

Lessons Learnt

People & Skills Activities

The levelling up baseline data demonstrates some of the biggest challenges facing people within Leicester's communities today are economic, driven by high levels of unemployment. Access to well-paid sustainable employment is vital to improving living standards and narrowing the Levelling Up Gaps across the city.

The local employment rate falls below the national average whilst the economically inactive population is considerably higher; the economically inactive is therefore a key area of focus for the UKSPF programme.

The city has several CRF/EU projects that are offering vital support services to those who are unemployed and economically inactive. In the case of CRF projects this support has already ceased whilst further gaps will emerge as ESIF projects wind down before June 2023.

Through the challenges highlighted in the previous section Leicester's UKSP programme will target activities around:

- **Supporting people into employment, including self-employment**
- **Sustaining employment**
- **People moving into education / training**
- **Increasing the number of people with basic skills (English, maths, ESOL).**

Most of the projects target specific beneficiary groups. Any UKSPF programme might need a selection of providers to offer the project themes above to a range of beneficiaries.

The sections below compare shortlisted projects by their alignment with the activities identified in the UKSPF programme and identify any lessons learnt from consultation with project representatives.

Note on Methodology:

At times, projects have been compared by cost-per-output. The analysis is only an approximate method of understanding efficiency, as projects and programmes deliver a range of activities.

The results should be viewed as a means of comparing projects that have delivered similar outputs, but it is important to acknowledge that each project comprises a different mix of offers and therefore any direct comparison needs to account for the different outputs and outcomes delivered within each project's budget, alongside the overall quality and impact of the project.

a. Supporting people into employment, including self-employment

There are a number of projects that supported/are supporting people into employment, although this may not be the sole purpose of the project.

Moving into Employment Support						
Project	Support			Value for Money		
	CV Support	1 to 1	Sector Training	People into Employment	Budget	£/person
Get Inspired Leicester	✓	✓		520**	£1,992,315	£3,831
Skills Support for the Unemployed			✓	800**	£3,474,900	£4,344
Leicestershire Employment Hub	✓	✓	✓	879**	£3,858,331	£4,389
Community Grants	✓	✓	✓	75	£430,000	£5,733
East Midlands Accelerator		✓		67	£1,000,000	£14,925
Leicester Textiles Renewal			✓	20	£500,000	£25,000
YES: Youth Employability Support/ Reboot	✓	✓		138	£4,401,947	£31,898
Positive Communities	✓	✓	✓	18	£584,230	£32,457
Moneywise Plus	✓	✓		107	£3,600,722	£33,651
She Inspired Business Playbox	✓	✓		10	£349,588	£34,959
GREAT	✓	✓		110	£4,301,071	£39,101
Leicester Community ESOL Project	✓	✓		1	£500,000	£500,000

Leicester City Council's **Leicestershire Employment Hub** and **Get Inspired Leicester**, as well as **Skills Support for the Unemployed** have supported the most people into employment (as well as training or education) at the best value for money. Many of the other projects were targeting specific or underrepresented groups that are typically harder to engage with and will have delivered the support at a greater cost per outcome. Moreover, some projects were not funded to achieve employment targets – such as **Moneywise Plus** – and have thus delivered outputs above and beyond their contracts.

There are some examples of lessons learnt from projects that relate to the supporting people into employment activity:

- A key element in examples of successful employment projects was the individual tailor-made support provided to each participant which built confidence and self-esteem as well as developing employment skills. It is recommended that individual personalised mentoring is a feature of projects promoted, supported or run by the City Council.

