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**Nottingham Trent
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Enterprising Ashfield

Project Evaluation – Final Report

September 2026



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**Nottingham Trent
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Ashfield
DISTRICT COUNCIL



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Project Contact Information

Lead	Kelvin Eatherington
Position	Enterprising Ashfield - Project Manager
Email	kelvin.eatherington@ntu.ac.uk
Evaluator	lucypike02@ntu.ac.uk

Introduction and Background

This final evaluation report analyses the impacts, successes, and lessons learnt from the Enterprising Ashfield project. The report collates feedback from over 300 beneficiaries/ stakeholders, including businesses, entrepreneurs, local residents, and the staff team working on the project.

Enterprising Ashfield was a £7.5 million project delivering a comprehensive start-up to scale-up, dynamic and responsive, business growth and skills development programme, in the Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield Towns Fund area.

Nottingham Trent University (NTU) delivered the Enterprising Ashfield project on behalf of Ashfield District Council (ADC), and with the support of the Discover Ashfield Board, as part of the successful Towns Fund bid for Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield. The Towns Fund was part of the previous Conservative Government's plan to drive the sustainable economic regeneration of towns to deliver long-term economic and productivity growth.

The Enterprising Ashfield project was developed to provide businesses in the Towns Fund eligible area with access to NTU's research, expertise and facilities, and to provide support for residents and employees to undertake training and enhance their skills. The project supported the creation of new enterprises, delivered growth and increased productivity for existing businesses, and provided employment opportunities for talented graduates and apprentices. *See section 1.7 for more details on the support that was available.*

1.1 Timeframes

The Enterprising Ashfield project was designed to run from 2021 to March 2026, however, the following factors impacted on this:

- Delays in recruitment and contracting meant that delivery only commenced in full in summer 2022. The total project delivery phase was therefore reduced by over twelve months.
- The project was underspent against the profiled budget as at January 2026. ADC agreed to allow the NTU team to carry this underspent budget forward, extending the project for six months. A new project end date of September 2026 was agreed. *Note: only certain elements of the project were extended - see section 1.7 for more details.*

1.2 Location and eligibility

Support through the Enterprising Ashfield project was available to businesses, residents, and employees within the Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield Towns Fund areas. A map of the eligible area is included in Appendix 3.

1.3 Project funding

The project funding is a combination of:

- £3.8 million core funding from the Towns Fund, via Ashfield District Council.
- £3.7 million match funding from Nottingham Trent University and the private sector.

Note: NTU incurs estate costs and indirect costs for every staff member it employs. This has been valued by the University's central finance team as £3,192,344. This was the main source of NTU's co-investment into the project. Private sector match includes the businesses contributions to the graduate salaries.

1.4 Project vision

The Enterprising Ashfield vision, as set out in the project business case/ grant application, was to:

'Benefit the local economy of Ashfield by supporting entrepreneurs to start businesses, supporting established businesses to scale up, improving productivity by increasing the relevance of employees' skills, and introducing graduate talent and higher apprenticeships to the area.'

1.5 Project short-term outcomes

The project's short-term outcomes, as included in the project business case (see section 3.3), were:

- An increase in Ashfield residents holding skills or qualifications
- A wider pool of employable local residents
- Increased numbers of start-up businesses in the area
- More businesses engaging with the Higher Education sector
- Closer contact between graduates and the local business base
- A greater number of businesses developing future plans for growth, scale-up, or future proofing

The project's success in achieving these outcomes is set out at section 13.

1.6 Project outputs/ indicators

The table sets out the Towns Fund outputs/ indicators that the project was contracted to achieve by September 2026. Section 5 of this report analyses the project's success towards achieving these, along with the variations made to the contracted outputs during the delivery phase.

