

Evaluation of the GBSLEP Pivot & Prosper Grant Fund Programme

The evaluand (policy or project being evaluated)

The Pivot & Prosper grant fund programme was aimed at helping businesses recover quickly from the COVID-19 crisis. The rationale for Pivot & Prosper was during lock down companies in the region had lost their usual channels to market for their goods and services and needed to think about diversifying into new markets. After the initial shock to the system from lockdown, based on intelligence through existing support schemes providers, the leadership programmes provided through Aston Centre for Growth and networks, members of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) Executive and Recovery Taskforce began to identify businesses coming up with innovative ideas and potential new products and services in response to the COVID 19 pandemic that needed support in their development.

The Pivot & Prosper scheme was designed for business owners who needed grant support following the COVID-19 crisis to enable their businesses to pivot and adapt their business models to deliver transformational change for business growth. It targeted businesses who could evidence a clear plan to change their pre-COVID-19 business model and were able to set out a clear proposal for how pivoting their business would help them adjust to new ways of working, build resilience, increase employment and lead to growth in productivity and/or sustainability.

Pivot & Prosper was aimed at the top end of the long productivity tail (i.e. those companies that may not be very productive but have the ideas and potential to thrive) and those who are looking to experience high growth. By focusing on the implementation of new business models and giving firms flexibility as to how they best spend their grant, it lets the market decide how best to thrive and prosper with a clear focus on diversification of business models.

In total £2 million was made available to pilot an intervention that was designed to help businesses adapt their business models in response to the changing economic climate cause by COVID 19. Applicants could apply for a grant to the value of £40,000 against which they needed to evidence their ability to provide match funding to fund a project that would enable them to pivot their business model and regrow their business and provide employment (safeguard or create new jobs).

To be eligible applicants needed to meet the following criteria:

- have a project that could be delivered by 31st March 2021 that will enable them to pivot their business model, enter new markets, start to regrow their business, and provide employment
- have between 10 and 100 employees
- be an established business (more than 3 years trading) that was growing before COVID 19
- operate within one of the following sectors: Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering, Business Professional & Financial Services, Creative Industries, Energy & Low Carbon, Life Sciences or Food & Drink manufacturing.
- able to provide a minimum of 25 percent matched contribution to amount of grant being sought.

The schemes objectives included:

- a) Survival – increasing chances of well-established business with growth track record emerging as viable businesses post COVID 19 crisis

- b) Supporting economic growth going forward. This included jobs safeguarded and not just jobs created. Companies needed to signal they were willing to take a step change to secure their future and contribute to inclusive growth within the region.

The Pivot & Prosper grant scheme was launched on 18th June 2020 and is notable for its quick turnaround with grant offers being made in August 2020 to successful applicants.

Evaluation focus

This evaluation has two distinct stages. Stage one focused on the aims, execution, and response to the call for applications to the fund and the level of match funding and output committed by grantee enterprises was completed in the autumn of 2020. Stage Two involved a more in-depth and detailed assessment of the achieved outputs, the financial and workforce impact of the programme and an indication of the likely outcomes for grantee enterprises.

The evaluation approach (methodology)

We broadly adopted the principles of [real-world evaluation](#) approach given data, budget, and time constraints. This included a desk review of programme documentation and interviews with key informants in stage one including applicants, group interview with three Growth Hub advisors/account managers, programme manager, selection panel member and wider stakeholders and contextual analysis of the representativeness of the successful applicants (e.g. sector, location). Stage 2 involved a representative sample of case studies of projects funded, analysis of management information and online survey of non-case study firms supported by Pivot & Prosper. We undertook 10 depth interviews (purposeful sample) of businesses supported by Teams or Zoom which asked questions related to areas of interest set out in the box below. Three of these interviews were follow up interviews of businesses interviewed in Stage 1 (75 per cent follow up) and seven additional businesses. In total we interviewed 11 businesses as part of this evaluation which represents one in five sample of businesses who received Pivot & Prosper grants. In the online survey we sought permission from businesses for their responses to be linked to the IDBR to allow us to track businesses over time and potentially create a counterfactual using propensity score matching using a quasi-experimental methodology to allow future follow up of economic impact of Pivot & Prosper should funding become available.

Key Findings (Methodological)

The evaluation took place during the pandemic and participants were used to online videoconferencing meetings and this became the preferred form of sharing information. It had the advantages of being able to offer paired or group interviews which allowed respondents to confer and check responses. Unlike face-to-face or telephone interviews interviewers were more likely to have available and to check information on the computer they were using, and some used their meetings to demonstrate their digitalised products and services leading to richer understanding of the benefits of the scheme.

Case study businesses were generally favourable to development of separately produced case studies that the client could use. This was sometimes on the proviso that their own press or media staff worked with the client to produce agreed text.

A fifth of businesses agreed for their responses on the online survey to be linked to business register to allow longitudinal follow up of impact of the Pivot & Prosper.

Key Findings (Project)

The scheme has clearly supported businesses in pivoting their business model. They have used the grants as intended to support everyday innovation including new products and services, developing, and implementing new business models and revisiting their value proposition. To support this, they were sourcing external advice, investing in training, and identifying new markets.

The main impacts businesses reported were digitalisation, new products, improved skills, and growth. Over two thirds of the survey respondents reported both revenue and productivity growth.

In terms of soft not easily quantified impacts Pivot & Prosper has resulted in firms having a new outlook and optimism and were able to test new ways of doing business.

At the time of writing our evaluation report the scheme had safeguarded 397 jobs and resulted in 108 new jobs which equate to retained £19.5m GVA. Given the timing of the evaluation meant some businesses had still to complete and report the outcomes of their project these figures indicate the pilot was very effective in achieving its intended outcomes.

In the absence of being able unable to undertake rigorous econometric modelling due to the absence of meaningful comparison group our estimates for cost per job are £3,552 and BCR of 10.9. These figures are very favourable to typical BCRs for business support of 2.6 and innovation programmes of 7.2.

References and further information

Bramley G, Pugh A and Schwarz Juliane (2021). Evaluation of the GBSLEP Pivot & Prosper Grant Fund Programme. Final Report. Can be accessed at: <https://gbslep.co.uk/resource/report/pivot-prosper-evaluation-report/>

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