

Evaluation of the Hawick Business Centre

Report for

South of Scotland Enterprise



Frontline

11 Academy Street, Coatbridge, Lanarkshire, Scotland, ML5 3AW

T: 01236 433019 E: consult@frontlinemc.com

Also at: 71-75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London, WC2H 9JQ
www.frontline-consultants.com

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1 Introduction and Strategic Context

South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), in partnership with Scottish Borders Council, is currently piloting a place-based Business Centre in Hawick to drive entrepreneurial activity across the region. The plans were developed in 2017 by Scottish Government, Scottish Borders Council, local businesses and community groups, on the back of the Hawick Action Plan¹. The Business Centre has been open since April 2024.

The Business Centre is located on the former Armstrong's Department Store site and the building is owned by Scottish Borders Council. Funding was provided by the Scottish Government for the build of the Business Centre (£2.6m), SOSE provided £175,000 to help furnish and fit out the building. The UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund also provided £123,000 for this project. The Shared Prosperity Fund forms part of the UK Government's Levelling Up agenda and aims to improve pride in local places and increase life chances across the UK by investing in communities and local businesses and by developing people and skills.

1.1 Background

The Scottish Borders creates fewer new/start up enterprises compared to Scotland as a whole, but startups have better three-year survival rates². To promote and celebrate entrepreneurial talent across the region, SOSE published its Five-Year Plan (2023-28) shaped by engagement with businesses, social enterprises, community groups, and those living in the south of Scotland. It is part of a collective effort to create a regional and national wellbeing economy establishing prosperity for everyone in Scotland. Awakening entrepreneurial talent is a priority in both the South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy, National Strategy for Economic Transformation, Scottish Borders and SOSE operational plans and Shared Prosperity Fund.

1.2 The Hawick Business Centre

The Business Centre has been designed like a Barclays Eagle Labs, with the following facilities available:

- short-term, working spaces and small bookable meeting rooms with modern video conference facilities for businesses as well as the wider community to use
- presentation space and a digital lab to provide users with advanced facilities such as podcast recording studio, live streaming and virtual reality headsets
- space to host SOSE's business accelerator programme for enterprises and businesses

1.3 Outputs

To date³ the Business Centre has:

- welcomed 466 visits from 113 individuals to the Business Centre
- hosted 25 events ranging from 1-1 expert support sessions, AI for business, Techscaler unplugged, adviser drop-in sessions and podcasting.
- seen 47 local businesses and organisations using the centre as a meeting place
- held several partner hosted events including Borders Chamber, Business Gateway and the SOSE aimed at supporting businesses in the region

The Business Centre is being used by a range of individuals and organisations. One of the most frequent users is Scottish Borders Council. It is commonly used by their Employability Team, Family Support Services and Social Workers. Other frequent users include local individuals and local businesses as well as SOSE.

¹<https://scottishborders.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s10648/Item%20No.%2013%20-%20Appendix%201%20Hawick%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

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

³ 25 February 2025

Table 1.1: Booker category

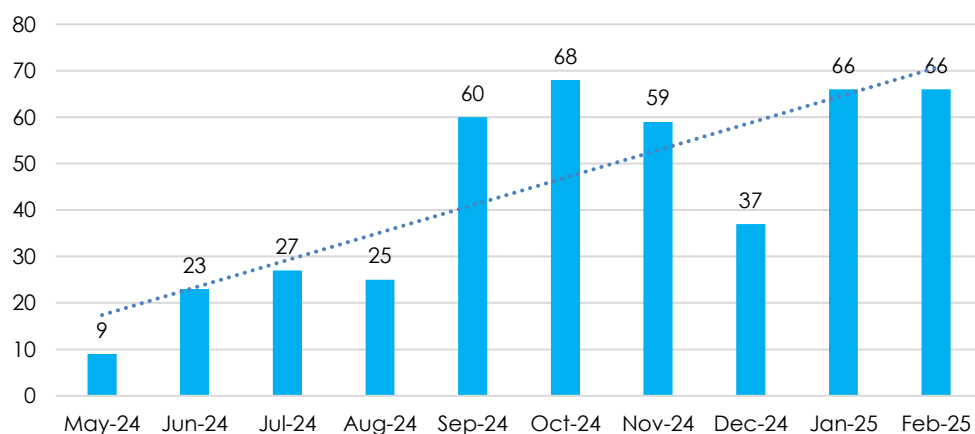
Category	No. of bookings
Scottish Borders Council booking	149
Individual person booking	77
External business booking	58
SOSE internal booking	58
External third sector organisation booking	51
SOSE external client or partner meeting	35
SOSE external event booking	25
Accelerator	13
Grand Total	466

Usage ranged from once to 34 times. 61% of booking are repeat users. Where people were making repeat bookings this was on average 6. Table 1.2 below shows the booking space most commonly used.

Table 1.2: Most commonly used booking space

Booking space	No. of bookings
1st Floor – Whole floor booking	136
Meeting Room 01 – Desk	117
Meeting Room 02 – Boardroom	93
2nd Floor – Desk	48
2nd Floor – Meeting room	29
2nd Floor – Whole floor booking	19
Ground Floor	9
1st Floor – Podcast suite	4
1st Floor – Presentation space	4
Meeting Room 02	4
Meeting Room 01	2
1st Floor – Training suite	1
Grand Total	466

Figure 1.1 shows a steady growth in bookings since the Business Centre opened. Maximum occupancy is 86 bookings per month, since September (with the exception of December) the Business Centre has been averaging 74% utilisation.

