
- ensuring that next steps are clarified for clients who participate together with some means of monitoring this with partner organisations
- clarifying the capacity of partner organisations, including Business Gateway, to provide follow on support to clients
- digitalising the application and grant processes with continued support provided
- creation of a central online programme management resource
- creation of a Pathways client community
- offering further networking events and opportunities
- measuring and monitoring of the longer term outcomes and impact

1 Introduction and Strategic Context

South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) has been supporting Women and Young People at pre-start stage for over two years through its coaches, enterprise pop up engagement, Real Models Business Simulation programmes and college engagement. In 2024, SOSE was chosen to lead a pilot in the region which aims to make it easier for women and people from other under-represented groups to start a business.

The 'Pathways Pre-start Pilot for Under-Represented Groups' (the Pilot) provides coaching support, micro funding and access to mentoring and advice services for people starting a company or seeking to expand a fledgling business. Under-represented groups in the start-up community, including women, are a particular targeted. The Pilot will run from 1 Sept 2024 - 31 March 2025.

1.1 Background

The Pathways Report, an independent review into women in entrepreneurship in Scotland, authored by Ana Stewart and Mark Logan highlighted the root cause of female under-representation in entrepreneurship¹. *"Only one in five businesses in Scotland are female-led, while start-ups founded by women received only 2% of overall investment capital in the last five years"*. The report identified five major causes of under-participation in entrepreneurialism:

1. Relative to men, women are often more logistically constrained, making participation in entrepreneurship difficult.
2. Women frequently have a sense of "not belonging" in entrepreneurship, which affects their confidence and self-belief.
3. Formally-defined pathways into entrepreneurship are unclear, while informal pathways and networks underserve women.
4. General education and normalisation of entrepreneurship as a valid career path is largely not present in the education system.
5. Women receive far less investment than men at all stages of the entrepreneurial journey from venture capital firms and related sources.

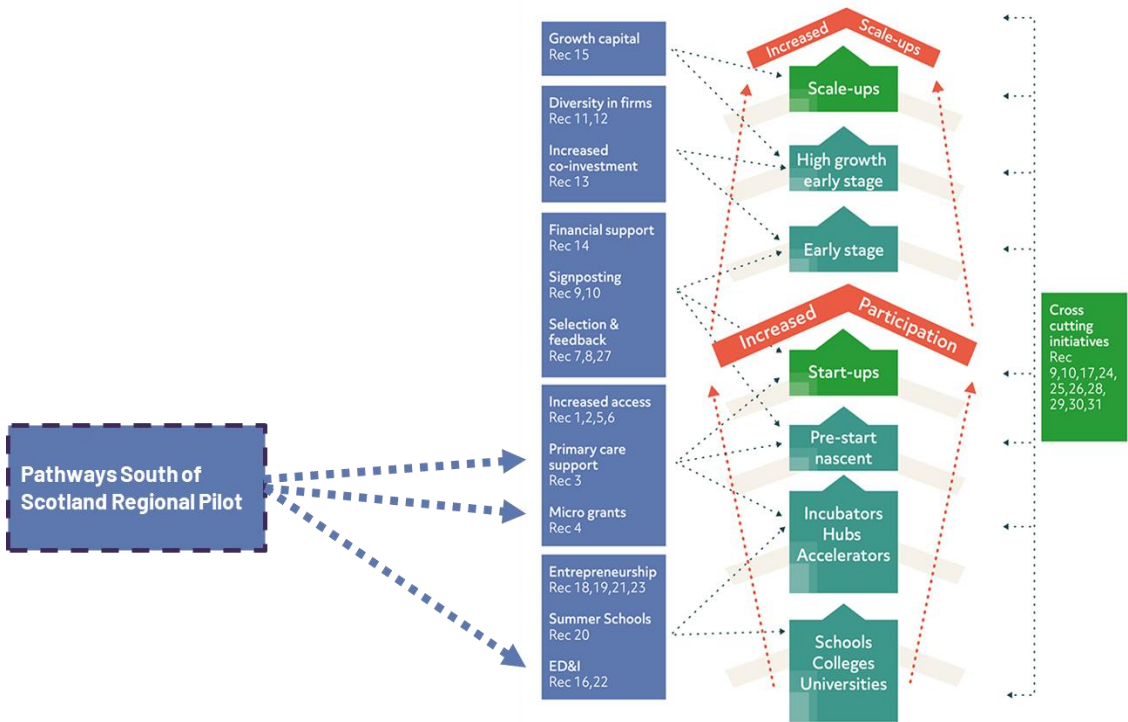
The report was commissioned to consider the under-participation of women in entrepreneurship, but the recommendations have wider applicability. This is because many of the root-cause issues affecting entrepreneurial under-participation as regards gender also affect other under-represented groups. Recommendations include:

- bringing start-up incubation, education and support to where primary carers are
- supporting under-represented founders through the Concept and Journey Funds
- encouraging better representation during "selection events" within the entrepreneurial journey
- integrating entrepreneurial education within Scotland's education system
- establishing Scotland as a leading nation in Femtech
- addressing the underlying sexism at the heart of under-participation
- clarifying access pathways into entrepreneurship
- establishing a comprehensive database for tracking progress towards full representation in entrepreneurship

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/pathways-new-approach-women-entrepreneurship/documents/>

The diagram below shows how the Pilot feeds into the recommendations of the Pathways Report.

Figure 1.2: Pathways South of Scotland Regional Pilot – Key Delivery Focus



The Pilot also aligns with the ambitions of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation, South of Scotland Regional Plan and SOSE five-year plan.

Awakening entrepreneurial talent is a priority in both the South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy and National Strategy for Economic Transformation². SOSE wants to 'promote and celebrate entrepreneurial talent across the region'. It plans to do this through partnership working with regional education providers, Scottish Borders Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council including Business Gateway, Converge and Interface to grow, retain and attract the best entrepreneurial talent, including more women.

The focus on awakening entrepreneurial talent will contribute to the delivery of SOSE's statutory aims, Regional Economic Strategy themes and NSET programmes, specifically:

Figure 1.3: Contribution to the delivery of statutory aims, Regional Economic Strategy themes and NSET



² <https://www.southofscotlandenterprise.com/media/51jevoif/our-five-year-plan.pdf>

2 Evaluation Objectives

Frontline was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Pilot focusing on:

- determining the relevance and level of achievement of project objectives, development of effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability
- identifying the outcomes that have been achieved, for whom and under what circumstances
- the activities and outputs – what has been delivered, when and to who

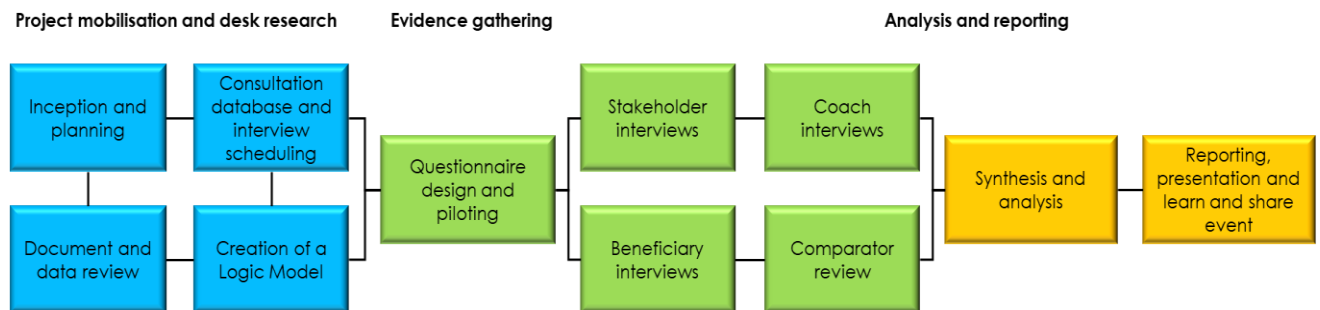
This evaluation report draws on evidence from the following sources:

- a desk review of secondary data
- qualitative interviews with 24 stakeholders and 9 coaches
- e-survey and consultation with 78 clients
- comparator assessment

A logic model for the Pilot was also developed to inform the evaluation framework.

Evaluation methodology is outlined in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Method diagram



3 Pilot Overview and Progress Against Targets

3.1 Pilot funding

A total of £1.5m was invested by the Scottish Government in the pilot with a direct Pathways project team consisting of 2 FTE's:

- Project Manager
- Project Coordinator

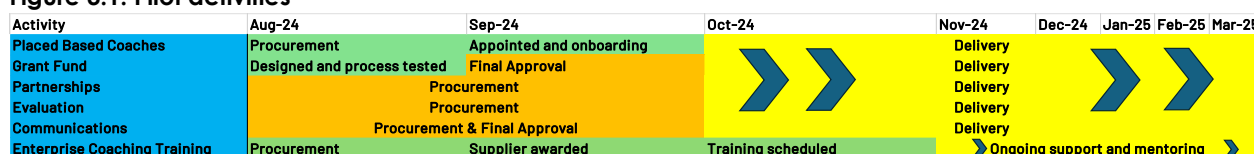
3.2 Pilot activities

The key delivery elements of the Pilot include:

1. **A framework of place-based Enterprise Coaches** – procured on a contractual basis, the Enterprise Coaches are based locally covering ten areas across the whole of the South of Scotland, for the purpose of the Pilot 4-5 towns within each ward were identified as the focus for this activity. The Enterprise coaches sit within SOSE Innovation and Entrepreneurship management and are supported by SOSE Enterprise regional coaches.
2. **Enterprise Coaching training** – provided for each Enterprise Coach along with guidance and course material to provide a consistent standard with local flexibility encouraged. Trauma and Neurodiversity training was also provided.
3. **Concept Fund** – SOSE is delivering pre-start fund grants of up to £1,000.
4. **Scotland's eco-system business support** – working with partners in Scotland's business support and social enterprise ecosystem e.g. Business Gateway, Techscaler, enterprise agency support and funders to share the understanding of the requirements of users to ensure a positive outcome as they access the next stages of their business support journey.

Figure 3.1 provides an outline of the activities being delivered against the timeline.

Figure 3.1: Pilot activities



The Enterprise Coach activity includes:

- identifying and reaching out to potential entrepreneurs in under-represented communities, and underserved locations – SOSE has established connections with Local Authorities (employability and skills & parental officers), Developing Young Workforce, Colleges, community groups and place-based structures through our Enterprising Communities team, community development trusts and DWP
- providing person centred pre-start coaching, and enterprise support and advice from idea generation to basic business skills for under-represented groups with a focus but not exclusively on Women to identify as a business owner
- preparing individuals to start their enterprise journey
- providing shared access to resources, equipment, and workspace – using community spaces and access to SOSE Business Centre in Hawick and premises in Selkirk and Dumfries
- promoting development of networks and connections
- providing access to business mentors and role models through organic peer to peer mentoring sessions and creating connections through wider SOSE pop up sessions

- developing skills including digital business skills – identify the barriers to starting up a business and access appropriate support, a variety of digital activity in the region already exists
- building connections and partnerships – a key role will be to embed the Enterprise Coaches in local place areas, to join up and create a vibrant eco-system in South of Scotland
- connecting into business support landscape both locally, regionally, and nationally
- introducing Social Enterprise business models

3.3 Progress against targets

The Pilot had a target to deliver enterprise coaching support to 250 under-represented individuals in South of Scotland. In addition, SOSE aimed to deliver pre-start grant fund (grants of up to £1,000) to 375 individuals exploring and starting a business in South of Scotland Scotland's Eco-system – working with local, regional and national partners to deliver bespoke projects that add value to the enterprise coaching delivery.

Table 3.1 provides a summary of progress against targets and shows the Pilot has exceeded all targets.

Table 3.1: Performance against targets

Description	Target	Achieved ³	Performance
Each coach will work with approximately 25 clients per annum (this is clients in the coaching group sessions and one 2 one follow ups).	250	269	108%
Clients progressing to next stage, accessing BG services, starting up in business.	80	122	153%
Concept fund – not all clients receiving coaching will apply for funding, however there will be clients working directly with Business Gateway or other partners who will be able to access the fund.	375	391	104%
Enterprise session and specialist support - Clients who do not require coaching however are engaging with Enterprise pop up sessions and specialist support delivered through partner organisations e.g. Colleges, WEvolution, Volunteering matters, Women's Enterprise Scotland	125	214	171%

3.4 Marketing and awareness

As part of their role coaches were required to promote awareness of the Pilot and contribute towards the development of partnerships. The weekly coach report provides the Pilot team with an update of marketing and awareness activity that has taken place with examples ranging from poster distribution through to promoting awareness through hairdressers and beauticians, meetings with councillors, attendance at networking or organising networking events and establishing an ongoing social media presence.