- Any programme needs to provide additionality in order to account for multiple barriers to training and employment, whether they are looking after young people, or have SEND needs, or whether they are a new arrival to the city.
- Participants in employability projects need to have an element of choice on the pace at which their interventions are delivered if they are to achieve success. Individuals need to feel in control of the choices they make with the help and support of knowledgeable key workers who understand their personal barriers and goals.
- Any UKSPF project needs to co-opt community partners already invested in their areas or include community outreach using local organisations in order to target those furthest from the labour market.
- Leicester City could target UKSPF provision for a project aimed specifically at young people (aged 16-24), one that utilises multiple partners to access different local communities.
- The Employment Hub is seen as an **essential centralised entity** for engaging businesses and strategic regeneration projects whilst connecting to colleges and education providers to facilitate skills and career pathways.
- Any employment programme will likely require a centralised advice and guidance service for engaging businesses and strategic regeneration projects whilst connecting to colleges and education training providers to facilitate skills and career pathways, plus linked to community-based employment and training.
- A city centre base is essential, in addition to community locations. **Get Inspired's Youth Employment Hub** space is offered out to organisations working with vulnerable individuals (such as the DWP) thus adding to a strong partnership ethos, which also allows for participants to meet each other. Advisers could also visit young people at home or in neighbourhood settings if it might help to remove barriers.
- There is scope to link the Employment Hub with a Community Grants scheme to allow CVS organisations to register with and feed into. The Hub could do more around community-based employment and volunteering, encouraging more social value practices and inclusive recruitment practices in businesses.
- The Community Grants project dropped its grant levels to £15,000 to be able to help more organisations. £15,000 is thought to be the minimum to make it worthwhile for the CVS organisations over 6 months. 6 months was long enough for organisations to promote their activity whilst providing stability in staffing.
- The **YES** project's **Young Person's Journey** (using OutcomeStar CRM system) captures the journey of any given young person as they progress through the project, starting with the barriers they are likely to be facing upon entry. The Delivery Model offers two routes: **Fast and Paced**, which reflected the needs of the incoming participants and a need to progress them more efficiently. The Fast route featured a **6-week end-to-end employability programme** (focussed on Social Care, Construction, Hospitality, Warehousing and Logistics); the longer-term Paced approach offers multiple interventions and activities. Any young person's employment programme should offer different speeds of route. The delivery model also needs to track client journeys.
- The Leicester Communities ESOL project focussed more on moving people into education and training and any value for money calculations associated with employment should acknowledge that this output was not a priority for delivery.

b. Sustaining employment

External structural barriers and current labour market conditions make finding ‘decent’ employment difficult, especially so for those with one or more disadvantaged characteristic. Choices are constrained by the local labour market and leave beneficiaries taking ‘any job’ rather than no job. Most of those entering employment take up low-paid, entry-level positions in areas such as logistics, warehousing, food processing, social care, retail and hospitality. Moreover, in terms of in-work progression, there is little evidence of participants ‘moving up’.

The projects delivering support to those in employment are below:

Support for those in Employment						
Project	Support					
	CV Support	Confidence Building	Basic Skills Training	1 to 1	Sector Training	Other
Leicester Textiles Renewal			✓		✓	
Leicester Community ESOL	✓	✓		✓		
She Inspired Business Playbox						✓
Positive Communities			✓	✓	✓	

There are some examples of lessons learnt from projects that relate to the sustaining employment activity:

- Very few projects identified their beneficiaries as employed, with even fewer delivering qualifications to those in work. **Leicester Textiles Renewal** and **Positive Communities** deliver sector training, but there is an opportunity for a new skills-based programme to broaden the existing offer to those in employment to achieve higher-level jobs.
- Any project focus should not simply aspire for higher standards of results for participants, but rather a concerted effort to avoid locking participants into a cycle of poor insecure work, low wellbeing and repeated unemployment. Employers can support the approach through ‘behind the scenes’ sessions, work placements and interview opportunities. Tours of local employers can give participants new insights into workplaces and broaden their horizons as to what work opportunities are available in Leicester.
- It will be important to procure/commission a joined-up approach to delivering employment support, one that encourages agencies to work together and to prevent users from engaging with multiple agencies to get training support.
- A key lesson to be learnt for LCC is the perhaps unexpected demand for upskilling from a lower level to integrate them into the workplace and society more generally.
- One of the significant issues for participants was childcare. Individuals with young children often found that they could not afford to go back to work due to the prohibitive cost of childcare, chose not to in order to spend time with their children during their early years, or

found they could not attend interventions to help them into employment due to lack of childcare. This barrier would often lead to a lack of confidence in themselves after having children, exacerbated by the low value society places on rearing children.

c. People moving into education/training

Projects were asked to identify which types of support they provided. The projects delivering support for people moving into education/training are over the page:

Moving into Education/Training Support							
	Soft Skills/ Confidence Building	In Education / Training	In Job- Searching	Gaining Qual.	Total	Budget	£/person
Leicester Textiles Renewal		175	50	191	416	£500,000	£1,202
Positive Communities	✓	174	139	110	423	£584,163	£1,381
Leicester Community ESOL	✓	157	22	169	348	£500,000	£1,437
Get Inspired Leicester	✓	520**	0	0	520	£1,992,315	£3,831
Skills Support for the Unemployed	✓	800*	0	0	800	£3,474,900	£4,344
Moneywise Plus	✓	230	304	0	534	£3,600,722	£6,743
Community Grants	✓	61	0	0	61	£430,000	£7,049
She Inspired Business Playbox	✓	0	14	23	37	£349,588	£9,448
GREAT	✓	111	71	0	182	£4,301,071	£23,632
YES: Youth Employability Support/ Reboot	✓	20	20	0	40	£4,401,947	£110,049

***Includes participants moved into employment upon leaving.*

Leicester Textiles Renewal, Positive Communities and **Leicester Communities ESOL** have proven to be the most cost-effective projects in terms of delivering support to people to move them into education or training. All three projects also rank highly for the proportion of female beneficiaries or those belonging to BAME groups.

The overall aim will need to be to help individuals address specific barriers and develop their confidence and skills so that they could play an active part in their communities. Services will need to be tailored to support individual needs and cover a wide range of soft skills, health/wellbeing, formal training and life skills. The measurable outcomes for any project should be helping inactive individuals secure qualifications or progress into voluntary or paid employment.

There are some examples of lessons learnt from projects that relate to the moving people into education/training activity:

- Any commissioned programme targeting NEET people needs to include some provision for those experience a broader range of barriers such as mental health issues, low-self-esteem, disability, being in, care previous offending, or language and cultural issues (including traditional family models that leave some economically inactive).
- It is important to focus on the softer outcomes. DMU research demonstrates that in terms of employability, employment skills are further down the line than social skills, building confidence and self-esteem, prior to employability – which aligns with UKSPF. Re-engaging individuals into community services and tackling social anxiety helps reduce the chronic social isolation that those furthest from the labour market often experience.
- In practice, this has required project front-line staff to be more than Employment Support Officers/Keyworkers in the traditional sense and offer mentoring and emotional support to participants as and when they need it.
- Low confidence for YES Project participants was more often than not linked to social isolation and this was often the most significant factor as to why individuals were Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET). The YES Project therefore focused its efforts on delivering social activities, to build peer networks for young people, growing their confidence in social situations and, ultimately, getting them into work, training or education.
- Although the Get Inspired project is delivered by external partners, the **internal administration of the City Council** enables access to a number of databases which can help to understand which young people are NEET, their circumstances and communities, and where new arrivals are. The project utilises local authority data effectively to identify where the NEET need is in the city and to try different ways to reach out to this group.
- **CVS organisations** are thought to be well placed to recruit economically inactive participants as they are the trusted voice embedded within their communities that can provide a holistic service that moves people towards employment.
- Delivery has shown that there is a large cohort of the local community not serviced by traditional employment, employability or learning provision. The local mainstream VCS groups are overwhelmed with supporting families/people in crisis i.e. financial, housing and health. The gap in provision that will hit this community and its residents the most, will be the loss of funding for community-based projects, which is designed to support the participants further away from the labour market, designed to engage and address barriers and confidences, before progressing into formal basic skills and training provision/opportunities.

d. Increasing the number of people with basic skills (English, maths, ESOL)

Projects were asked to identify which types of support they provided. The projects delivering basic skills support are below:

Basic Skills Support	
Project	Basic Skills
Leicester Textiles Renewal	✓
She Inspired Business Playbox	✓
Get Inspired Leicester	✓
YES: Youth Employability Support/ Reboot	✓
Moneywise Plus	✓

Basic Skills Support	
Project	Basic Skills
Skills Support for the Unemployed	✓
Community Grants	✓
Leicester Community ESOL Project	✓
Positive Communities	✓

There are some examples of lessons learnt from projects that relate to the increasing basic skills activity:

- Entry-level qualifications around ESOL, functional skills English and functional skills Maths are considered by some to be more relevant than Level 1 and Level 2 courses offered elsewhere.
- Any commissioned programme targeting NEET people with basic skills needs to include some provision for those experience a broader range of barriers such as mental health issues, low-self-esteem, disability, being in, care previous offending, or language and cultural issues (including traditional family models that leave some economically inactive).
- A significant proportion of GREAT project participants were new arrivals to the UK, many possessed high level qualifications but could not translate these to UK-recognised qualifications. In addition, individuals were unfamiliar with the UK employment system, lacked the relevant skills needed to obtain employment and lacked confidence speaking English. Basic knowledge building was therefore a priority for keyworkers to work on with participants.
- Moreover, some project participants lacked basic qualifications upon leaving school or arriving at the UK. Equipping young people with job-ready education was therefore a key barrier to overcome in the YES Project.
- Even just learning English is thought to be a huge enabler to finding sustainable employment as it gives workers the ability to discuss new opportunities and to raise awareness between themselves, as well as allowing them to participate more fully in society.
- There is more projects could do to work with different community groups to tap into other cultural organisations and their existing networks. Utilising existing community groups to deliver basic skills can have a number of benefits: the learners have sometimes felt more comfortable attending courses alongside a few people they already know, whilst the groups themselves have acted as a marketing tool, self-promoting and raising awareness of support and the project within their own circles and on social media.
- Leicester Community ESOL's roll-on roll-off delivery model complements the comparable College term-time offer rather than duplicating it, allowing the project to support people who are restricted by caring duties, for example.
The more flexible model allows participants to work in-person or remotely, and to vary the number of hours on the course each week to fit their schedule.
- In the local community, the Leicester Textiles project is seen as a safe haven; through the provision of ESOL classes and Level 1 Stitching courses, the project is thought to be giving economically inactive people opportunities and purpose in a country perhaps unfamiliar to them. The classes give people a chance to interact socially with different cultures too.
- Training delivered by Twin Training in Leicestershire was more skills-based than in the city; whereas ESOL became a priority in Leicester, the subcontracted employment training courses centred on warehouse skills, business administration, customer service.

- To combat social isolation, where possible, the projects provided support out in the community rather than in participant's homes to encourage them to leave their house. Local libraries, community centres, museums and children's centres have all been used for this purpose. This allowed participants to find what free and accessible events were going on in their local communities, including support groups, stay and play sessions, reading groups and family activities.

Digital and financial skills were also discussed as being essential to any UKSPF programme:

- Basic skills should also accommodate digital skills and financial capabilities. The Prince's Trust research identified that their current offer focusses on finance support but there is increasing demand for support with digital skills, e-commerce etc. to provide young people with a more solid base from which to work.
- LLEP's Digital Skills Partnership Report 2021-2022 includes a number of Digital Poverty recommendations based on solutions suggested by grassroots practitioners, including: buddying schemes, internet access for all, equipment loan schemes, recycling and refurbishing IT equipment, and integrating digital skills with ESOL.

Supporting Local Businesses Activities

Leicester has a large manufacturing sector but with a relatively high proportion of businesses in lower value-added sectors. **Textiles, Construction, Food & Drink, Manufacturing, Care, Retail and Hospitality** are core sectors which are identified as providing opportunities. Work has already taken place to initiate change in the construction and textiles sectors in particular.

With productivity, local earnings and wages all falling below the national average, the UKSPF Investment Plan calls for investment (business investment and infrastructure), skills, innovation, competition and enterprise (business leadership and management).

Regarding types of support required, Leicester has a high business start-up rate, but business survival rates are significantly lower compared to the East Midlands. Increases in the employment rate are also worse than the average across Leicestershire and nationally. The city is primarily made up of small/medium businesses and any interventions need to deliver targeted support to this business base.

There is scope for the various enterprise projects to co-exist in a more joined-up system than currently exists in Leicester. Although there is some overlap in terms of activity delivery (which represents an opportunity to consolidate where possible), most of the programmes target a specific demographic or business stage and therefore could provide a comprehensive support journey for businesses at any stage of their development. In response, the Leicester UKSPF programme is designed to include:

- **Business advice/ guidance**
- **Targeted business support for sectors**
- **Targeted business advice for recruitment/ retention/ investment**
- **Targeted business support for specific or under-represented groups (e.g., ethnic minorities/ women/ social enterprises etc.)**

Below, the business support areas identified by the UKSPF programme are analysed in more detail.

a. Business advice/ guidance

Projects were asked to identify which types of support they provided. The projects delivering business advice/guidance are below:

Business Advice/Guidance Projects		
Project	General Business Support	General Workshops
Growth Hub	✓	✓
Growing Enterprise	✓	✓

Both **NBV** and the **Growth Hub** offer a general business advice/guidance service across Leicester and Leicestershire. Key to the NBV project success across 3 LEP areas is the localised nature of delivery, using Advisers to engage in local networks. Feedback from the Growth Hub and EMA suggests that Generalist Business Advisers remain a priority, although each could offer a specific angle, be that under-represented businesses or a particular sector – perhaps as a community-based Adviser service.