Figure 1.1: Bookings per month

2 Evaluation Objectives

Frontline was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Business Centre including to:

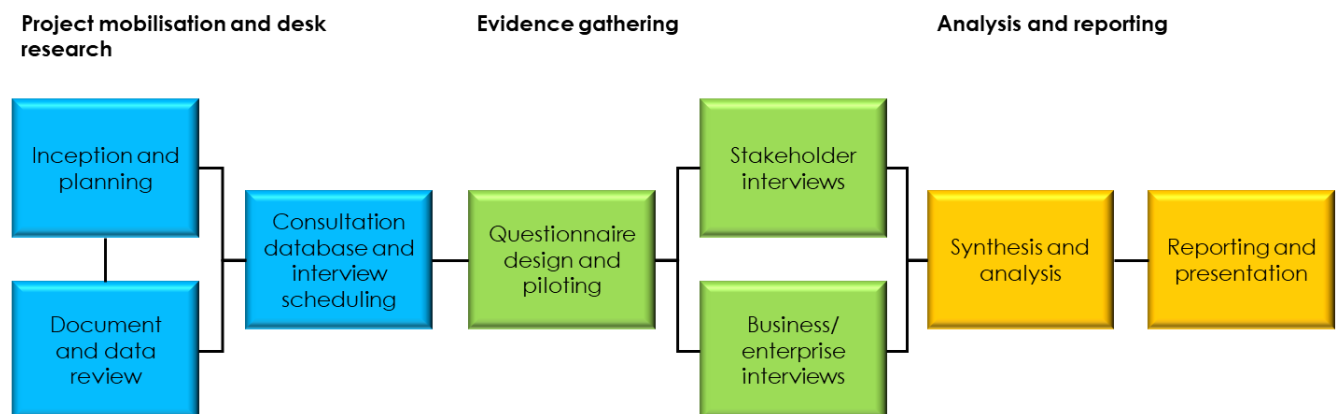
- determine the relevance and level of achievement of project objectives, development of effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability
- identify the outcomes that have been achieved, for whom and under what circumstances
- identify activities and outputs – what has been delivered, when and to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

This evaluation report draws on evidence from the following sources:

- a desk review of secondary data
- qualitative interviews with 11 stakeholders
- e-survey and consultation with 63 service users

The approach to the evaluation is outlined in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Method diagram



3 Stakeholder Findings

Interviews were undertaken with 11 stakeholders with the majority employed by SOSE in the following roles:

- Business Assistants
- Communities Manager
- Digital Specialist
- Internal coach also involved in delivery of Accelerator
- Business Advisors
- Head of Innovation and Enterprise
- Head of Enterprise and Business

In addition we spoke to those involved in Colliers facility management and the delivery of Techscaler.

Stakeholder views and perspectives very much relate to the connection and level of engagement they have with the Business Centre. Some were involved in the initial idea and design of the Business Centre with limited engagement since, others are more involved in its day-to-day operations and management. Several stakeholders have also been users of the Business Centre's facilities. Apart from the receptionist/manager who works for Colliers none of the stakeholders are based on site.

3.1 Understanding of the purpose of the Hawick Business Centre

Stakeholders describe the main purpose of the Business Centre as offering free and professional space to local businesses to encourage and develop enterprise within the area. A visit to Barclays Eagle Labs Glasgow had provided inspiration for the design and function of the Business Centre with the aim of creating a vibrant business atmosphere to support networking and collaboration. This environment is seen as beneficial to businesses involved in locally delivered Accelerators.

Having a local resource for business is also seen as a purpose of the Business Centre, somewhere where people can drop in to a professional environment to meet clients or hold meetings, as space that otherwise they might not have access to. The Business Centre also seems to provide businesses with the opportunity to test and use technology, again which otherwise might not be accessible to them.

The Business Centre is seen to act as a resource for local community groups and to provide a space for SOSE and local authority staff to meet clients as well as providing a venue for training.

An overview of stakeholder feedback on the purpose of the Business Centre is provided in the mind map below.

Figure 3.1: Views on the purpose of the Business Centre



Benefits that the Business Centre is seen to bring include:

- convenience and suitability for business use as there is a lack of other venues and facilities available locally
- flexible with no charge to use the Business Centre or the need for a contract
- people being able to start and/or run their business in a place other than their home
- its modern design and not being seen as a local authority building which could be off putting for some
- availability of and access to SOSE staff and support
- the variety of workspaces available
- supporting digital maturity in the region

"Some people have started their businesses here rather than from home, some with support from SOSE. They then come back and use it to meet their clients."

"Benefits from being not seen as a council building, it has a wider partnership feel which influences how people react."

"For business to access and test out tech who otherwise wouldn't be able to do so because of cost and before buying it themselves, supporting digital maturity in the region."

3.2 Extent to which the Business Centre is achieving its potential

It was acknowledged that the Business Centre has only been in operation for 10 months. Several stakeholders involved in the day-to-day administration of the Business Centre felt that utilisation was increasing now that people were becoming more aware of it. However it appears from the feedback that some of the spaces available are being utilised more than others. It was felt that more people could make use of the hot desks and the digital and VR facilities which could increase with more marketing and awareness raising.