This was complimented by a SOSE marketing and comms campaign, which included:

- paid and targeted social media advertising – focusing on lower referring areas such as Stranraer, East Berwickshire and Upper Nithsdale
- design of an original Pathways logo, and production of physical marketing collateral such as flyers, posters, and roller banners
- 10 individual case study videos being produced to showcase less tangible impacts and benefits
- a series of podcasts recorded and produced including interviews with clients, coaches and SOSE pathways team

³ As of 28 March 2025

- a radio advertising campaign, again targeting low referring areas
- print and further online advertising with Stranraer Press, Border telegraph, D&G Online, Peeblesshire News

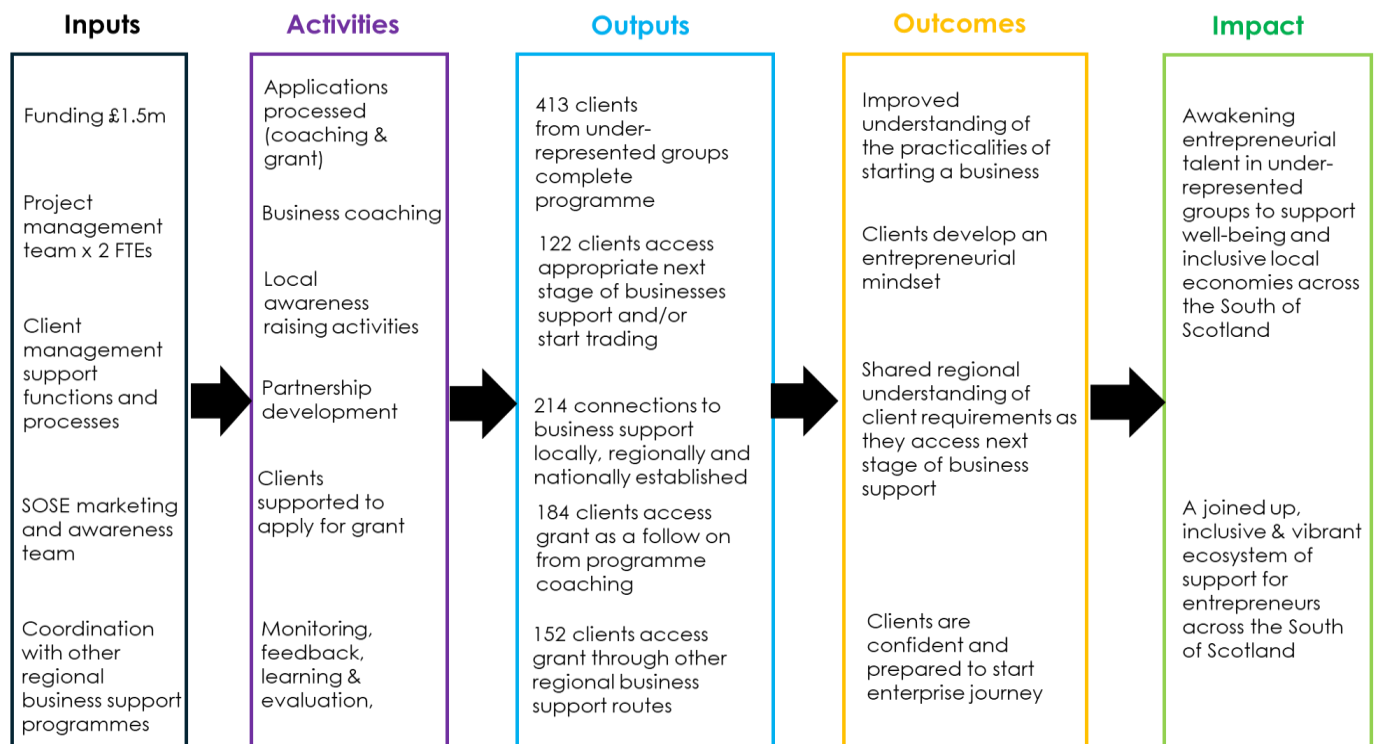
3.5 Logic model

Running alongside the evaluation, a Logic Model was developed for the Pilot based on a review of all background information. It was further refined and updated with findings from stakeholder, coach and client consultations.

A Logic Model provides a cause and effect framework for the Pilot and acts as a basis for measuring performance and for evaluation. It is also an effective way of facilitating project understanding and communicating this to a range of stakeholders.

Figure 3.2 shows the finalised Logic Model for the Pilot.

Figure 3.2: Pathways Pre-Start Pilot Logic Model



4 Stakeholder Findings

Interviews were undertaken with 24 stakeholders in the following organisations and roles:

- SOSE
 - Pilot management team
 - internal coaches
 - marketing team
 - those in related projects and teams
 - senior management team
- Strategic stakeholders
 - Scottish Government
 - Scottish Borders Business Gateway
 - Dumfries and Galloway Business Gateway
 - Developing the Young Workforce
- Partner organisations
 - Women's Enterprise Scotland
 - Borders College
 - Scotland's Rural College
 - Academy of Enterprise Education
 - Dumfries and Galloway College
 - WEvolution
 - Volunteering Matters

Stakeholder views and perspectives very much relate to the connection and level of engagement they have with the Pilot. Any particular themes or differences emerging from different groups of stakeholders have been highlighted. Stakeholder interviews were undertaken over the last two weeks in February with one and a half months of the Pilot still left to run.

4.1 Understanding of the purpose of the Pilot

Overall, stakeholders understand that the aims of the Pilot are to support those in under-represented groups to become entrepreneurial and/or start a business across the South of Scotland region. The Pilot is seen as a way of testing an approach to address recommendations arising from the 2023 Scottish Government Pathways Report⁴.

The Pilot is seen to target those at a very early stage of considering a business venture, to provide this as a realistic option for them and to provide them with personalised support, guidance and funding to progress with their ideas.

Whilst the Pilot aims to target a range of people in under-represented groups, many of the stakeholders mentioned women as the main focus. Those stakeholders in more operational programme roles and in partner organisations took a wider view of under-representation with the latter having a focus on their own specific demographic.

However the South of Scotland, largely made up of rural communities, is seen to imply a wider definition of under-representation. It was suggested that the Pilot seeks to create a mindset change in terms of the possibility of entrepreneurship and business for all those living in the region.

The Pilot is seen to fit well with the overall objectives of SOSE as well its approach to supporting an inclusive enterprise agenda with a vision to have a buoyant rural economy that benefits the region at large. The Pilot builds on SOSE's work in supporting women to start a business through coaching and the learning derived from this.

⁴ [Pathways: A new approach for women in entrepreneurship - gov.scot](https://gov.scot/publications/pathways-a-new-approach-for-women-in-entrepreneurship/pages/1)

The Pilot is also seen to provide a pathway and pipeline into wider business support and is supported by other SOSE initiatives including The Seeding Enterprise Workshop which creates a pipeline into the Pilot.

"Pathways was initiated to get more women into business – intention is not to create a standalone system and if it works for women will it/can it help others?"

"A government initiative with a local and mainly female focus although it does cover other under-represented groups."

"It is doing what Scottish Government and everyone has realised what needs to be done."

"To show those who are disadvantaged that there are other options."

"To reach and target under-represented groups and to change hearts and minds of small rural communities, those who have never left the area, to get them to figure things out and dream big and the ability for them to see that they can do that."

"SOSE is all about supporting an inclusive agenda with a vision to have a buoyant economy where everyone who wants to start a business can do so. SOSE as a rural place tends to have entrepreneurs in that many have a side hustle that could become a proper business and you never know where the next big business might come from."

"It's to encourage more people to start self-employment particularly under-represented groups (women main focus). Place based approach. Its nice that we have that 'pathway' into the wider SOSE support. It drums up interaction and gets SOSE known in the region and that we are here to help everyone and we are inclusive. Helping to engage with clients we wouldn't necessarily have engaged with."

4.2 Views on the place based and under-represented group focus

All stakeholders regard place as being particularly important. Given the rural nature of the area, differences across the region as well as the subtle cultural nuances, the fact that the coaches connect with and understand this is seen to be key and a proactive way of engaging with clients in the target population. As a result, it is felt that coaches are more likely to be trusted, approachable and relatable. One stakeholder commented that this would not be able to be achieved from a central office due to geography and capacity.

"Place – this is a good approach as most things happen in the central Borders area – offering to go out to them makes this different."

"Place is very important particularly for those who are low in confidence. Much better than directing them to an 'agency' which can be off putting. Place based coaches are more relatable, and people can trust them more."

"There are different dialects and cultures which are important to understand and accommodate."

"Place is very important given the rurality of the area, people are hidden away, importance of the coaches being from the local area and understanding this."

"In this area if you don't have local knowledge it might not go down well, no good having a coach from London or Glasgow. The industries are different, more creative, small and local but also can have impact for the local community and wider local socioeconomic benefits."

A focus on under-represented groups is seen to also be important with all stakeholders in partner organisations identifying the need to support their specific demographic. It is acknowledged that the majority of clients currently involved in the Pilot are female and that more could be done to target other groups and areas where there is less uptake.

Comments relating to under-representation varied amongst stakeholders, possibly due to the different profiles of under-representation across the region. For example one stakeholder in the Borders mentioned Polish, Asian and South Asian communities within the area whilst another in another area did not see a lot of cultural diversity. However Dumfries and Galloway Business Gateway had only made a few referrals to the Pilot as not many of the clients fall in an under-represented group and Scottish Borders Business Gateway mentioned that they do not tend to encounter many under-represented females. This could indicate that there is a need for a pre-Business Gateway type of support that the Pilot offers.

Overall stakeholders agree that the South of Scotland with its rurality and areas of deprivation can create multiple barriers for people thinking about starting a business.

One stakeholder felt that the term 'under-represented' can be off putting for some people which was acknowledged in the marketing of the Pilot.

4.3 Comparison of the Pilot with other similar supports available

Stakeholders identified a number of valued supports available for people looking to start a business in the area. These included:

- third sector employability projects and support
- Business Gateway
- formal accelerators
- Local Authority employability projects and services
- sector specific supports

What was identified as missing in this space by stakeholders was a consistency of support across the region particularly in relation to prestart support as well as meeting the needs of those in under-represented groups or facing barriers and challenges to engaging with support.

Several stakeholders feel that there is no public sector support equivalent to the Pilot with its focus on under-representation and place with support offered through coaching and a grant. The Pilot is seen to be more personable than the more practical and business focused advice and support offered by Business Gateway which tends to concentrate on clients at a slightly later stage of their business journey. Some stakeholders also questioned whether Business Gateway would have the capacity of meet the needs of the Pilot client group.

"SOSE is working at a local ecosystem level – using local partners to help consistency and bring it into regional offering and this is perhaps where the gap is."

"We want to try and bring more coherence and shape – there is no public sector business support like this."

"Yes there is support but it's not as targeted as this Pilot. Lots of people involved in employment including third sector. Plus Business Gateway. The difference with this Pilot is that it is reaching out to these people, directly into the community where they feel more comfortable."

"Business Gateway is similar but more focused on business plans etc. Also have accelerator and other business programmes – these can be scary and intimidating. Pathways helps to nurture the idea, when done in the community you can have a different conversation."

"There is a lot of good support out there, but access can be an issue particularly for those in under-represented groups, who might find it hard to access public sector support for a variety of reasons. Business Gateway offers great tools but don't tend to focus on the individual and access in the first place which can be an issue for some. Coaching is more local and personable."

"There is other support available for some of them as part of wider ecosystem, such as Business Gateway, they should accept calls from pre prestart, they give advice, the Pilot is giving coaching. Coaching isn't really there elsewhere unless you want to pay for it."

"The beauty of this Pilot is that it brings together people and organisations who have expertise in the topic for different groups of people that creates a real ecosystem of local support."

It was also suggested that more formal public sector supports could be intimidating for clients who possibly lack the confidence to engage. The Pilot's approach to reach out to people in their communities was seen as novel. However it was pointed out there is a need to better align the Pilot with the support offered by Local Authorities and Business Gateway to avoid duplication.

4.4 Feedback on Pilot processes

Those stakeholders closer to the Pilot were able to provide feedback so some of the processes. The main findings are presented as follows.

4.4.1 Marketing and awareness

It was widely acknowledged that marketing of the Pilot could have started earlier however the tight lead in time brought its challenges. As a result although coaches were seen to have done an excellent job at marketing and awareness locally there were some issues initially with consistency and alignment of the message.

It is now generally felt that the marketing message is getting out there from both SOSE and the coaches with effort put in to try and ensure that communications and language are relevant for the target audience. Facebook was identified as a particularly good channel for marketing and awareness.

4.4.2 Application processes

Stakeholders who were able to comment felt that effort to simplify the application process for clients was a success although some technical issues still need to be sorted out.

4.4.3 Engagement and communications with the programme delivery team

The programme delivery team were highly praised with the Pilot seen as being well managed. They were described as very proactive, a pleasure to work, supportive and responsive.

4.4.4 Reporting and governance

Again, due to the short lead in time it was acknowledged that ideally this could have been set up earlier. However those close to the Pilot felt that the processes for capturing data and information, including the weekly coaches, report were working well with the key data being available for governance purposes. It was agreed by those involved that processes could be reviewed and improved for the future.

4.5 Views on what is working particularly well

When asked to name what working particularly well in the Pilot, stakeholders identified a number of areas:

- the level of demand, engagement and enthusiasm of clients – it was suggested that demand could be further analysed
- place based reach out with one-to-one coaching
- the commitment, determination and passion of the programme team and the coaches
- the stimulation of relationships across the region with referrals between partners

4.6 Benefits and impact to date (February 2025)

Although the Pilot had not yet completed at the time of this evaluation stakeholders were able to provide some indication of the benefits and impact emerging. These included:

- seeing clients' confidence grow – particularly visible at events
- hearing positive feedback from clients
- the number of clients starting a business (at the time of the evaluation this was 98) and/or progressing with their business; this included gaining contracts, creating income and being able to purchase essential equipment

From a Pilot perspective benefits included:

- collaboration with and learning from other area
- building partnerships

4.7 Challenges and areas for improvement

Stakeholders named a number of challenges or areas for improvement. The one most frequently mentioned was clarifying the next steps for clients who have engaged with the Pilot.