Leicester has a very high start-up rate, but an equally higher than average rate of churn. There is less of a need to encourage more start-ups as there is to encourage growth and resilience amongst new businesses. Businesses need support to become responsible employers who pay well and provide secure careers.

There is an acknowledgment amongst Growth Hub staff that the role of the Business Gateway Growth Hub will need to change in 2023 in response to the withdrawal of EU funding and the reduction of 50% in BEIS core funding. The core budget doesn't offer the flexibility to procure targeted business support programmes.

The ambition for the Growth Hub and NBV remains to help businesses across Leicestershire successfully navigate the business support landscape ensuring they find the information and assistance they need to develop and grow. The Growth Hub or NBV could still offer support services in the forthcoming period.

The UKSPF prospectus provides an opportunity to widen access, reduce the eligibility restrictions and encourage broader outputs and outcomes, which recognise the social and health impacts of business support as well as the economic impacts.

There are some examples of lessons learnt from projects that relate to the business advice/guidance activity:

- Generic business support is still considered the most effective means of supporting micro-, pre-start-up and start-up businesses, before more tailored, sector-specific support can be provided to businesses looking to scale-up.
- Business support is likely to be characterised by nationally prescribed programmes delivered locally, accommodating programmes from both the public sector (Made Smarter, Create Growth) and the private sector (Barclays, British Business Bank etc.) that can be delivered and sometimes tailored to local audiences. Partnership working is likely to be an essential feature of any business support provider.
- General workshops and webinars around themes such as growth, low carbon and digital will continue to be important.
- An interactive website providing 24 hour/7 days per week access to business support information is also fundamental to Leicester, complete with an integrated enquiry mechanism, an event booking facility, and a searchable supplier register. There is real value in connecting the myriad of offers hosted at the city's universities, the Chamber, the banks, FSB, CBI etc.
- Grant vouchers at a 100% intervention rate could also be used to extend the support offer beyond any core adviser team, drawing in specialist resources where businesses needed flexibility and allowing innovative new products to be packaged together. If the programme had been operating longer, more benefits in this area could likely have been realised.

- Many neighbouring district councils are thought to be interested in supporting an adviser position or a local representative of some kind from their UKSPF programme, whether that is jointly-funded or not. There would be benefits from supporting joint business support activities across Leicester and Leicestershire, even if the UKSPF programme is not explicitly designed to enable this.
- Activity can be delivered online, which actually allows project leads to support more businesses because of efficiency savings. Online sessions are also more accessible for those restricted by childcare responsibilities, for example. There are different learning styles which would require a mixed-delivery hybrid approach, including one-to-many pre-start and one-to-one post-start support both in-person and online, to deliver the most benefit.
- There are opportunities to align NBV or the Growth Hub’s business support offer with the existing Adult Education – Adult Skills and Family Learning provision, the new Multiply programme and the LEP’s Skills provision and Career Hubs.

b. Targeted business support for sectors

The Investment Plan emphasises the need for sector-specific support, namely in the Textiles, Construction, Food & Drink, Manufacturing, Care, Retail and Hospitality core sectors that are identified as opportunity areas. Whereas the Textiles and Construction sectors have received initial support already, it is important that the UKSPF programme provides some targeted support to the other core sectors, predominantly in terms of recruitment.

Projects were asked to identify which types of support they provided. The projects delivering targeted business advice/guidance are over the page:

Targeted Business Support for Sectors Projects				
Project	Sector Support	Innovation Support	Technical Workshops	Start Up Support
Growth Hub	✓		✓	
Leicester Life Science Accelerator	✓	✓	✓	✓
STAR	✓	✓	✓	
PROSPER	✓	✓	✓	
Leicester Innovation Accelerator	✓	✓		✓
Growing Enterprise				✓
Manufacturing Growth Programme	✓			
Better Off in Business				✓
Leicester Graduate City	✓		✓	✓
East Midlands Accelerator	✓			
Leicester Textiles Renewal	✓	✓		
She Inspired Business Playbox				✓
Leicestershire Employment Hub	✓			

It is important to consider projects which align with the city’s strategic priorities, such as some large capital workspace projects. Similarly, the city boasts a number of Creative Industries and Tech projects that have been supported by Levelling Up funding to provide new business

floorspace that will need filling; a project that is designed to attract businesses whilst helping existing businesses to grow would align with the city's core strategic priorities.