Stakeholders felt that the Business Centre's potential to encourage a vibrant networking business community was yet to be achieved for a variety of reasons including:

- a tendency for people to make more one-off bookings and not interact with other users of the Business Centre
- security issues and booking system means that the door to the building is locked reducing spontaneity of access
- external view of the building not communicating its use

"It's partially achieving potential, a lot of people still don't know they can use it. The marketing has been OK but only if you already follow the SOSE channels. Widen that marketing. Word of mouth is happening, and it is getting busier."

"People tend to book for a one-off purpose e.g. a meeting - more transactional at the moment. Not sure if the potential to network and share and innovate is being realised."

"Due to security and safety restrictions we can't provide an open-door space – people need to book it for something which might detract from the spontaneity of meeting others although this could possibly happen in the hot desk area, but they still need to book."

"Could probably do more on the digital side, the VR equipment has only been used a handful of times at most - could be advertised more - but then you need someone around to show people how to use it and the person isn't always available."

"SOSE staff could maybe use it more to meet clients – they tend to do this online or go to client premises."

"Really great building and great facilities but seems like the only people in there are those at the event - it would be better to have other people around, more energy and buzz, it doesn't have that yet."

"Don't think it's a place that people can go and work for a whole day. I understand that only those on Accelerator can do this. A business community could be built there but it feels a bit "pop-uppy."

"There's tinted glass so sometimes looks like it isn't open. We tried to put a TV screen in the window that runs on a loop and explains the Centre – only useful if you're up close."

3.3 Suggestions for improvement

In addition to the challenges relating to the Business Centre realising its potential a number of suggestions were provided for improvement:

- having a regular programme of SOSE staff providing drop-in sessions with IT facilities to enable them to work from the Business Centre
- more SOSE staff upskilled in the digital technology available at the Business Centre to be able to demonstrate its use to clients
- some way of incorporating drop in visits without the need to book
- improving the booking system so that the Colliers and SOSE systems connect and providing an online booking system
- increased marketing and awareness
- ensuring the reliability of the Wi-Fi
- opening up its use to other SOSE teams and services

Another theme that arose was the current need for SOSE staff to provide cover for the Colliers receptionist when they take a lunch break or are on annual leave. It was felt that this arrangement puts pressure on a small number of staff who were local to the Business Centre. It was suggested that always having a SOSE representative on site to cover reception duties and provide advice, signposting and support to clients would be a better arrangement for both staff and clients.

3.4 Future of the Business Centre

The majority of stakeholders felt that there was a continued need for the Business Centre. The reasons given for this included:

- the increase in demand
- the convenience matched with the facilities, particularly IT facilities, available
- the fact that it has only recently started operating and needs more time to establish itself
- the need for a place for businesses to connect in the region

There were mixed views on whether people would or should pay to use the facilities with the potential complexity of any charges highlighted as an issue.

Several stakeholders felt that, if the Business Centre was no longer available, this would not only leave a gap for local business but also would detract from the message that there is business support in Hawick and that it is a place of regeneration. The fact that people would have to pay for facilities such as the digital equipment might mean that people would just not utilise such technology in their businesses.

"If there was no Business Centre It would depend on how much they were willing to pay. In Hawick there's the Hub but that has limited space, or Costa, or the library but that now only opens on selected days."

"It was advertised to help Hawick regeneration. If it stopped being there what sort of message would that send? Have to remember that enterprise doesn't happen overnight and it's only been here less than a year."

"It would be a loss if it were not here. It identifies that there is business support in Hawick which is a large town in the area."

4 User Findings

There were 466 bookings made by 113 individuals for Business Centre facilities (over the period May 2024 to February 2025). Of those, contact details were provided for 81 with survey responses received from 63 users.

Table 4.1 provides a breakdown of response rates.

Table 4.1: User consultation

	Total
Population	81
Users consulted	63
% of those consulted who responded	78%
Population sample confidence interval	90%

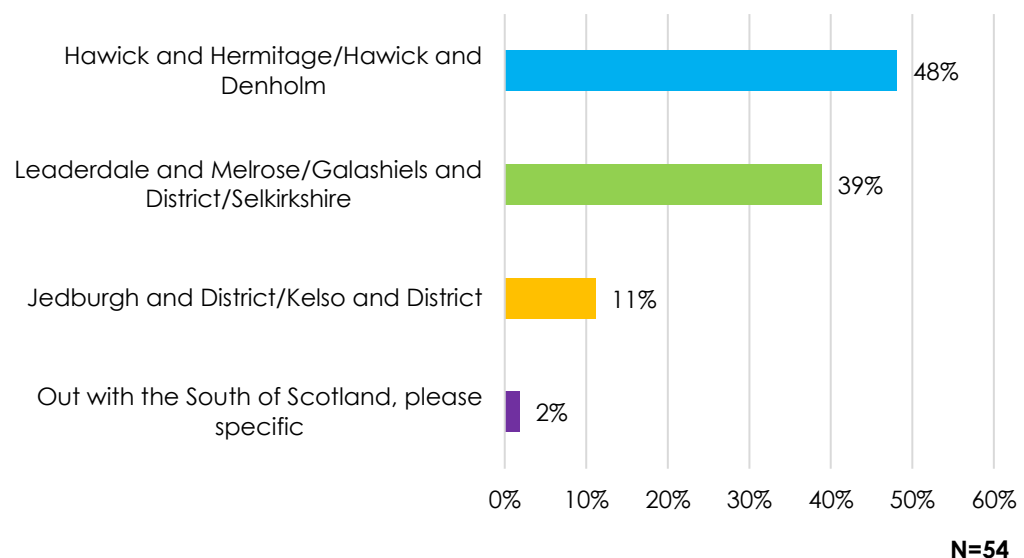
4.1 User details

Of the 63 people who responded to the survey 12 stated that they worked for SOSE and 18 for Scottish Borders Council. The remaining respondents were from businesses, other government agencies and local support networks/organisations.