"The main challenge is the next steps for people who have been engaged. There is a lot of support from SOSE at the start, what happens next? They probably need nurturing to stop them floundering in the first two years - same type of coaching is probably going to be key."

"Ensuring that we have a pathway following support – don't want dropping off the cliff edge."

Other suggestions to address challenges or for improvement included:

- understanding of demand across the region
- gaining a better understanding of how the Pilot integrates with Business Gateway
- review of resourcing and capacity to deliver
- reviewing, clarifying and refining procedures and processes
- further work to simplify the grant application process and language together with support for clients to complete
- more timely marketing and publicity
- exploring ways to reach clients in harder to reach areas as well as ethnic communities, young people with additional needs, those with neurodiversity and the home school network
- sustaining the local networks that have been developed
- exploring reach within particular sectors e.g. sole traders in construction and trade areas who could grow their business
- strengthening the links with entrepreneurship activity in schools

4.8 Views on the future of the Pilot

All stakeholders bar one felt that the Pilot should continue. Reasons for continuation included:

- as a short pilot it will need longer to embed and see results
- Business Gateway not having the capacity, or budget, to deliver this type of more personalised support
- a continued need for coaching support for those who face barriers and who are low in confidence
- the demand evidencing that there is a need
- to continue to support partners' awareness and work in this area

"The demand is there, shown in waiting list for the Pilot. Also the Pilot is only just starting to build awareness. It is also important at this time of economic uncertainty, seeding resilience for success in the future – it will need more time to embed and to see the value that it is going to bring."

"I know there are a lot of people getting benefit from coaching, hand holding and encouragement that Business Gateway don't have time for, we are a volume set up."

"There are lots of barriers that still exist for these groups and they have lots of potential. These groups are not supported elsewhere."

5 Enterprise Coach Findings

Interviews were undertaken with all nine external coaches who were recruited for the Pilot. All coaches have experience in setting up their own businesses and a few had received SOSE coaching support in the past. Whilst the majority of coaches do not have a formal coaching qualification several have been involved in providing informal support to others setting up a business and/or their work connects in some way to the purpose of the Pilot.

All of the coaches came across as extremely enthusiastic, if not passionate, about the Pilot and what it is seeking to achieve. Being from the local area they are familiar with the challenges of, and barriers to, setting up a business in the South of Scotland and some also bring firsthand experience relating to wider 'under-representation' focus of the Pilot.

5.1 Value of place-based approach

All of the coaches felt that the place-based coaching approach was adding huge value. In particular they felt that those in under-represented groups, who they felt often lacked confidence, were more likely to engage with a coach from the local area. Other areas of value that the place-based approach brings included:

- being able to make quick and appropriate connections for clients
- having a real sense of what the local issues are without clients having to explain and justify them as well as understanding the subtle differences within and across local communities
- having first hand familiarity with the area helps establish a sense of trust
- the message that the Pilot gives – reaching out into the community and not just in the central Borders area
- the opportunity, logistically, to meet with clients face to face

"It's very deep in the culture here for people to establish how you fit in and what you actually know about the place. That mindset is specific to different towns, familiarity makes people feel more comfortable. Establishing credibility, having the place-based coaches has been extremely important to the clients I've worked with."

"For the clients it means I have inside information to pass onto people and make the connections for them, breaking down the barriers for them."

"Clients respond well to not having to explain the local issues and knowing how things work."

"It is important that we are going to them in their place, we are building a bridge."

"Being able to see you face to face means people are more trusting of you and they are likely to be more honest with you."

"I have two localities, lived in both of them. Having the knowledge to interconnect the clients, things that are relevant and understand how the locality works and is structured is hugely important. The Borders is vast, and each locality is different in terms of how it works."

Coaches also provided a variety of examples of awareness raising and partnership development activity within the local area that they had been involved in. These included:

- involvement in local Developing the Young Workforce programme activities
- connecting with local creative arts group, schools to access parents, colleges and community centres and community groups
- connecting with Citizens Advice and a local youth organisation

A couple of coaches have found it more difficult to undertake awareness and partnership development activity. Reasons given for this were currently not living in the local area and having to undertake additional research as well as focusing time and effort on coaching delivery. It was also felt that this would add more credibility. However all coaches had been personally involved in marketing the Pilot which included:

- social media – town groups, community groups
- posters
- leaflet drops
- utilising the Scottish Borders Chambers of Commerce network (those coaches linked to the Chambers)
- promoting the Pilot through coaches' own businesses activity
- engaging with support workers of clients to spread the word
- talking about it in places like the gym that a coach attends

Coaches mentioned that networking and sharing experience with the other coaches in the Pilot had supported their marketing activities.

5.2 Views on meeting the needs of the local under-represented target population

Three of the coaches mentioned that they struggled with the term 'under-represented' with a suggestion to reframe it as those facing challenges or barriers to starting a business. For example, it was suggested it could include father and son type businesses that, with support, could grow and become more entrepreneurial. One coach also felt that for some the term might be confusing or carry a stigma which could potentially lead to them not applying for the Pilot.

The majority of coaches felt that the rural nature of the South of Scotland brought its own unique challenges and barriers to starting a business which would be common to the population.

Coaches described a range of clients within under-represented groups however, the majority were identified to be female with the range seemingly dependant on the local areas that they were covering. Coaches also mentioned that as the under-represented category is self-assessed and not always disclosed they do not always know what group clients may fall in unless they self-disclose.

Suggestions for under-represented groups for whom the Pilot could be promoted in the future included:

- ex-offenders
- more young people
- those who are neurodivergent
- refugees
- victims of domestic abuse
- care leavers

"We live in a rural area so lots of people could fall into a category of some sort. Would instead say that people have faced barriers to starting a business rather than being from an under-represented group."

"I feel we're only scratching the surface of those with rural issues and challenges at the moment."

5.3 Comparison of the Pilot with other similar supports available

Coaches who were able to comment could not identify any other similar supports available for the particular group of clients on which the Pilot focuses. Business Gateway was praised for the support it has available but coaches commented felt that support offered was more practical business advice and less able to address the range of personal and individual needs of clients at the very early stage of thinking about a business. The capacity of Business Gateway to meet these needs was also mentioned.

The only other support identified as a private loan and/or a private coach which was felt to be something this group of clients would not consider.

"Whilst there is support for people wanting to start their own business, this can be limited due to the capacity of these organisations. Capacity to offer regular support is also an issue. As far as I am aware, Pathways is the only organisation that offers regular contact along with financial assistance in this area."

"It's the personalised coaching approach that sets this apart. Business Gateway tends to be more practical advice rather than getting to the barriers that are preventing people moving forward. Or people have to pay for a coach which is the other option."

"Places like Business Gateway maybe don't have the same ambition for this group of clients in their support."

5.4 Feedback on Pilot processes

In general, coaches acknowledged that with the tight timescales of the Pilot, and the need to get things up and running quickly, there were inevitably some teething problems with process. However they felt that any issues identified and/or suggestions made for improvement were quickly and effectively put in place.

5.4.1 Marketing

Coaches felt that the marketing campaign could have started earlier and thought that social media and word of mouth were the best channels for the population being targeted. They mentioned that the social media campaign just before Christmas had resulted in increased interest and referrals; this was leading to concerns about scheduling and being able to meet demand effectively before the end of March when the Pilot is due to finish.

It was also suggested that in future SOSE marketing and coach marketing could be more consistent and relevant in terms of language and branding.

5.4.2 Initial coaching referral

Coaches described how issues relating to the contact information for clients had been quickly addresses and that the initial referring system was working well. It was suggested that a shared CRM type system would be beneficial.

5.4.3 Scheduling coaching dates

Coaches deliver coaching either in person or online or a mixture of both and spoke of how they have developed their own systems for scheduling dates. Geography and time were identified by some to restrict the number of in person sessions particular given the increased demand since Christmas.

5.4.4 Start and end assessment

Coaches see the benefit of the start and end assessments although it was acknowledged that coaches are using different approaches to who fills out the form; the coach, the client or whether they do it together. Those coaches who are part of the Scottish Borders Chambers of Commerce include additional questions in the assessments to report back to the Chambers.

A couple of coaches did suggest that the assessment questions could be reviewed in order to ensure consistency and to prevent any ambiguity as some questions could be subjective in definition.

5.4.5 Coaching delivery and engagement with clients

All coaches spoke about how rewarding it was to coach and engage with clients and how they were receiving very good feedback from them. In general coaches identify strongly with the challenges of the target population and consider that they are providing a valuable service.

Challenges for some coaches are the time requirements for preparation and travel as well as for some, finding a suitable private yet comfortable venue to hold the session.

5.4.6 Supporting clients to apply for the grant

Coaches are aware of the need for process to be observed and in general feel that it works well. The majority of coaches sit with a client to complete the forms together to ensure that they are completed correctly. It was suggested that some of the forms could be more user friendly particularly for those clients with limited IT skills.

5.4.7 Completion of the weekly coaching report

Coaches appreciate the importance of the report and generally felt that with modifications it is working well. As for the Start and End assessments it was suggested that a shared document would add value together with a review of data requirement, e.g. names of clients rather than numbers and also definitions of some of the data requirements to avoid ambiguity.

5.4.8 Communications and engagement with the SOSE Pilot team

Coaches were full of praise for the SOSE Pilot team; "they are brilliant", "excellent", "relatable, nice, fun folk and really committed". They very much appreciated the weekly Monday drop-in meeting and felt that any queries received swift and helpful responses on an ongoing basis.

5.4.9 Communications and engagement with the other coaches

Coaches are also appreciative of their fellow coaches. Having met initially at the two-day training session and subsequently keeping in touch through whole and local coach WhatsApp groups as well as the weekly meetings they consider the group of coaches to be supportive and willing to share expertise and experience.

It's been really refreshing and helpful for me as individual and coach to have these other coaches. It's infectious enthusiasm. We meet informally, there is a lot of sharing and encouragement and that has been really positive and an unexpected benefit from this programme and in terms of holding each other to account, encouraging and also understanding more about the backgrounds. Holding each other to account and learning about other people's personalities but also their circumstances."

"They are a brilliant bunch, we all did the training together and have stayed close. All really embrace the whole thing together. Share everything, let off steam, share resources and networks for clients. It's a sort of coaches network."

5.5 Views on the benefits and impact of the Pilot for clients

Coaches described a range of benefits and impacts for their clients which included:

- starting a business
- increased confidence and motivation
- having someone to talk to about the business and their personal circumstances and being listened to and being able to be honest
- hand holding and support to formulate a plan
- a dedicated yet flexible time to talk about their business or business idea
- reducing the risk of escalating financial or mental health issues
- allowing people to understand if starting a business is the right thing

- gaining an understanding of what knowledge or skill development might be required before starting a business and being signposted to that support
- business networking
- access to grant for things that they would otherwise not be able to afford
- a local service with a more human side

"It's working, people have launched businesses. They say 'it's given me the confidence and motivation to do it'. A lot of them don't have anyone to talk to and we provide that."

"Some have started their business in difficult circumstances, one lady might have lost her home and suffered with mental health issues without the support."

"There is a sense of relief for some clients, a weight off their shoulders to start talking about their ideas. Getting an action plan really excites them, can see people jumping forward."

"So many women, victims of abuse, single mothers, seeing them thrive, confidence, earning money, realising they are worthy."

"I've had eight start trading since Pathways."

Coaches described the Pilot as giving clients the confidence, encouragement to start a business and acting as a catalyst for this to happen. Without the Pilot and the coaching it was felt that clients would either have not progressed at all or their business would have taken longer to establish or fail.

"I'm wondering about what percentage of business would still be launched. I believe that the conversations with me have been a catalyst as to go, no go, helped them decide sooner, people find it difficult to hold themselves to account. With others they're sort of thinking even at the mention of the grant, they're sort of thinking, oh, I've bitten off more than I can chew. There's always that need to strike the right balance between encouragement and avoiding pressure. Hoping that for 70% of the clients this has helped them get there quicker."

5.6 Aspects of the Pilot that work particularly well

All of the coaches felt that the Pilot as a whole was working well. Aspects that were felt to work particularly well that have not been already mentioned included:

- the coaches as individuals and as a group together with the supportive network that has been established
- the personalised and locally delivered service for clients
- the flexibility that the coaches are granted but with the support of the SOSE team

- the coach training that was delivered with the opportunity to undertake additional training

"It's all good, the benefits are shining through."

"The coaching network that has developed. The coaches are planning an event for all clients to help them network with each other. The mix of coaches with previous coaching experience and those who have more business experience."

"Clients really love that we go to them and work around their calendar."