Contracted Outputs. Agreed 2026 – Town Fund Indicators

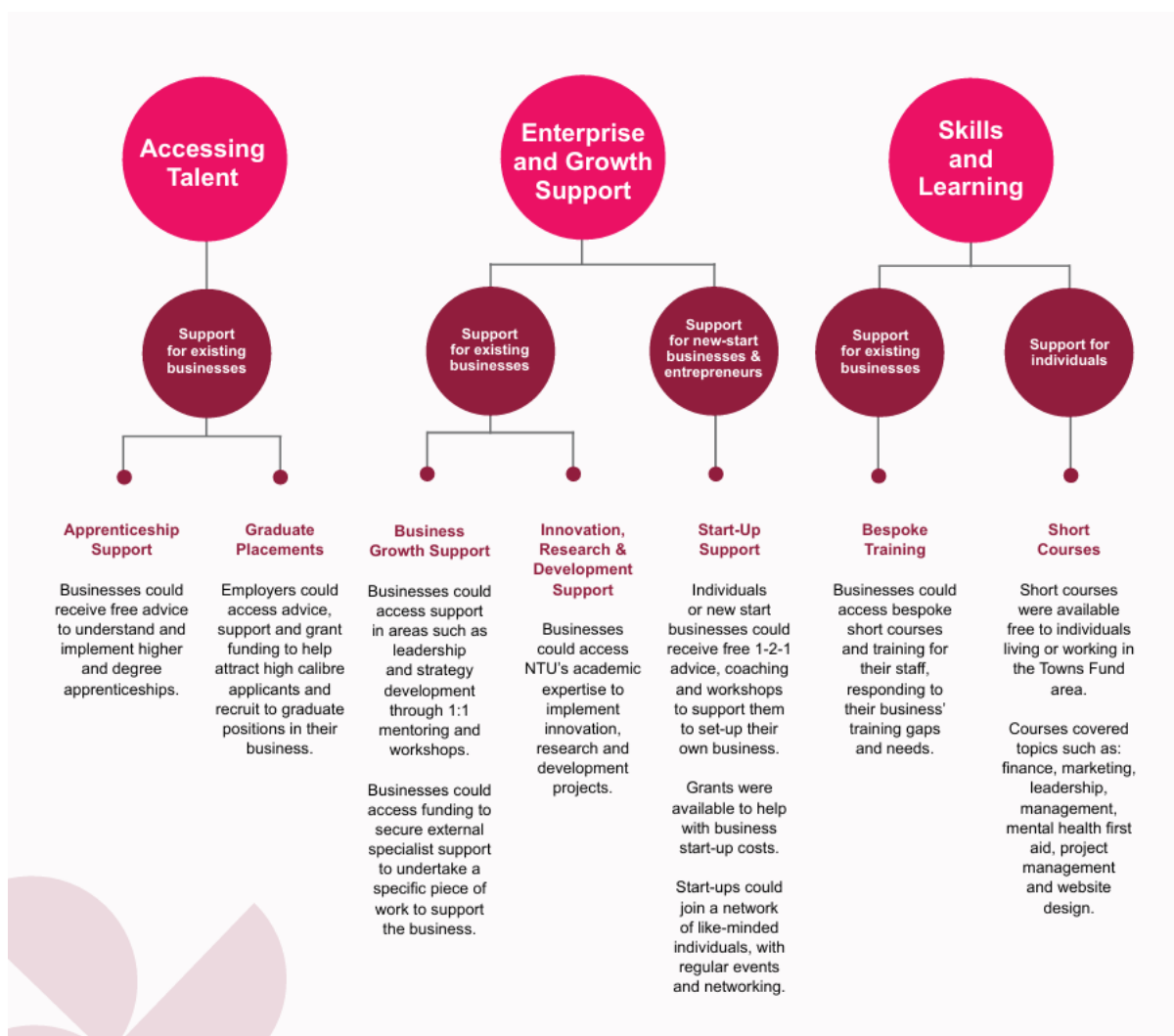
Indicator	Target
HeadStarters	265
Short courses – new learners	650
Short courses – returning learners	250
Graduate placements	50
Business growth – non-financial support	146
Business growth – specialist support	35
R,D and I collaborations	60

Contracted outcomes - As per latest contract variation – Agreed Jan 2026 (see later sections for details on output variations)

1.7 The beneficiary journey and the support available

The beneficiary journey through the project was as follows:

- The business or individual found out about the Enterprising Ashfield project through an event, an existing relationship, project marketing, social media, word of mouth, peer networking, or signposting from a project partner.
- The project team then established eligibility.
- Eligible beneficiaries could access the support shown in the diagram below. Beneficiaries could access multiple strands of the project.



Accessible version of diagram:

Accessing Talent

- **Support for existing businesses**
 - **Apprenticeship Support** - Businesses could receive free advice to understand and implement higher and degree apprenticeships.

- **Graduate Placements** - Employers could access advice, support and grant funding to help attract high calibre applicants and recruit to graduate positions in their business.