4.1.1 Location

Apart from one, all of those who provided a location (n=54) were based in the Scottish Borders. Almost half (48%, 26) were located in Hawick and Hermitage/Hawick and Denholm. Figure 4.1 provides a breakdown of the location of Business Centre users.

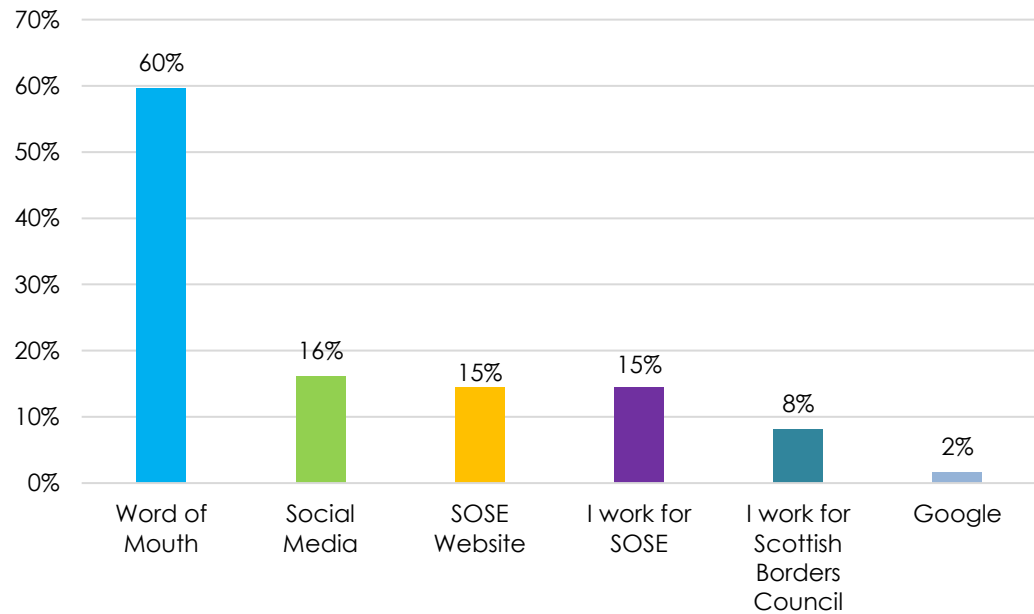
Figure 4.1: Respondent location



4.1.2 Awareness of the Hawick Business Centre

Business Centre users were asked how they had become aware of the centre. 60% (37) said through word of mouth and a further 23% (14) said it was because they worked for either SOSE or the Scottish Borders Council. Figure 4.2 provides a full breakdown.

Figure 4.2: Awareness of the Business Centre⁴

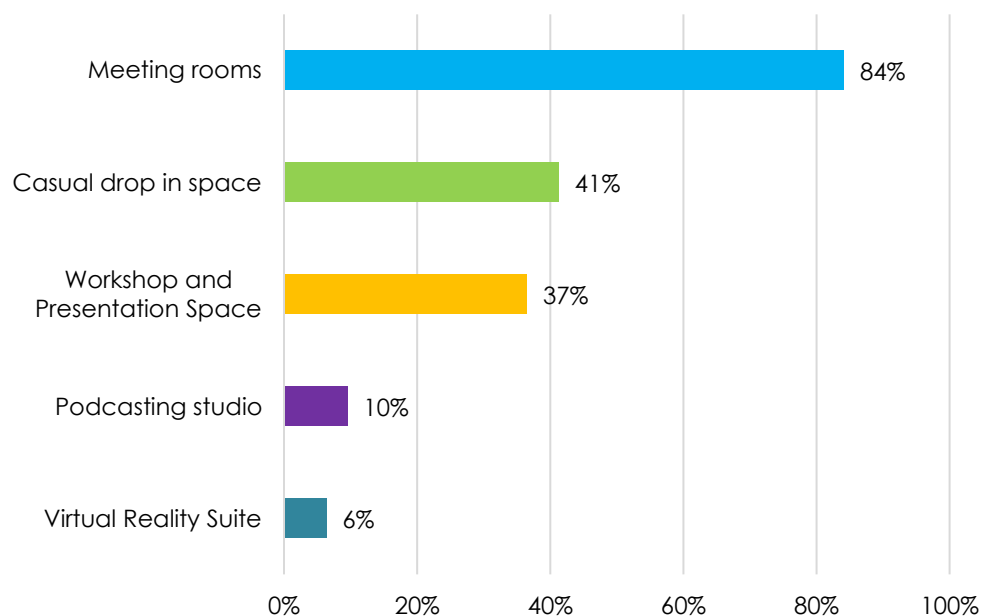


N=62

4.1.3 Facility use

The most commonly used facilities were the meeting rooms (84%, 52), followed by a 'casual drop in space' at 41% (25). The podcasting studio and virtual reality suite were less utilised at 10% and 6% respectively. Figure 4.3 provides a full breakdown.