5.7 Challenges and areas for improvement

When asked how the Pilot could be improved four main themes emerged:

- earlier marketing – for any future Pilot it was suggested this should be in place before the Pilot commences
- personalised coaching to continue into the next stage of a client's business – coaches were concerned about what would happen to their clients once the Pilot ended particularly for those who had commenced their coaching later into the Pilot
- more time and space to deliver the coaching i.e. over an extended period
- the provision of more networking opportunities for clients – a dedicated Facebook page was suggested as a way to support this

Other suggestions for improvement included:

- changing the under-represented language
- building more local partnerships
- identifying local private places to meet
- a centralised, shared documentation system

5.8 Views on the future of the Pilot

All of the coaches felt that there was a continued need for Pathways support. They base this view on the current level of demand within the context that the Pilot has only been operational for a short period and that marketing of the Pilot started quite late.

As previously mentioned, coaches were also concerned about what would happen to their clients once the Pilot ended, particularly those who commenced later into the Pilot. Some coaches were worried that Business Gateway might not have the capacity to provide the continued personalised support that some of these clients might need in the short to medium term.

One other consideration for the future, if the Pilot continues, is that coaching capacity may need to increase as coaches have their own businesses too. Whilst this brings valuable experience to the coaching relationship it does impact on coaches time.

"It definitely needs to continue – given the nature of the area and the type of clients, it's a minefield and they wouldn't have the confidence to do this without the personalised support. If you look at the numbers coming through for January it proves it needs to carry on."

"We've only just scratched the surface and if you look at all the interest we've now got since the marketing has kicked in you can see the demand. I'm worried about the cut-off date at the end of March and what will happen to people then. They might not get such personalised support from e.g. Business Gateway."

"I'm concerned about amount of referrals to Business Gateway for courses/support on things like tax and marketing etc, will they be able to cope, be overwhelmed?"

"What happens to people at the end who need further support."

"I absolutely think it has opened a pandora's box – those who are struggling to start or run a business for lots of different reasons are asking about it."

6 Client Findings

The Pilot has supported 413 clients (up until 17 March 2025) across:

- coaching and grant provision (184)
- coaching only (77)
- grant only (152)

Table 6.1 provides a breakdown of response rates across the support delivered.

Table 6.1: Client consultations

Support provided		
	Coaching	Grant
Population	261	336
Clients consulted	78	90
% of population consulted	30%	27%
Population sample confidence interval	95% confidence (+/- 10%)	95% confidence (+/- 9%)

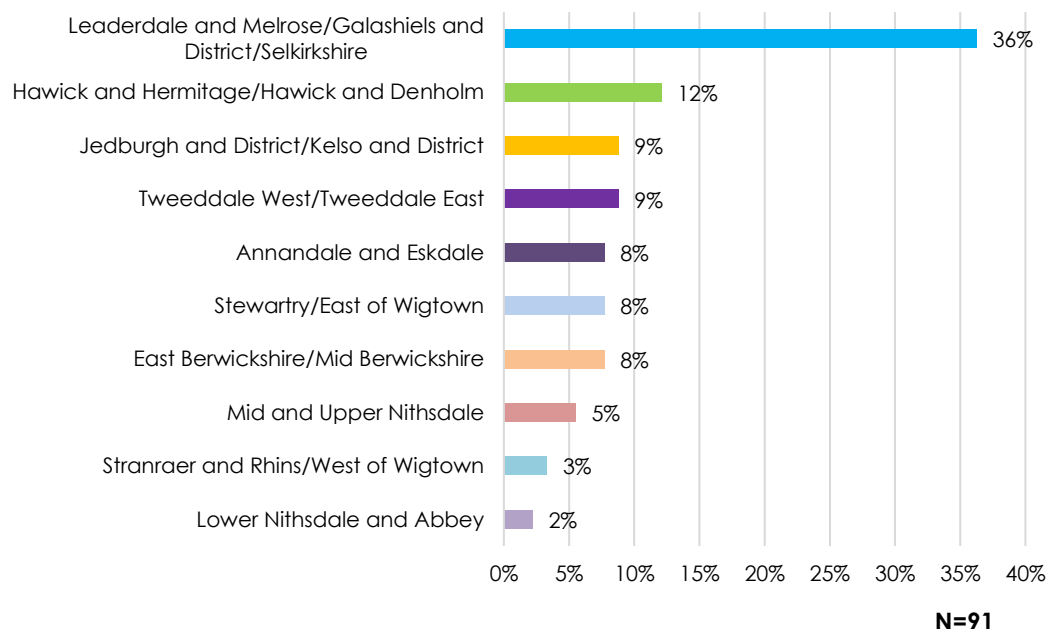
6.1 Background

A total of 93 clients responded to the survey split across:

- coaching and grant support – 75
- coaching only – 3
- grant only – 15⁵

Clients were located across Dumfries & Galloway and the Scottish Borders.

Figure 6.1: Client location



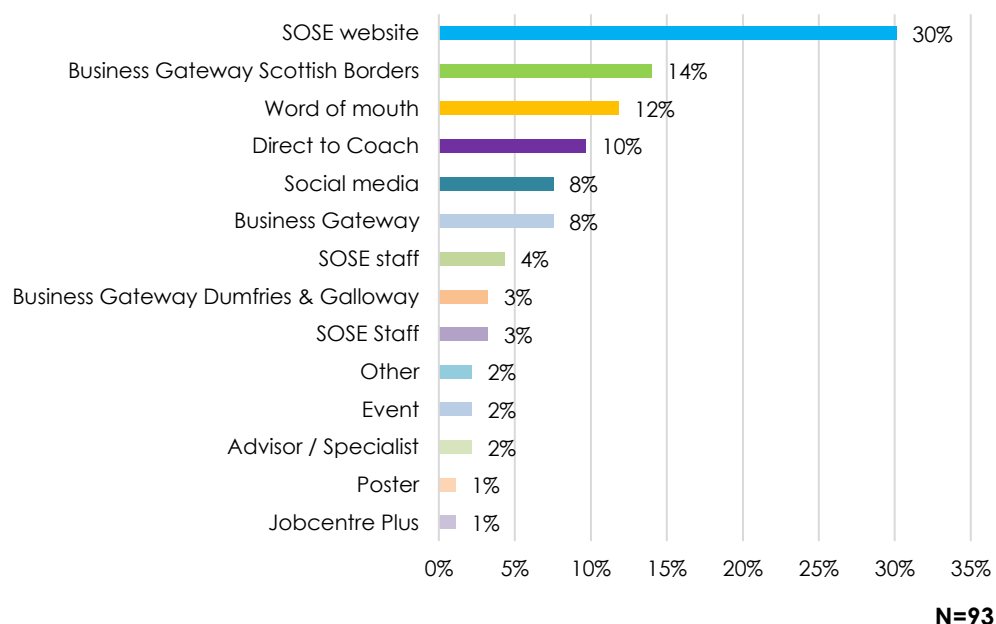
Enquiries came from a range of sources, the most common being:

- SOSE website – 30% (28)
- Business Gateway Scottish Borders – 14% (13)
- word of mouth – 12% (11)
- direct to the coach – 10% (9)

⁵ Contact details for those that received grant only support were held by other organisations such as Business Gateway and therefore the survey link was sent out by them.

When looking at those who received grant only support the main source of enquiry was Business Gateway (47%, 7). For those receiving coaching and grant support it was the Pathways coach (53%, 41)

Figure 6.2: Enquiry source

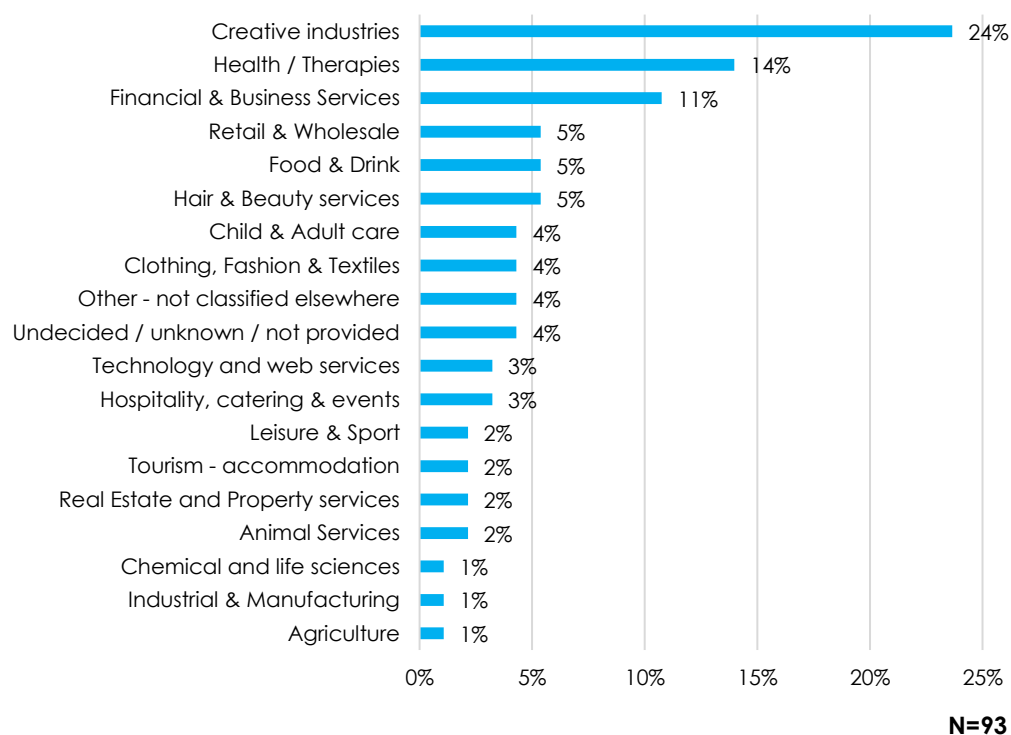


Clients were interested in/operating in a broad range of sectors including:

- Creative Industries – 24% (22)
- Health/Therapies – 14% (13)
- Financial & Business Services – 11% (10)

Figure 6.3 provides a full breakdown of sectors most commonly highlighted.

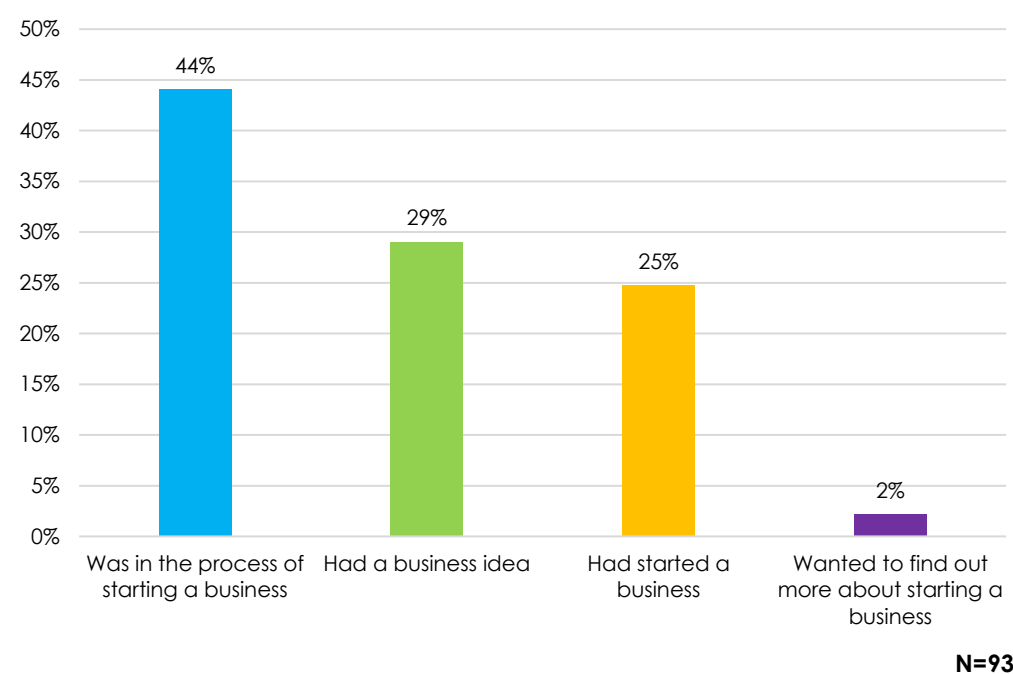
Figure 6.3: Sector



At the point of engagement, 44% (41) of clients were in the process of starting a business, 29% (27) had a business idea, 25% (23) had started a business and 2% (2) wanted to find out more about starting a business.

The majority (93%,14) of those receiving grant only support had started a business or were in the process of starting a business compared with 65% (48) of those accessing coaching and grant support, suggesting that grant only was attracting those further along the enterprise journey.

Figure 6.4: Business stage when first engaging with the Pathways Pilot



6.2 Coaching support

6.2.1 Background

Of the 78 clients accessing the coaching, 44 had completed their sessions, with 34 still ongoing at the time of reporting⁶. For those that had completed the coaching, the average length of time to complete the (up to) six sessions was 10 weeks.

In addition, 75 had accessed the grant as well as the coaching. Findings in this section are based on all 78 clients. Due to the small number accessing coaching only (3) we did not do any comparison between those receiving just coaching, versus coaching and grant support.

Data has been drawn from clients start and end evaluation forms administered by the coaches⁷ as well as the e-survey.