Moreover, the city is investing heavily in Leicester Market which represents an opportunity area for Leicester City Council to support retail- or B2C-orientated businesses that previously haven't been eligible for European funding. Support for businesses occupying the new marketplace is a priority.

There are some examples of lessons learnt from projects that relate to the targeted business support for sectors activity:

Textiles Manufacturing

- The overarching outcome is to create a sustainable, ethical and transparent supply chain for retailers and e-tailers who will be incorporating best buying practices of today, using ethical compliance and technological advancements. This will support the long-term growth and development of Leicester's textiles manufacturing sector, enhancing business productivity and GVA, skills attainment, business growth and economic growth in Leicester.
- Businesses need more active support, perhaps in a consultancy/advisory format that visits their premises to look at their existing processes and systems, before advising on how to improve their profitability, efficiencies and compliance. This will support businesses to increase productivity and deliver higher value-added work, through both the development of their existing workforce and encouraging them to take on new employees.
- The grants management process has identified three key areas thought to be crucial to business growth: the modernisation of equipment, software solutions, and the diversification of production.
- There is a stated demand for continued skills support, particularly Level 2, Level 3 and Level 4 learners, who are more skilled, combining higher speed with greater accuracy in their production.
- The Fashion Technology Academy could become a hub with centralised services and equipment that could host seminars, technology showcases, demonstrators and events. The academy could offer a programme of courses complete with different levels of qualifications and different pathways into the industry, perhaps including different vocations within the sector, from logistics to engineering to look after the machinery. The academy could also act as a community hub, featuring a local jobs board and offering volunteering opportunities.

Manufacturing

- The ERDF-funded **Manufacturing Growth Programme** supports a range of manufacturing subsectors, including Textiles, Food and Drink, Engineering, Medical & Life Sciences, Packaging, Automotive and Chemicals. Through the provision of grant funding and dedicated account management support, SMEs can invest in new equipment or procure an independent, manufacturing expert to support the implementation of their growth plans.
- However, the project's strengths are in its scale across 18 LEPs, which helps to spread costs whilst recruiting specialists as part of the MGP team (e.g. process optimisation). Only North West Leicestershire has expressed any interest in collaborating with the Manufacturing Growth Programme beyond the end of the ERDF programme. If the project only secured

funding from 1 or 2 areas, the Project Manager will likely be expected to deliver all of these functions.

- The East Midlands Accelerator includes partnership work with the Food and Drink Forum, a specialist delivery organisation concentrating on food and drink manufacturers.

Retail and Hospitality

- The East Midlands Accelerator delivered digital support to independent high street businesses, involving Advisers on the ground encouraging businesses to adopt digital solutions to encourage better footfall. Digital support was delivered by consultants (via Growth Vouchers) who helped with low-level digital marketing, not just supporting them to sell online. The project also offered online retail webinars.
- The pandemic has brought forwards many new businesses into the technology sphere, including in sectors that it has historically been difficult to deliver ERDF interventions to. Whilst the programme has finished, the need for support has not.

Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering, Space Technology and Life Sciences