Figure 4.3: Facility use



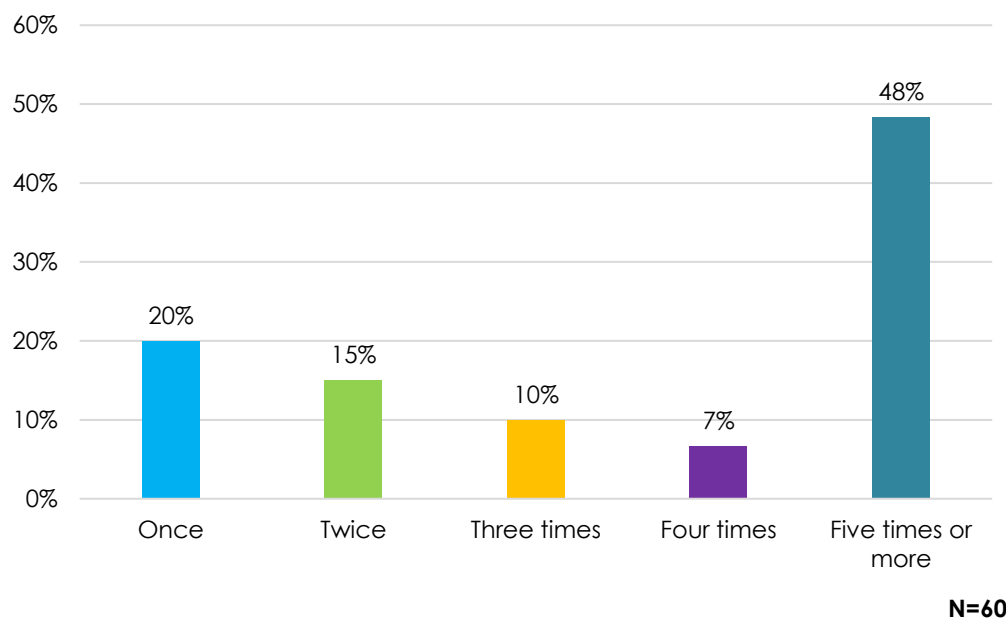
N=63

⁴ Does not total 100% as respondents could cite multiple routes.

4.1.4 Frequency of use

Almost half (48%, 29) of respondents had used the Business Centre five times or more. Figure 4.4 provides a breakdown on frequency of use.

Figure 4.4: Frequency of use



For those who used it most i.e. five time or more, almost 80% (23) had used it between 10 and 50 times since it had been open. The most frequent users of the centre were Scottish Borders Council with 149 bookings over the period, and SOSE using the centre 118 times.

Table 4.2: Frequency of booking user

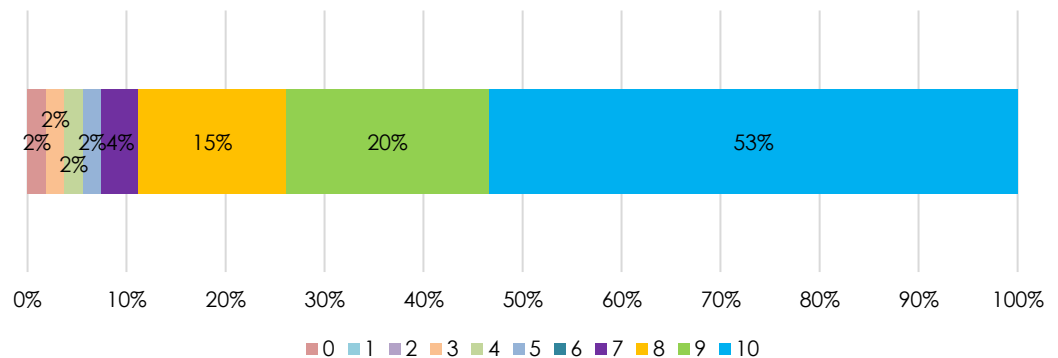
Booking Type	Number
SBC	149
SOSE	118
Individual person	77
External business	58
External third sector business	51
Accelerator programme	13
Total bookings	466

4.2 User experience

4.2.1 Initial enquiry process

Users of the Business Centre were asked to rate their experience of the initial enquiry process on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all satisfied and 10 is completely satisfied. The majority (88%, 48) rated their experience between 8 and 10. Figure 4.5 provides a full breakdown of the ratings.

Figure 4.5: Experience of the initial enquiry process



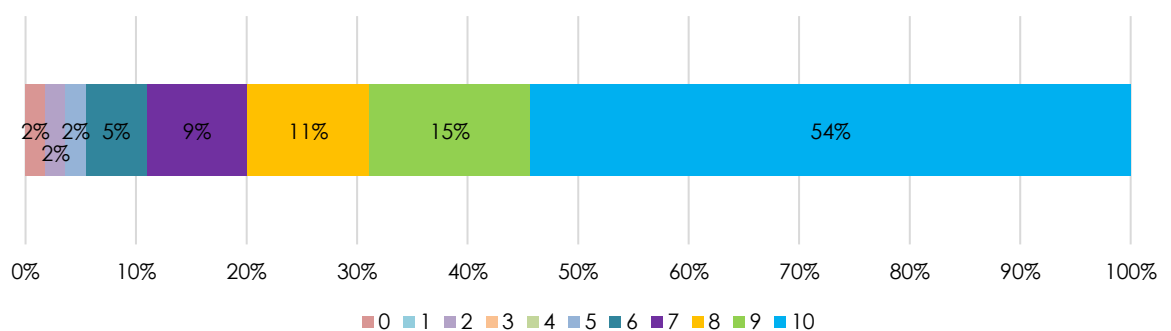
N=54

Those who provided comments on the initial enquiry process mentioned the friendliness and helpfulness of staff and timeliness of email responses.