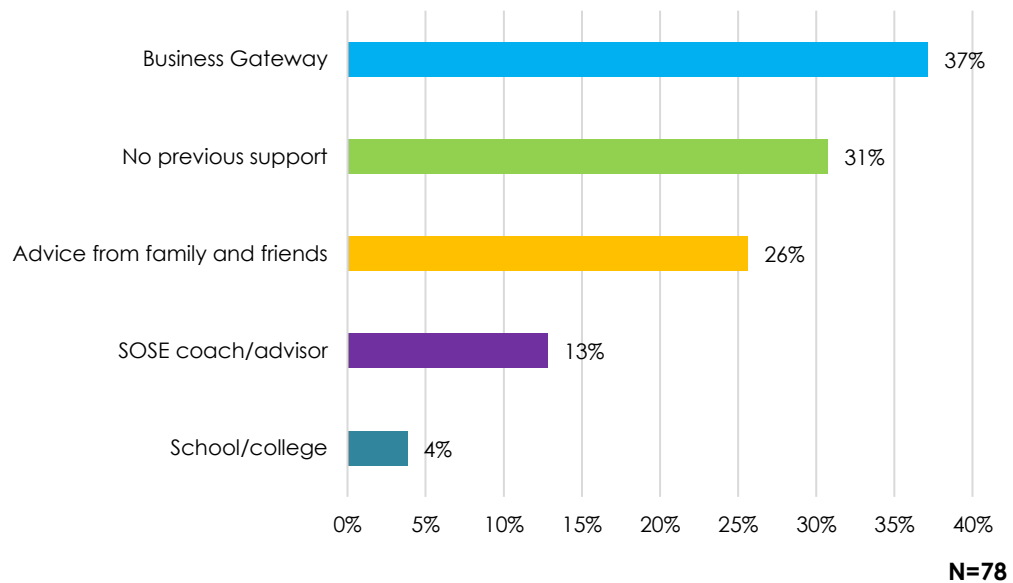
⁶ 17 March 2025
⁷ The n number for some areas may vary throughout as not all clients provided an answer to every question in the e-survey and some clients hadn't completed their post evaluation form at the time of reporting

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6.2.2 Previous business support received

Almost one third (31%, 24) of clients had not received any previous business support, of those that had, Business Gateway was most frequently mentioned (37%, 29), followed by advice from family and friends (26%, 20).

Figure 6.5: Previous business support



Other support mentioned included coaching (not SOSE), grants, books and support from the Scottish Childminding Association.

28% (22) of clients stated that they had run a business before.

6.2.3 Expectations of coaching

From the coaching clients wanted to gain a better understanding of how to set up and run a successful business and the confidence to be able to do so. They hoped that coaching would provide the advice, guidance and direction to start and/or run a business.

Many of the clients also identified particular skills that they would like to develop. Marketing, the use of social media, reaching and growing customers and clients, developing a business plan together with better understanding finance and tax issues were skill areas most frequently mentioned. Other skills clients were hoping to develop included:

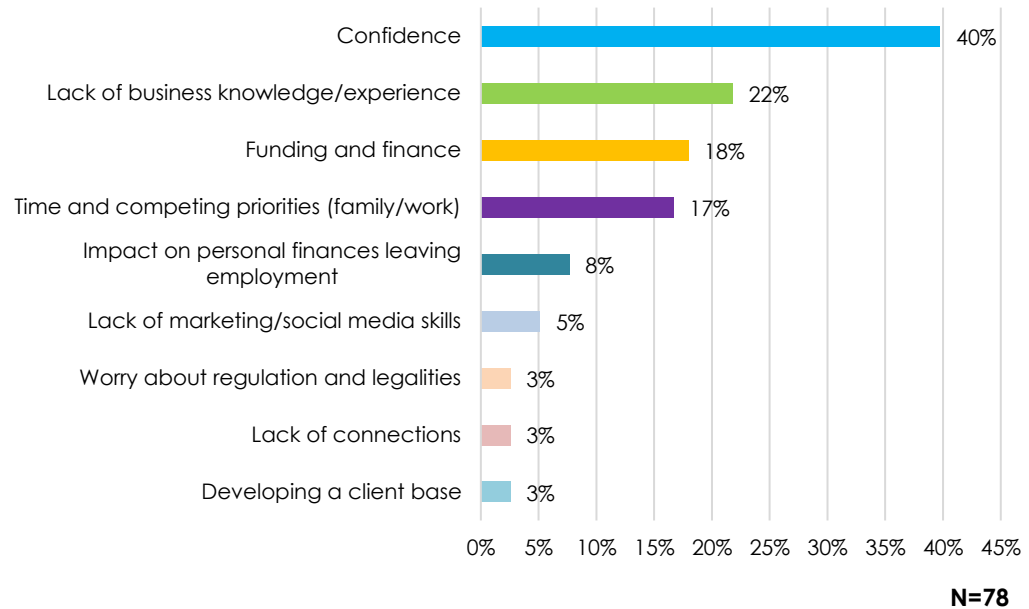
- customer relations
- strategy development
- developing a growth plan
- e-commerce
- how to set a price point
- business processes
- recruitment
- brand identity
- pitching
- business legalities
- AI and IT skills
- cashflow

Some clients also hoped that the coaching would provide support to gain additional funding, provide opportunities for networking and signpost to other business supports available.

6.2.4 Barriers

Confidence was the major factor holding clients back from starting a business. Lack of business knowledge and experience, funding and finance as well as competing priorities including other employment and family and care responsibility were also common factors. Figure 6.6 provides a breakdown of the most common factors.

Figure 6.6: Factors holding clients back

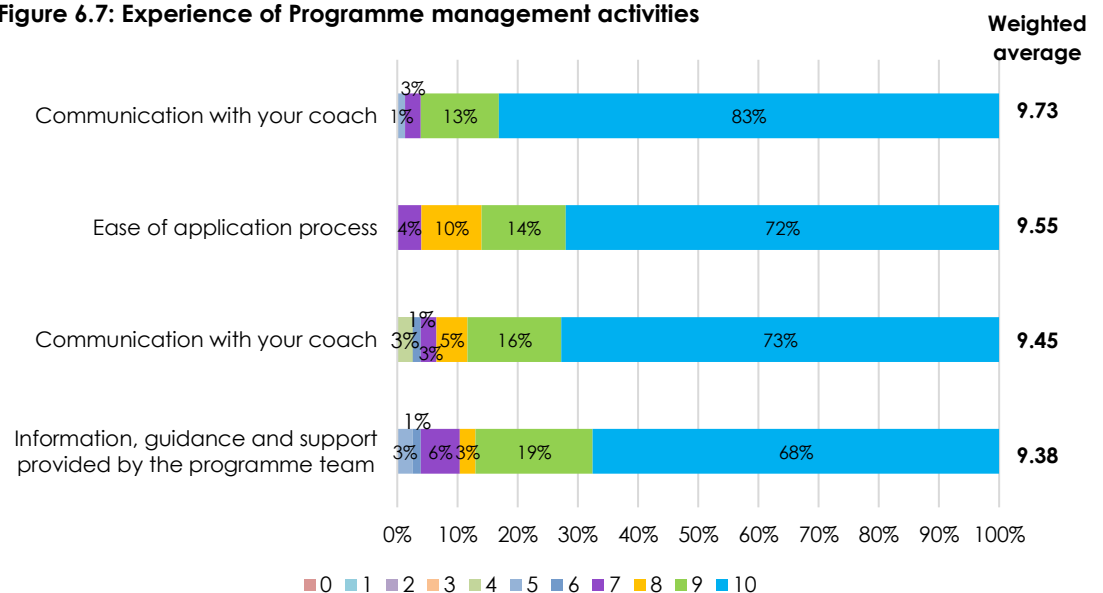


Other factors included age, English not being first language and regulation/legalities. Five clients felt that nothing was holding them back apart from getting the timing right. Examples given were pregnancy and gaining the right accreditation.

6.2.5 Programme management and delivery

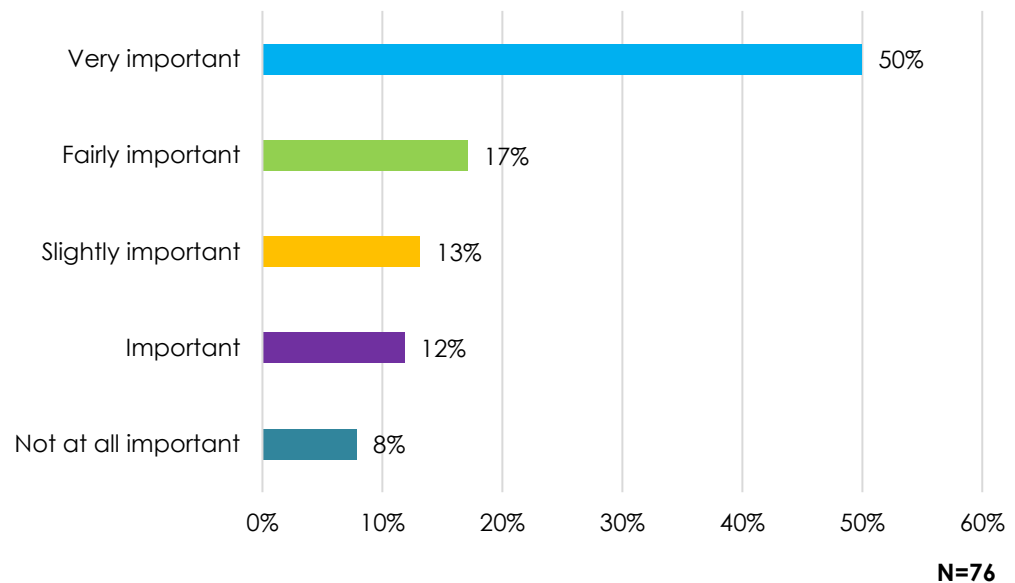
Clients were asked to rate their experience of the following in relation to the Programme management activities (on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all satisfied and 10 is completely satisfied). All elements were rated very highly scoring an average of 9.38 or above out of 10 with communication from the coach rated highest.

Figure 6.7: Experience of Programme management activities



The majority of clients (92%, 70) felt that having a coach who knows the local area was important, with half (50%, 38) viewing it as very important.

Figure 6.8: Importance of having a coach who knows the local area



Comments from those that thought it was important included:

"Although I've lived in the Borders for 16 years, I'm from the North East of Scotland, so it was really helpful to have my coach, who was super knowledgeable about the all the areas within the Borders, so we were able to discuss logistics of travel, access and many other factors which may impact those attending the pottery."

"I'm new to the Borders and so it's been invaluable to have someone who knows and has contacts locally."

"Face to face is so much better. I was matched with a coach near to me."

"It was great having a coach who understood the local area when I was setting up a hairdressing business as she understood the competition I had."

"My coach comes from and knows Dumfries & Galloway very well. This really helped her advise me on my future business's possibilities in terms of connections, outlets, other training and advisory organisations as well as possible future programmes and support from SOSE."

"The fact that my coach is from the Scottish Borders made a huge difference with her insight and knowledge and also her passion in supporting local businesses to flourish."

Comments from those that didn't feel it was important included:

"My business doesn't particularly have a local audience so having a local coach wasn't all that important to me."

"I didn't require assistance with the area."

"I wouldn't say it's completely necessary, perhaps depends on the person and business idea though."

"It was good in the fact that I was able to network locally, but I would have preferred more of UK based knowledge."

6.2.6 The most useful aspects of coaching received

Clients identified a wide range of aspects of the coaching experience that they found most useful. Those most commonly mentioned included:

- being held accountable through the review of progress
- the flexibility of the coach which was easier because the coach was local
- the advice and support provided
- having someone who listens and being able to bounce ideas around
- the promotion of confidence and motivation
- having a structure with things broken down into small manageable steps

Comments included:

"Accountability and helping to simplify what I need to do, as well as looking at progress each week and what has been achieved."

"Being able to bounce off ideas and thoughts and not feeling stupid about the questions. It was a positive experience which has made more confident about developing my business."

"Having structure on how to decide on the next steps and make progress, and how to go about the different states of start-up. Having the coach to bounce ideas off - having an actual person as a contact to motivate me and help me reflect back on things. She made me feel confident that I could do it."

"Highly structured sessions applicable and relevant to me. The skill of the coach to create a warm, empathetic and really productive environment for maximum learning. Wonderful networking opportunities. Appreciated the great skills of the coach, without her things could have been very different! She wants all of us to succeed. The coach loves her job and it shows."

"She gave us great advice and some really good tips on how to build our business."