- The **Leicester Innovation Accelerator** at the University of Leicester targeted start-ups with innovation-led growth in Space Science, Engineering, AI, Data Analytics, Advanced Manufacturing, Environmental Sustainability, driven from the newly refurbished Leicester Innovation Hub. Life Sciences was promoted by the Leicester Life Sciences Accelerator Project (LLSA) also based in the Innovation Hub.
- Strategically, the LIA plays an important role in bringing in new companies that could benefit from the spaces at Pioneer Park. It is important to acknowledge the purpose of the Innovation Hub as a connector or corridor to support and to signpost businesses to incubation and other support to complement the support available via the Hub.
- However, the number of businesses in the Life Science, MedTech and Healthcare sectors located in the area at present is thought to be relatively small which restricted engagement opportunities for the project. The existing project has performed poorly in terms of outputs/outcomes and has struggled to deliver to a geographically-restricted catchment area. Any future project needs to consider the prevalence of Life Sciences businesses in Leicester at the time of commissioning.
- There is no follow-up project to the LLSA. However, the University of Leicester are considering developing a Health Accelerator on the LLSA and its pipeline, working within the Biomedical Research Centre's existing infrastructure. The Accelerator is likely to work regionally and to target smaller funding pots (e.g., Innovate UK, £250,000 Smart Grants).
- For university projects that utilise academics, Leicester have dedicated Fellows which helps to provide a diverse mix of academics to service the sectors they are servicing. The use of Innovation Fellows allows experts within the university to work immediately with businesses without waiting for an academic, allowing support to be delivered in a more agile and responsive way. However, this model requires significant funding to cover the salaries of the Fellows.
- It should be acknowledged that universities have been required to deliver placed-based projects in response to European funding calls, but despite the importance of being an anchor university, the institutions rely on national and international partnerships, which don't lend

themselves to place-based strategies. Moving forwards, Leicester’s universities’ Civic Agreement recognises the need to make joint approaches to funding opportunities in a post-ERDF ecosystem.

Low Carbon and Decarbonisation

- The East Midlands Accelerator successfully delivered decarbonisation plans, whilst STAR has been more effective at delivering Carbon Literacy Accreditation.
- The University of Leicester-delivered Race to Zero Carbon Accelerator sustainability activities delivered as part of the East Midlands Accelerator project were thought to be too high level for the businesses engaged. In response, EMC delivered carbon literacy training courses, a carbon management programme and 1-hour carbon awareness sessions, before linking SMEs to the Zellar platform already funded by the LEP. It was suggested that smaller businesses need lower-level support. Sustainability support should be aimed at the lowest ‘raising awareness’ end.
- Grant funding has traditionally been used as an incentive for businesses to engage with support programmes. The East Midlands Accelerator CRF project has demonstrated the value of linking any grants to an SME commitment to produce a Decarbonisation Plan, or to digital transformation.
- The Green BELLE project saw a surge of interest in the wake of the cost-of-living crisis. With a demonstrable need for energy efficiency grants and an absence of similar programmes in Leicestershire, the project is hoping to secure long-term investment via the UKSPF.

c. Targeted business advice for recruitment/ retention/ investment

Recruitment/Retention/Investment Support			
Project	Recruitment	Retention	Investment
Leicestershire Employment Hub	✓		
Leicester Graduate City	✓	✓	
Leicester Innovation Accelerator			✓

The **Leicestershire Employment Hub** is a 7-year ESF project (finishing in December 2023) that supports SMEs with business growth through recruitment. Officers on the project visit employers and provide bespoke one to one case management to ensure the vacancy is advertised as widely as possible using the Employment Hub website and social media.

Leicester Graduate City is designed to drive graduate retention in the City via internships, aimed at UoL and DMU students. The project has tried to work with sectors that have a particular need for higher level skills, such as Professional Services (an expanding sector), Manufacturing and Textiles (as a priority sector).

There are some examples of lessons learnt from projects that relate to the recruitment/retention activity:

- With grant funding no longer likely to be available in abundance, there is an opportunity to emphasise the access to finance/investment support offered by the likes of Barclays, NatWest

and the British Business Bank, who are also well placed to deliver various business support programmes themselves based on national models. The banks can leverage connections to financial professionals who are willing to donate their time in the form of free financial webinars.

- The **Leicestershire Employment Hub** is one of the only projects that specifically targets the Care and Construction sectors. The Hub's connections to Healthcare and Construction are examples of best practice for recruiting into target sectors.
- The Leicester Graduate City project and the city would benefit from targeting final-year students rather than second-year students, for which internships act as a 'try before you buy' probation-style scheme, perhaps with some incentives to businesses to recruit full-time afterwards.

d. Targeted business support for specific or under-represented groups

The following projects have delivered/are delivering targeted business support for specific groups.

None of the existing EU/CRF projects directly deliver business support to specific or under-represented groups. Although She Inspired Business Playbox targets ethnic minority women, beneficiaries are typically those moving into employment rather than businesses themselves.

Business Support for Specific/Under-Represented Groups		
Project	Ethnic Minorities	Women
She Inspired Business Playbox	✓	✓