4.2.2 The booking process

Business Centre users were asked to rate the ease of the booking process on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not easy at all and 10 is very easy. The majority (80%, 44) rated the booking process at between 8 and 10. Figure 4.6 provides a full breakdown of the ratings.

Figure 4.6: Ease of the booking process



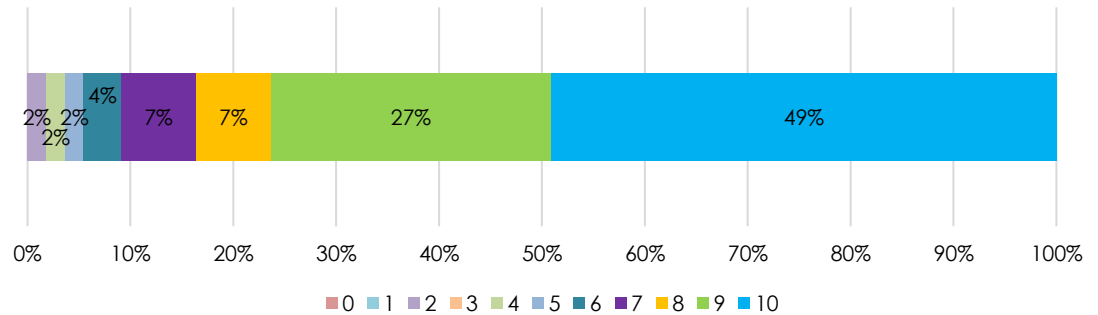
N=55

Whilst the helpfulness of staff was again praised, nine respondents felt that the booking process could be improved with an online system.

4.2.3 Satisfaction with the facilities

Users of the Business Centre were asked to rate their satisfaction with the facilities on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all satisfied and 10 is completely satisfied. Over three quarters (76%, 42) rated the facilities at 9 or 10. Figure 4.7 provides a breakdown of the ratings.

Figure 4.7: Satisfaction with facilities



N=55

Comments praising the facilities included:

"Far and away the best space we have access to as a service. Fantastic facilities and meeting rooms."

"Excellent facilities that complement the work I do in helping young people."

"Brilliant meeting rooms. Technology is really good e.g. screens in rooms. Tea and coffee facilities are good to have. Headsets and virtual reality is fantastic and as a team we plan to use this in the future."

"Equipment very easy to use and it was extremely well equipped for what we needed."

"My role was to book the space. I have not seen it in person. However, my colleagues have both fed back to me how AMAZING the space is and how it makes our group feel very professional. They told me it is perfect for everyone's needs."

Overall, users of Hawick Business Centred valued the modern, local venue with friendly staff, the range of facilities, and pleasant environment in which to do business.

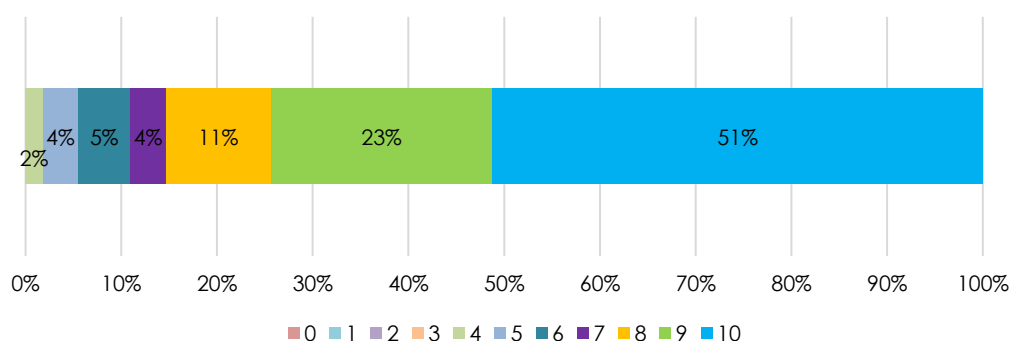
Areas where the Business Centre and its facilities could be improved included:

- larger toilet space
- access to a vending machine
- access to a printer
- better soundproofing of meeting rooms and podcast studio
- docking stations at workspaces
- greater privacy in meeting rooms/workspaces
- online booking system
- longer opening times
- the opportunity to meet other users
- having an unlocked front door

4.2.4 Satisfaction with the location of Hawick Business Centre

When asked to rate satisfaction with the location of the Business Centre, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all satisfied and 10 is completely satisfied, almost three quarters (74%, 41) rated it at between 8 and 10. Figure 4.8 gives a breakdown of the ratings.

Figure 4.8: Satisfaction with the location of the Business Centre



N=55

Users of the Business Centre appreciated its central location although views on availability of parking were mixed.

The majority (82%, 45) felt that it was very important to have a business centre located in the Scottish Borders.

4.3 Impact of the Hawick Business Centre

Users of the Business Centre were asked what difference the Business Centre had made to them or their organisation. Comments reflected the range of usage and purpose, and overall were very positive:

"The Centre has absolutely help me in running an independent remote marketing agency by providing meeting rooms for important client calls and presentations."