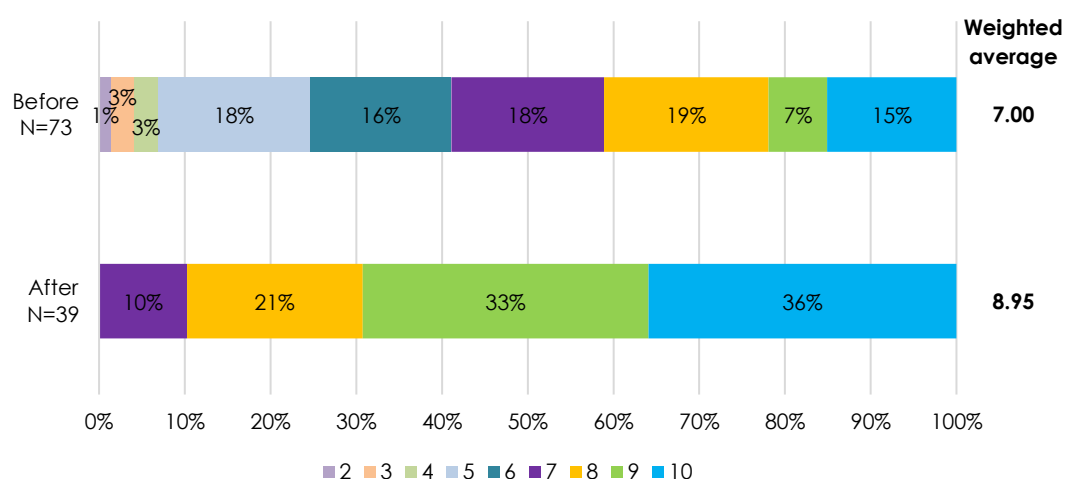
Only a few had engaged with other similar supports previously, meaning that not many were able to compare Pathways with other business support. Those that were able to make a comparison felt that Pathways offered more personalised and tailored support which they were really appreciative of.

6.2.7 Pilot outcomes

Clients were asked to rate their level of confidence to run their own business on initial engagement and at the end of their coaching on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is not confident at all and 10 is completely confident).

Changes in **confidence** grew from 7.0 to 8.95 (28% increase).

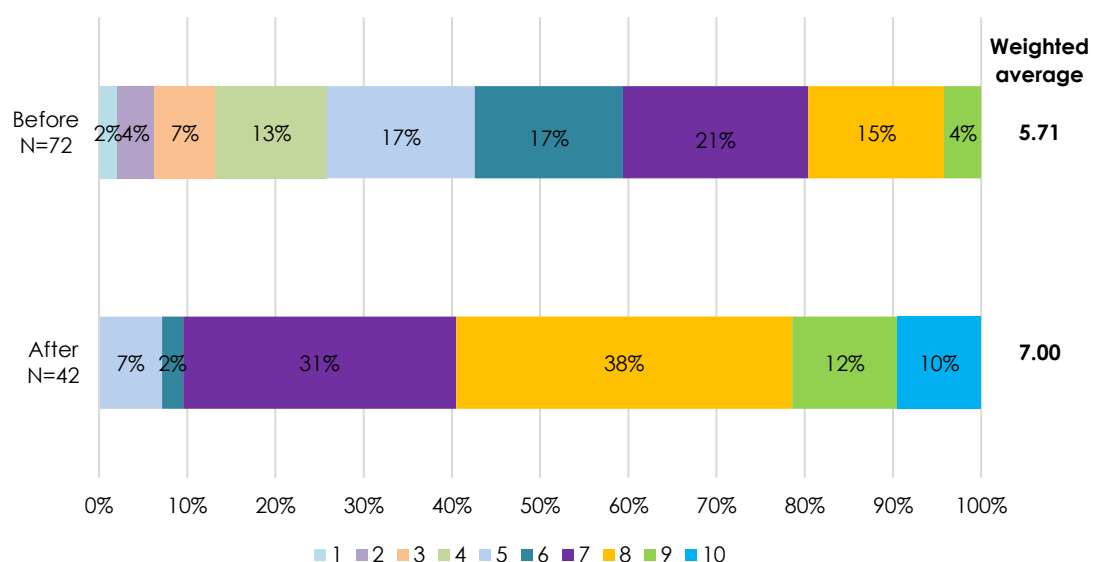
Figure 6.9: Confidence to run your own business



Clients were also asked to rate their knowledge of running a business on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is not confident at all and 10 is completely confident).

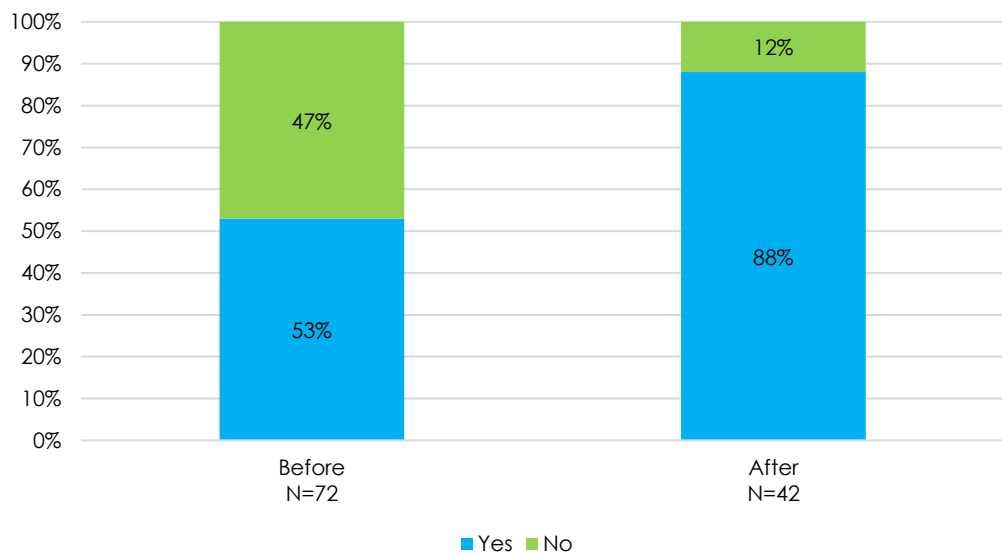
Changes in **knowledge** grew from 5.71 to 7.0 (23%).

Figure 6.10: Knowledge in running your own business



At engagement, 53% (38) of clients considered themselves a 'business person', this grew to 88% (39) following coaching.

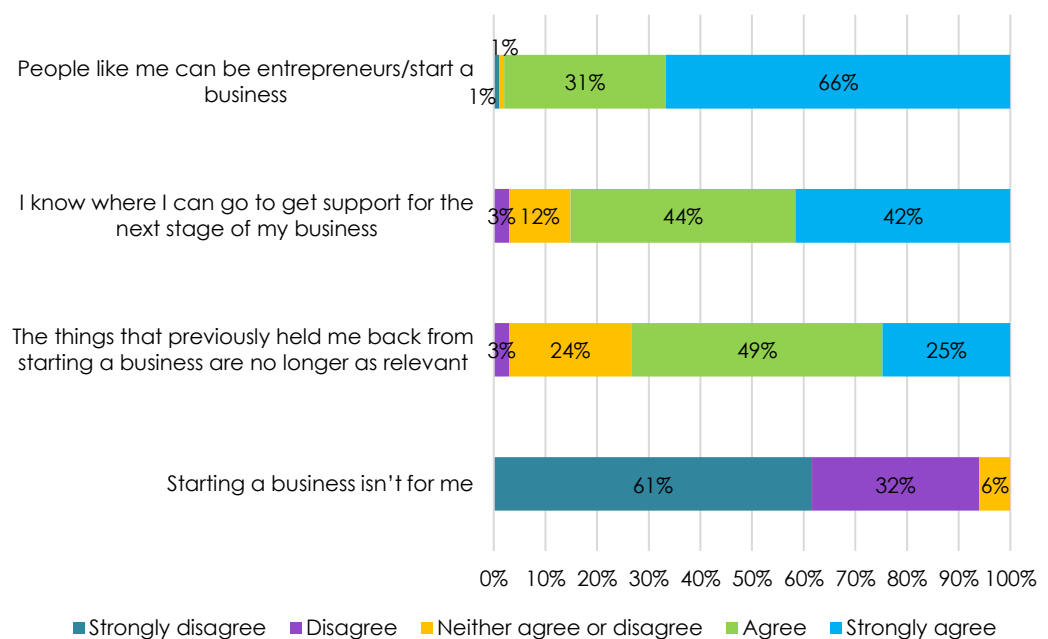
Figure 6.11: To what extent you consider yourself a business person



Clients were asked to what extent they agree with the following statements. As a result of the coaching:

- 91% (75) agreed or strongly agreed that 'people like me can be entrepreneurs/start a business'
- 86% (66) agree or strongly agree that 'I know where I can go to get support for the next stage of my business'
- 75% (56) agree or strongly agree that 'the things that previously held me back from starting a business are no longer as relevant'
- 93% (72) disagree or strongly disagree that 'starting a business isn't for me'

Figure 6.12: Outcomes as a result of the coaching



N=77

Client comments on the difference that coaching has made included:

"Everything! I have grown in confidence in so many ways. I probably would have thought about and chatted about my business idea, but not took it any further!"

"A huge difference. I knew nothing of running a business. The information has been valuable."

"It helped me to pivot and also to understand what it means to run a business with a local outreach and broader ambitions - I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now without the coaches help."

"It's completely transformed my view and my business!"

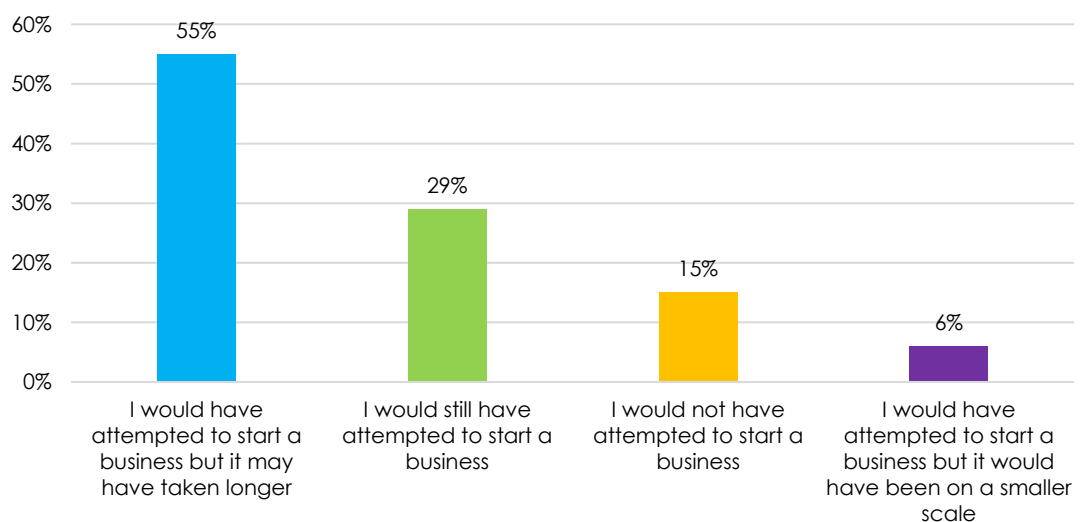
"I am now adamant that I will make my business work, whereas before the coaching, it was just lots of ideas floating about in my head."

"It's given me a more solid foundation for succeeding, by helping draw out my potential and vision, giving me practical steps, and ultimately improving my confidence to continue professionally."

"Without Pathways my business development would have taken longer and I am now much more realistic on the challenges of starting a business and I am now more confident that I am doing the right thing, because of my Pathways coach and the Pathways Programme."

Without the coaching support the majority of clients would have still attempted to start a business (85%, 56), however over half (55%, 36) said it would have taken them longer and/or 6% (4) said it would have been on a smaller scale⁸.

Figure 6.13: What would have happened without the coaching support



N=66

⁸ Note clients could have ticked both these options

Comments included:

"If I didn't have SOSE at the start I think I would have struggled and been a lot further away compared to where I'm at now."

"I would have continued with my plans but probably with less focus and it would have taken longer."

"I would have continued to face challenges with my confidence and ability to start a business, managing my time and expectations of myself, and enjoyed the start-up process a lot less because I'd be feeling more overwhelmed than I was already."

"I have been thinking about starting a business for a number of years and haven't done it, this coaching/mentoring has been really useful in gaining the knowledge and confidence to start."

"Without the coaching, I would have likely continued feeling uncertain about key business decisions and struggled with clarity on my next steps. The structured support helped me refine my direction, build confidence, and take more strategic action. While I would have made progress, it would have been slower and less focused without this guidance."

If the pathways Pilot was not available, over half (57%, 28) would not have accessed another form of business support. Reasons for this included:

"I don't know of any other advice available."

"As my business is not yet registered or trading there isn't any other support that I know of that could financially support at this stage."

"No other coaching is available."

"I don't have the confidence to ask for help."

"I approached the career's service and they introduced me to another service which was actually detrimental."

Many of those that would have accessed other support (43%, 21), said they didn't know exactly where from or found the landscape confusing.

Comments included:

"SCMA, or other childminders, but wouldn't have had the extra money."

"I don't know much about what support is available, but I might have tried though it is quite confusing from what I've seen and heard. Often I just think it's easier to crack on and do things myself but I'm learning now that there may be help available."

"I am not aware of funding elsewhere, but I would look to explore options open to me."

"I looked at start-up grant through a bank but looked complicated so put me off."

"Business gateway webinars and advice to help me understand how to run a business. I would not have known where else to look for business support."

"I am unsure - I was not overly aware of other support like this. I have used business gateway before and thought that I had accessed things I knew. But the pathways programme also focused on the wellbeing of the person and to focus on what passions we had, and I think that added a lot of value to everyone I met on the course."

"Maybe, maybe not. I would have likely tried Business Gateway but otherwise not aware of other business support."

"Strathclyde University Entrepreneur Scheme, Edinburgh Futures Programme, Converge, and other Government Technical Startup Support Networks."

"Paid support from a specialist mentor in my field. Also, I had already

6.2.8 Areas for improvement

The majority of clients felt that no improvement was necessary. Suggestions that were made included:

- creation of a Pathways Community to provide peer support
- a centralised place to share programme resources and streamline administration which often took up coaching time
- more networking sessions
- access to further coaching and/or coaching delivered over a longer time period
- wider marketing promotion of awareness of the programme

6.3 Grant support

Of the 90 clients accessing the grant:

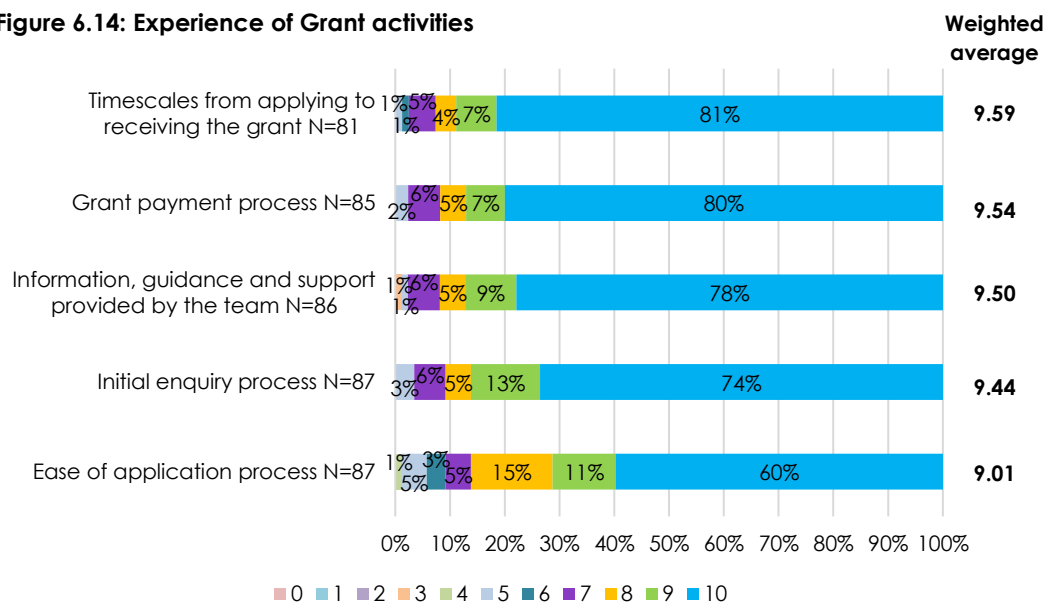
- 74 had received it and were using it
- ten were still in the process of accessing it
- four had accessed it but not used it

75 had accessed the coaching as well as the grant. Findings in this section are based on all 90 clients. Where relevant, differences have been pulled out in findings between those accessing the grant only and those accessing the grant and coaching.

6.3.1 Programme Management & Delivery

Clients were asked to rate their experience of the following in relation to the Grant activities (on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all satisfied and 10 is completely satisfied). All elements were rated very highly scoring an average of 9.01 or above out of 10 with timescales from applying to receiving the grant and the payment process rated highest. There was no real difference in experience between those accessing the grant only support and those accessing the coaching and grant support.

Figure 6.14: Experience of Grant activities

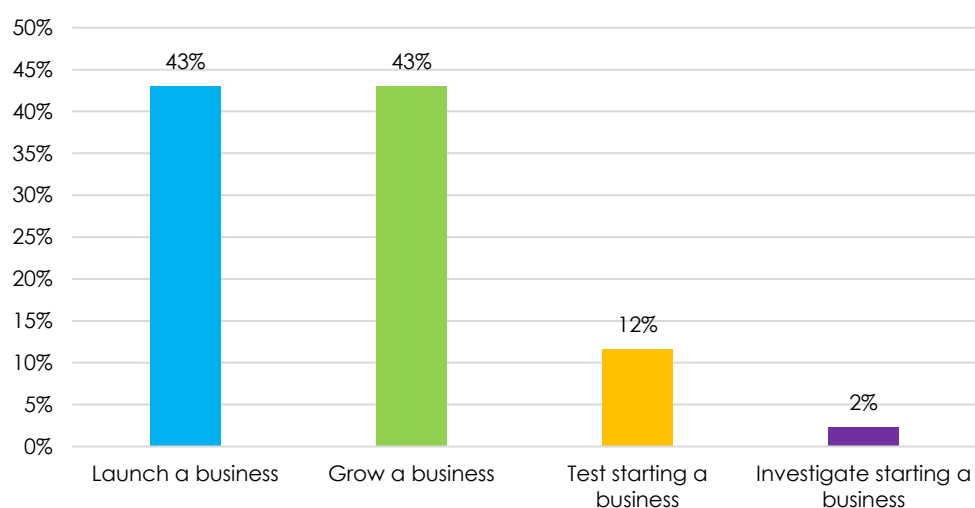


6.3.2 Pilot outcomes

The majority of clients (86%, 49) used the grant to help launch or grow a business.

When looking at those receiving grant support only, 73% (11) were using it to grow a business compared with just 37% (26) of those accessing coaching and grant support. On the flip side, 47% (33) of those accessing coaching and grant support were using it to launch a business compared with 27% (4) of those accessing the grant only. This highlights the different stages of the enterprise journey, with those accessing the grant only, more likely to be further along than those also accessing the coaching.

Figure 6.15: Use of Grant



N=86

Most frequently the grant was used to purchase equipment to run a business. Building a business website was the second most common use of the grant. IT purchases, subscriptions and training were also supported by the grant.

Client comments on the difference the grant has made included:

"A huge difference, I have invested in more equipment to make my life so much easier and further training which will take my business to the next level!"

"Allowed me to take the pressure off initial tech required to start the business and save money on marketing and promotions required."

"As a primary carer I was worried about starting a business that caused me to out of the home for long periods - the grant helped me to address that by being able to work at home when needed."

"Huge, I have been able to complete my courses with the grant funding and used the small savings I had to buy my equipment."

"I 100% couldn't have taken my business plan forward without it. Being on Universal Credit and without savings, it would have been impossible for me!"

"It has allowed me to start a podcast and get some merchandise I wouldn't have been able to purchase. All branded to get my name out there."

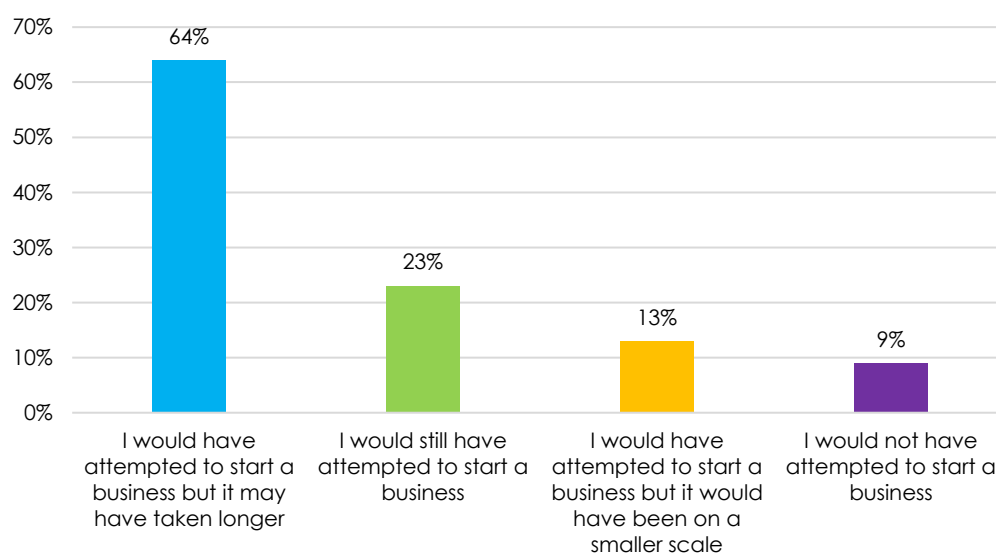
"It's really jumpstarted the business as I was struggling to save enough to buy the materials needed to start trading. The grant has enabled me to buy the majority of the materials I need to run some introductory, investigative, affordable pilot workshops which will get the word out into the community about the new business."

"I have been able to purchase a van which has allowed me to partner with other businesses in the Borders."

Without grant support the majority of clients would have still attempted to start a business (91%, 79), however 64% (54) said it would have taken them longer and/or 13% (11) said it would have been on a smaller scale⁹.

When looking at those who received coaching and grant support, 11% (8) would not have attempted to start a business without the support whereas all those who received the grant only said they would have attempted to start a business (albeit for some it would have taken longer and or been on a smaller scale), again highlighting the different stages of the enterprise journey.

Figure 6.16: What would have happened without the grant support



N=87

Comments included:

"I would have continued with my business but not have been able to get the tools to make it more efficient and professional."

"I would have had to partner with online businesses for my materials and framing rather than shopping locally."

"I would not have been able to invest in my business right now."

"I would have struggled to stock the shop."

"I would not have been able to market myself in the same way, as I would not have had the funds to develop a professional website or brand to the same professional level."

"I feel my business would not have had as great a chance to succeed, and I would have felt weighed down by that side of things and less free to grow and deliver the service I am trained for and am offering. The grant has been a huge bonus."

"Would not have been able to offer drone photography when diversifying."

⁹ Note clients could have ticked both these options

6.3.3 Areas for improvement

The majority of those in receipt of the grant felt that there were no improvements necessary. However some of those who received coaching commented that they may have found the application process difficult without the coach support. Where suggestions for improvement were made these most included:

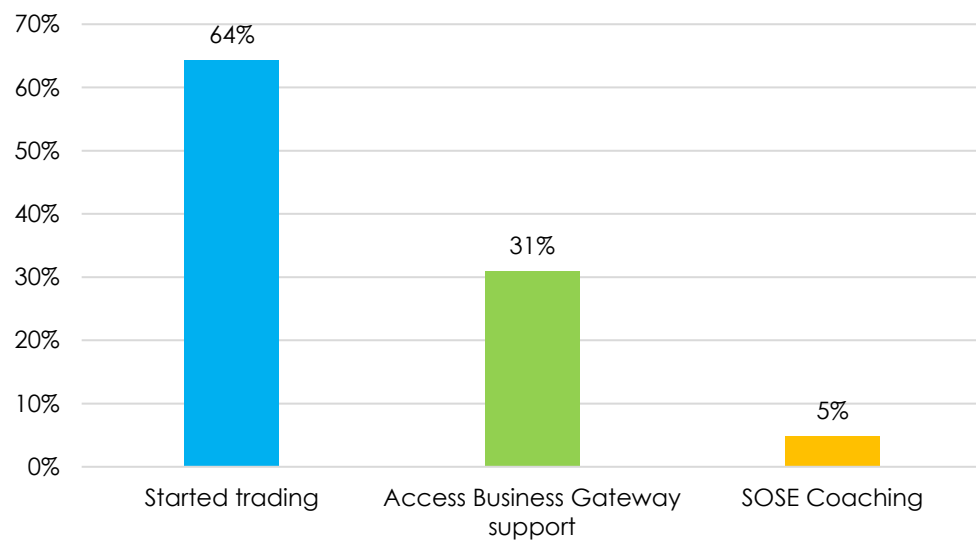
- having an online application process rather than the use of attachments
- extending the time period in which the grant can be used
- post grant networking opportunities

6.4 Next steps and Net Promoter Score

Following the coaching and grant support 61% (27) had started trading, 30% (13) had accessed Business Gateway support and 5% (2) had accessed SOSE support.

A higher proportion of those accessing both the coaching and grant support had started trading (73%, 22) compared with those receiving grant only (45%, 5). This is a reflection on where each group of clients were when they received the support, with more clients from the grant only support having started a business or were in the process of starting a business compared with those accessing coaching and grant support.

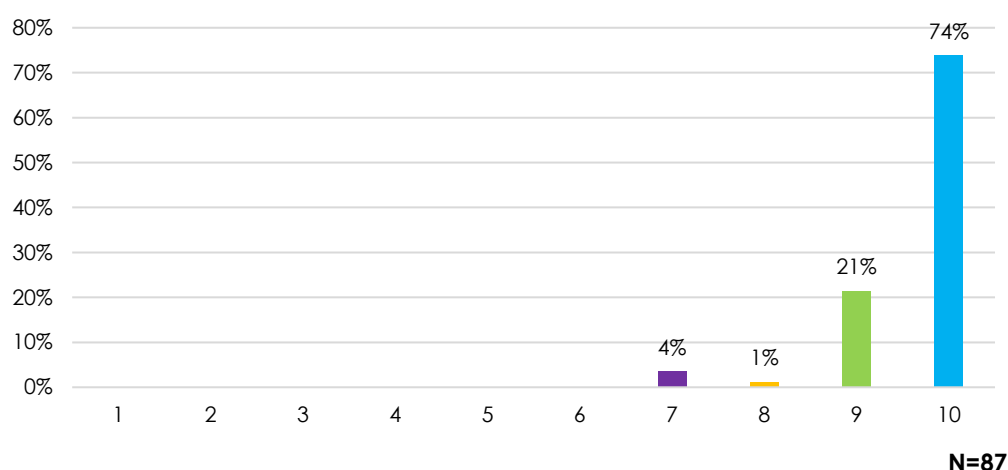
Figure 6.17: Next destination



N=42

Clients indicated how likely they would be to recommend the Pathways Pilot to someone on a scale from 1- extremely unlikely to 10 – already had. The Pilot performed extremely well with 100% (87) rating their likeliness 7 out of 10 or above and 74% (63) rated the Accelerator 10 out of 10, i.e. had already recommended to someone else.