"The participants on our ten week course communicated that the space was inviting and not "stuffy" unlike some council offices previously used, which means the learning is easier to conduct."

"It has allowed us to have a workshop and a creative space whenever we needed it."

"We wouldn't be able to record our podcast if it wasn't there!"

"This has been a game changer - I have a clean and quiet space to work from and a place to have meetings. It's an amazing facility and has helped me loads."

"It was really helpful to be able to use a space dedicated to businesses to launch our new brand."

"It's given me space to meet clients, access training and build my network."

"It has helped professionalise what we are doing and in turn this will make the women we are supporting feel they are in good hands."

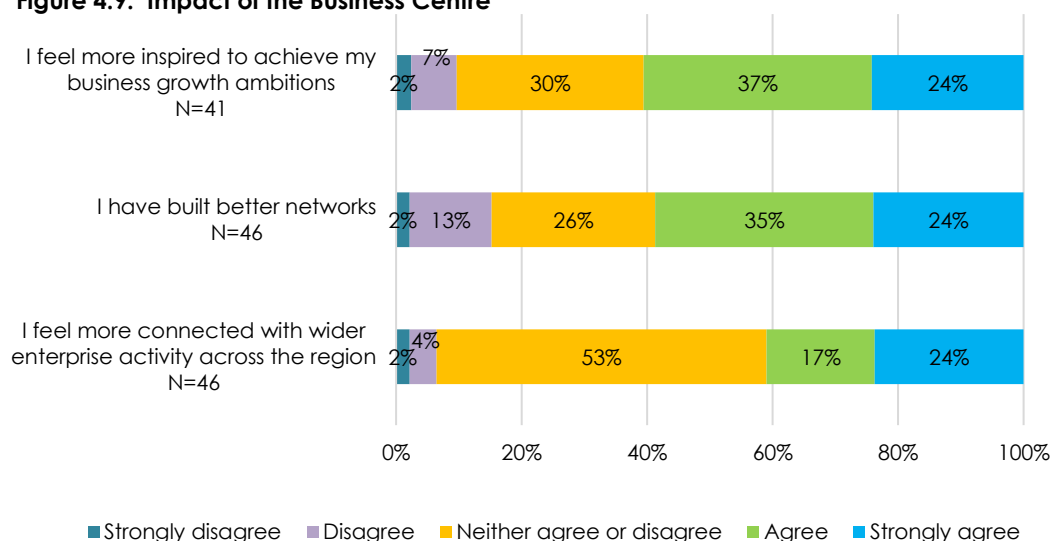
"As a start up, it gave me a location to hold meetings."

"It has allowed me to bring my two staff members (who work from home as I can't afford an office) to come in and work together. It has boosted the moral."

"It gives me a better option as a training venue as previously venues were few and far between."

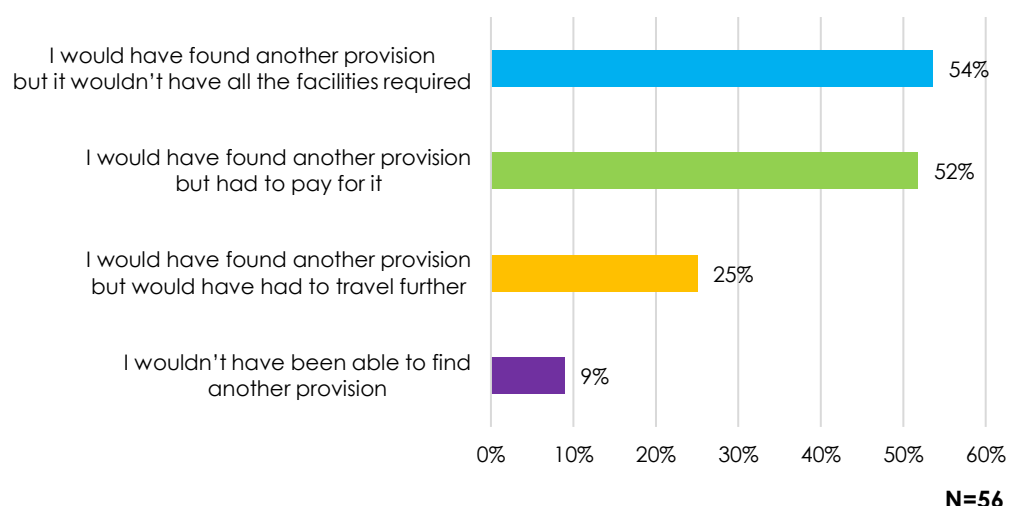
Users of the Business Centre were asked to what extent it had impacted on their sense of connectivity to wider enterprise activity and networks across the region as well as its impact on their business growth ambitions. The results are provided in Figure 4.9 and show that the majority felt there was an impact on networks and growth ambition. Fewer people felt that they were more connected with wider enterprise activity as a result of using the Business Centre.

Figure 4.9: Impact of the Business Centre



When asked what would have happened if the Business Centre was not available over half would have had to find a less suitable venue (54%, 30) or would have had to pay (52%, 29) to find similar facilities. Figure 4.10 provides a breakdown of responses.