Figure 6.18: Net Promotor Score (NPS)



Based on the feedback the Pilot has an excellent NPS of 95¹⁰. NPS scores can range from -100 to +100. Industry benchmarks for NPS state that any score above 0 is good, anything between 30 and 70 is very good and anything over 70 excellent. Those receiving grant support only had an NPS of 100 while those receiving coaching and grant support had an NPS of 95.

Comments included:

"It is empowering, motivating and gives confidence as well as practical (monetary) assistance. Life in a rural area is difficult, and employment is restricted."

"It's been a brilliant boost to confidence and given me the opportunity to get started rather than thinking 'if only'."

"Tailored to need, encouraging, non-threatening, supportive, friendly, professional, reliable."

"It was a huge help to me both coaching and grant. It was great for clarity of Business, keeping me motivated and accountable to keep on track."

"It was really helpful and I've been introduced/inducted into a network of amazing entrepreneurs and business founders, and it's great to be a part of this and to learn from each other."

"It's a great thing for people just starting. It will give them extra support, confidence and somebody they can talk to about struggles they're facing."

"Both the mentoring and the grant are a dream combination for starting up a business. It's rare to get both in the same place."

"The team have changed my life! Even without my business actually starting, I feel validated, listened to and very thankful and I definitely feel the need to spread the word!"

¹⁰<https://www.retently.com/blog/good-net-promoter-score/#:~:text=A%20score%20between%200%20and,happy%20customers%20than%20unhappy%20ones.>

Final comments included:

"Just a big Thank You for your help, support and belief in what I'm doing."

"Everyone I have dealt with so far has been incredible!"

Excellent service and support. Feel very lucky to have come across this help

"This was a new experience for me and you made it so painless, which is super appreciated when faced with mountains of complicated admin and jargon. This is just what I needed to have a super professional launch."

"Thank you for this amazing opportunity the grant has helped me with my business."

"A brilliant support for new and existing business. Keep up the great work SOSE."

"I think the Pathways Programme is a great incentive for the Scottish Borders and it really helps create a platform for people to start their own businesses. I think otherwise, people struggle (I know I did), as it is just an idea and without some investment in developing yourself, building confidence in you and your idea, it probably will just stay as that for a lot of people."

"I've been so lucky to access this programme. The coaching has been invaluable, and the grant has made setting up easier."

"I think this programme was excellent! Easy to apply, great coaching and £1000 at the end! So supportive. I am very grateful. Thank you."

"I've had the idea for nearly a year and not done anything about it. Pathways has given me the confidence to start and pointed me. In the right direction. I am very grateful, thank you!"

7 Comparator Assessment

A comparator review of similar projects was undertaken to identify areas of good practice and any learning that can be taken. Similar supports were identified based on those focusing on entrepreneurship support for under-represented groups and compared with the Pilot using the headings in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Comparator assessment

Programme/Organisation	Target audience	Specific Support Provided	Reported Outcomes/Impacts	USP/Distinguishing Features
E3F, delivered by Elevator and funded by the Scottish Government through their Pathways Fund	Rural, socioeconomically challenged, and black and ethnic minority women	6-week interactive workshops to enhance participants' skills and boost their confidence as well as sustained support via a digital platform and local networks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% felt they would go on to start a business, with over 90% ready to do so now Over 90% agreed that they learnt new skills and knew more about starting a business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tailored to each region's needs use of simple/ friendly language focus on women as individuals use of locally based female small business owners as facilitator concentration on 'soft skills'
Women in Agriculture Practical Training Fund, administered by Lantra Scotland	Women in Scottish agriculture who would otherwise not have access to training and development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% funding for training courses up to £500 additional travel and accommodation costs for those living on islands or in remote areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> empowerment of women and girls in agriculture through skill development enhanced career progression and employment opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> practical, vocational training tailored for women in agriculture supporting women from remote/rural areas aims to address the specific needs identified in research
Introduction to Self-Employment Course, CEIS Dumfries & Galloway supported by DG Works	Parents, in receipt of universal credit thinking about self-employment.	6-week course delivered online covering topics relevant to starting a business, with some in-person peer-to-peer learning.	No reported outcomes but it has been designed to give confidence as well as practical knowledge and skills to embark on self-employment or social enterprise.	On completion of the programme, referrals will be made for parents to have continued support from partners, such as Business Gateway or South of Scotland Enterprise.
Rural enterprise support pilot, delivered by GrowBiz and funded by the Scottish Government	Rural micro-enterprises in Perth and Kinross.	12 months of one-to-one support on topics relevant to starting a business as well as signposting and peer learning.	50 new business starts in Perth and Kinross. Increased confidence as an entrepreneur was the most common benefit noted by participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> highly personalised service practical advice peer support and networking access to further collaboration with agencies including HIE, Business Gateway
W-Power Programme, delivered in Scotland by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)	Female business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs in rural areas in Scotland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an online networking platform facilitating connections among female entrepreneurs webinars addressing business and skills development needs "Ask the Expert" sessions offering tailored advice face-to-face events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enhanced networking opportunities for women in rural areas, leading to increased collaboration and support improved access to business learning and development resources tailored to the needs of female entrepreneurs empowerment of women to overcome challenges unique to rural entrepreneurship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> focus on women in rural and often remote areas, addressing specific challenges they encounter a blend of online and face-to-face support part of a broader international initiative, allowing participants to benefit from cross-border knowledge exchange and support

7.1 Comparator learning

The Pilot has similarities with several of the comparators identified such as:

- the target audience, aimed at those who find themselves to be quite far from the traditional routes to self-employment
- the fact that women seem to be the most frequent under-represented group that is targeted
- the inclusive welcoming nature of the support achieved through simple easy to understand language, particularly at the early stages of the business process when clients are developing their confidence
- tailored support focusing on both practical and soft skills
- access to further collaboration with agencies such as Business Gateway
- a place-based approach through the use of local coaches

From the information available, none of the other supports offer a grant in addition to the support provided and none have coaching as their main approach (the others focus more on training and business skills). Areas that differ, and which could be explored in terms of their potential value-add for the Pilot include:

- peer to peer learning/support
- a blend of online and face-to-face support
- using research to identify specific needs of the target group
- provision of a digital platform offering ongoing support beyond the Pilot
- the opportunity to look at the wider category of under-represented groups beyond females

In addition to the comparators, there are also a number of potential partnership opportunities or follow on support options to consider if the Pilot is to be rolled out further:

- **Social Innovation Challenge Fund** – aims to help people from under-represented groups in Glasgow, such as women and ethnic minority communities, overcome challenges that make it difficult to become successful entrepreneurs. Through the funding, organisations are invited to design and deliver support programmes for groups such as female or minority ethnic community entrepreneurs, or to signpost them to existing public services, which have been traditionally less likely to have been accessed by such groups.
- **AccelerateHER** – is dedicated to accelerating the growth, visibility, and backing of high-growth-potential women founders in the UK. The organisation aims to address the gender investment gap by providing tailored support to female entrepreneurs. It provides a range of support including:
 - an annual awards programme recognising inspirational female founder success across the UK. Winners receive mentoring packages and opportunities to participate in international market-building missions
 - a nine-week accelerator programme designed to support female founders who are beyond the idea stage and poised for growth. It includes masterclasses, one-to-one mentoring, accountability groups, and networking events
 - access to a global network of angel investors, commercial advisers, and other successful businesspeople.
 - tailored events to inspire, energise, and connect female founders, providing them with the skills and tools to be more effective in business

- **Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and NatWest Female Entrepreneurs Fund** – This initiative directly addresses the funding gap identified in the Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship, which highlighted that female-led businesses receive less funding than those led by men at every stage. The programme aims to support female entrepreneurs in scaling and growing their businesses. Beyond financial support, NatWest offers over 1,000 Women in Business Accredited Specialists throughout the UK, providing expertise and support to female entrepreneurs. The bank also provides non-financial services, including the NatWest Accelerator Hub, specialised business support, networking opportunities, and campaigns such as "Buy Women Built" and the NatWest Business Builder.

8 Conclusions and Recommendations

The Pilot has demonstrated a successful approach to addressing the recommendations arising from the 2023 Scottish Government Pathways Report. The Pilot has effectively targeted those at a very early stage of considering a business venture and has provided them with personalised support, guidance and funding to progress their ideas. It has exceeded its targets in all areas which not only suggests sound management and operational processes but also indicates a gap in the market for pre-start business support as well as a demand for such support. The Pilot achieved an excellent Net Promotor Score of 95.

Those who had participated in coaching were typically at the pre-start stage or in the early stages of starting a business and reported increases in both the confidence and knowledge to run their own business with 88% of them considering themselves to be a business person at the end of coaching compared to 53% before. 75% also agreed that the things that previously held them back from starting a business were no longer barriers.

Clients who received the grant reported that it made a huge difference and most often used it to purchase equipment and/or essential IT to either help launch or grow their business. Those that received the grant support without coaching were more likely to use the grant to grow a business while those accessing coaching and grant support were using it to help launch a business. This highlights the different stages of the clients enterprise journey, with those accessing the grant only, more likely to be further along than those also requiring coaching.

The Pilot is seen to fit well with the overall objectives of SOSE as well its approach to supporting an inclusive enterprise agenda with a vision to have a buoyant rural economy that benefits the region at large. However, whilst the Pilot aims to target under-represented groups at large, anecdotally the majority of clients have been female. There is currently no process for identifying and categorising those in under-represented groups.

The Pilot was designed and implemented within very short timescales, with a fixed end point. As a result it is acknowledged that in some cases management processes were introduced a little hastily or late but which were refined as the Pilot progressed. This was particularly relevant with regards to the marketing of the Pilot which resulted in increased interest and activity in its later months. Many of the suggestions for improvement to the Pilot relate to the challenges resulting from the tight timescales involved.

As a successful Pilot, with indications of future demand for the support it offers, now would be a good time to embed and integrate Pathways within SOSE as well as within the supports offered by other partner organisations.

Due to the Pilot's short term nature it has not been possible to assess longer term outcomes or the sustainability of the support provided in the realisation of the overall impacts identified within the logic model. However, there are strong indications that with continued effort, Pathways will contribute to a joined up, inclusive and vibrant ecosystem of support for entrepreneurs across the South of Scotland.

Key factors of success for the Pilot were:

- the place based support delivered by coaches with local business experience
- the coaches – carefully selected for both their experience and passion to support pre-start businesses
- the personalised and tailored one-to-one support
- the calibre, enthusiasm and motivation of the programme management team

Recommendations and learning points for replication and future roll out of Pathways

- clarifying or reframing the term 'under-represented' in terms of the South of Scotland context and to consider this in terms of marketing
- if future programmes are to continue to focus on under-represented groups there should be a process for identifying and monitoring such groups to inform monitoring and evaluation
- ongoing or phased marketing to support a consistent spread of activity across time
- ensuring that next steps are clarified for clients who participate together with some means of monitoring this with partner organisations
- clarifying the capacity of partner organisations, including Business Gateway, to provide follow on support to clients who have undertaken Pathways
- digitalising the application and grant processes with continued support provided for those who need it
- creation of a central online programme management resource
- creation of a Pathways client community
- further networking events and opportunities
- measurement and monitoring of the longer term outcomes and impact as set out in the logic model

Appendix 1 – Consultees

Coach Interviews (9)

Name	Organisation
Holly Young	Interactifs
Sarah Hanson	Interactifs
Karen Riddick	Coach
Martina McKinnell	Enterprise Coaching Services
Victoria Lane	Solway Blankets
Ann Carter	Coachr
Sharday Hislop	Happy.Mind.Life
Lorna Jackson-Hall	Scottish Borders Chamber of Commerce
Sian Downes	Scottish Borders Chamber of Commerce

Stakeholder Interviews (24)

Name	Organisation
Allan McNaught	Business Gateway Dumfries & Galloway
Carolyn Currie	Women's Enterprise Scotland
Claire Simmonds	Volunteering Matters
Cynthia Moore-Opdam	SOSE
Dale Clancy	Borders College
Davy McCracken	SRUC
Graeme Galloway	DYW Dumfries & Galloway
Jane Morrison-Ross	SOSE
Jayne Murdoch	SOSE
Jill Millar	SOSE
Julie McFarlane	Academy of Enterprise Education
Kevin Greenfield	Developing The Workforce (DYW) Scottish Borders
Karen Rodgers	Scottish Government
Suzanne Henderson	Scottish Government
Kate Glendye	Dumfries and Galloway College
Kathy Cremin	SOSE
Kirsty Cummings	SOSE
Lesley Forsyth	SOSE
Neil Johnstone and team	Business Gateway Scottish Borders
Noel Matis	Wevolution
Susan Harkins	SOSE
Alan Barr	SOSE
Kirstie Scrimgeour	SOSE
Karen Crawford	SOSE