Figure 4.10: Implications of no Business Centre



Comments relating to the impact of not having the Hawick Business Centre included:



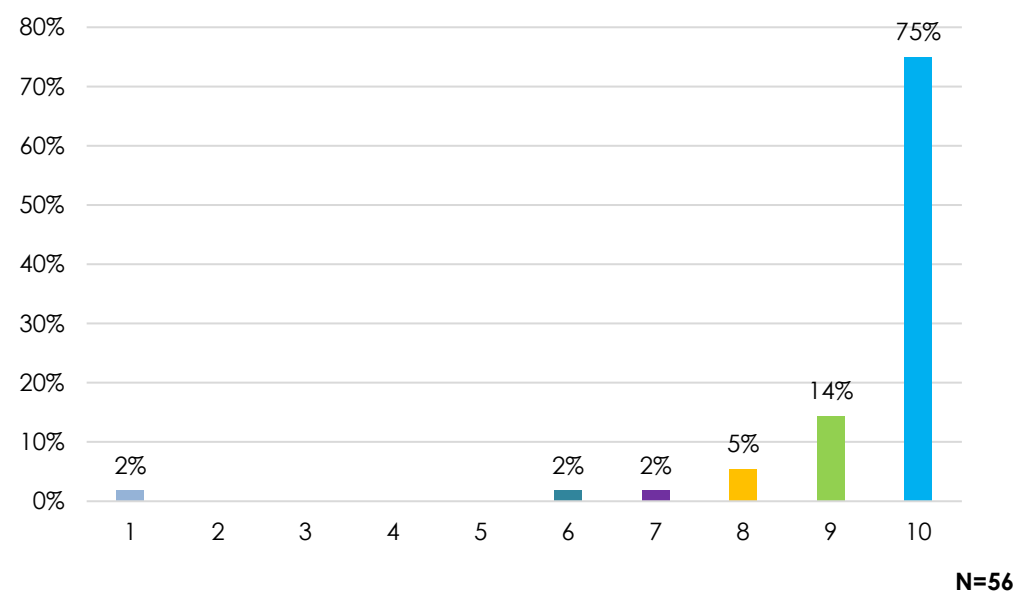
Almost all (96%) stated that they would continue to use the Business Centre.

Out of 51 people who responded to whether they would be willing to pay for the facilities, over half (57%, 29) said yes.

4.4 Likelihood of recommending the Business Centre to others

Users were asked whether they already had or were likely to recommend the Business Centre to another person, business or organisation on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 in not at all likely, to 9 is very likely to 10 is already have. 75% who responded stated that they had already recommended it. Figure 4.11 gives a breakdown of responses.

Figure 4.11: Likelihood of recommending the Business Centre



Based on the feedback the Business Centre has an excellent NPS of 85⁵. 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.

⁵<https://www.retently.com/blog/good-net-promoter-score/#:~:text=A%20score%20between%200%20and,happy%20customers%20than%20unhappy%20ones.>

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The Hawick Business Centre is welcomed by both stakeholders and users as a local venue and a flexible resource for businesses, community groups and enterprise development. Its presence in Hawick is seen to provide a positive indication of the importance placed on regeneration and ambition for the local area.

Since its launch in April 2024 the Business Centre is becoming more well known, mainly by word of mouth. Between September 2024 and February 2025 (with the exception of December), bookings have been relatively stable between 60 and 68 per month. 61% of bookings are repeat bookings with 48% reporting utilising it more than five times. The majority of bookings are made by employability, family support and social work staff at Scottish Borders Council followed by SOSE staff for client meetings or enterprise events and the Accelerator.

The most frequent bookings are for the whole first floor with some of the meeting rooms and desk bookings being the next most frequent.

There has been steady growth in bookings since the Business Centre opened with utilisation now averaging 74%.

Overall users of the Business Centre were satisfied with the facilities and its location. Whilst the booking process works, it was felt that a digital booking process would be more effective. They appreciated that they could use the Business Centre at no cost to them with the majority stating that without it they would have to pay for facilities that would not be as good. Users of the Business Centre who work from home valued having somewhere else to work and meet clients.

Evidence of the impact of the Business Centre on local businesses was more difficult to identify. This may well be due to the short period that it has been in operation together with the high proportion of bookings made by organisations who are not local businesses which makes impact on business growth ambitions, networking and enterprise connectivity harder to assess at this stage. However some users did report some positive impacts in these areas. 75% of users of the Business Centre had already recommended it to others.

In the twelve months that it has been open the Hawick Business Centre is proving to be a valuable facility for those who have used it. It would now be a good time to explore how the environment could be strengthened to provide the vibrant business atmosphere to support networking and collaboration which was one of the aims of the Business Centre and to demonstrate the impacts of this on local businesses.

It is recommended that:

- more marketing and awareness is undertaken with local businesses and community groups to increase their use of the Business Centre, particularly regarding the technology facilities available
- opportunities are explored to stimulate a vibrant atmosphere and connectivity between businesses and the local community
- opening times and access to the Business Centre are reviewed to stimulate use particularly for those who may not work traditional business hours
- an online booking system is explored together with open-door, drop in access

Appendix 1 – Consultees

Name	Organisation
Morven Marlborough	SOSE
Rebecca Brandon	SOSE
Michael Gardiner	SOSE/Digital Specialist
Caja Sharkey	SOSE/Business Gateway
Pauline Deans	SOSE/Adviser
Jan Pringle	SOSE/Communities Manager
Kathryn Orton	Colliers
Cynthia Moore-Opdam	SOSE/Coach
Sarah-Jane Burns	Techscaler
Phil McCreddie	SOSE Head of Enterprise and Business
Susan Harkins	SOSE