Enterprise and Growth Support

- **Support for existing businesses**
 - **Business Growth Support**
 - Businesses could access support in areas such as leadership and strategy development through 1:1 mentoring and workshops.
 - Businesses could access funding to secure external specialist support to undertake a specific piece of work to support the business.
 - **Innovation, Research & Development Support**
 - Businesses could access NTU's academic expertise to implement innovation, research and development projects.
- **Support for new-start businesses & entrepreneurs**
 - **Start-Up Support**
 - Individuals or new start businesses could receive free 1-2-1 advice, coaching and workshops to support them to set-up their own business.
 - Grants were available to help with business start-up costs.
 - Start-ups could join a network of like-minded individuals, with regular events and networking.

Skills and Learning

- **Support for existing businesses**
 - **Bespoke Training**
 - Businesses could access bespoke short courses and training for their staff, responding to their business' training gaps and needs.
- **Support for individuals**
 - **Short Courses**
 - Short courses were available free to individuals living or working in the Towns Fund area.
 - Courses covered topics such as:
 - finance
 - marketing
 - leadership
 - management

- mental health first aid
- project management
- website design.

2.0 Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation reviews the beneficiaries of the Enterprising Ashfield project, the success of the delivery approach, the outputs/ indicators achieved, and the extent to which the project met the outcomes and objectives that it set out to achieve. The table below explains the methodology that has been used for the study.

Enterprising Ashfield - methodology and data collection

Area of work		Approach
Delivery context		The team analysed the relevant Towns Fund guidance, the project business case and Theory of Change to gain a full understanding of what the project / Towns Fund hoped to deliver. This set a baseline from which success could be measured. Analysis was also undertaken to review how the delivery environment changed over the lifetime of the project and what changes were made to ensure the project remained relevant over its delivery phase.
Beneficiary data capture	Survey beneficiaries	An online exit questionnaire was circulated (via email, text message, via the WhatsApp group, via the Facebook page, at events etc) to beneficiaries supported through the project. The questions used were designed to help understand the benefits/ impacts that were being realised from the support provided. Response rates were circa 20%, which is higher than many recent NTU evaluations. The project team spent a significant amount of time chasing and pushing the survey.
	Detailed case studies	Detailed case studies were undertaken with business beneficiaries and individuals supported. These were a mix of written and video case studies.
	Informal discussions with participants	Informal discussions were held with participants/ beneficiaries to capture anecdotal evidence to support the impact evidence base. A video has also been created to capture this type of feedback.
Staff consultation	Consultation with the delivery team	Face-to-face discussions were held with the delivery team leads from each strand of the project at the start of the evaluation to discuss and agree on the evaluation approach and timetable. Further 1:1 discussions were held with each team member to capture information on outcomes and impacts at various stages. In addition, a Theory of Change workshop was held midway through the programme to ensure all data and evidence was being captured, and that all team members were engaged in the evaluation process.
	Delivery team online survey	An online staff survey was developed and circulated at the interim evaluation. Whilst the online survey provided useful feedback, it was agreed that the use of the face-to-face interviews provided staff with the opportunity to give more detailed/ comprehensive feedback. Given the small staff team, a face-to-face approach was used for staff consultation going forward.
Monitoring participation		Analysis of those participating in the project was undertaken (age, gender, etc) and compared to the baseline statistics for the area. This was used to identify any areas of over/ under representation.

Area of work	Approach
Outputs analysis	The evaluation team undertook an assessment of outputs data. This review also sets out details on the variation requests that were made over the lifetime of the project in terms of spend/ outputs and sets out the rationale for these. The evaluation also assesses the rationale for any over/ under delivery.
Outcomes, indicators and impact analysis	The outcomes, indicators, and impacts achieved have been analysed and used to demonstrate progress towards delivering the Theory of Change.
Recommendations	Recommendations for future projects were collated and fed back to the NTU team who develop externally funded projects.

3.0 Project Context

This section sets out the rationale behind why the project was initiated and what it was hoping to achieve.

3.1 UK Towns Fund – Theory of Change

The objective of the Towns Fund was to drive the economic regeneration of towns to deliver long-term economic and productivity growth. The evidence base for the Towns Fund suggested that struggling towns faced persistent challenges that make it difficult for them to change, including:

- Transport and digital connectivity infrastructure were out of date, insufficient or not suited to local needs.
- Land use and buildings were not suited to modern demands.
- Low skills and business support.
- Limited strategic, local economic management.

The Enterprising Ashfield project was specifically developed to deliver action against the challenge of 'low skills and business support'. The Towns Fund monitoring guidance set out a Theory of Change for this theme – as shown in the table below.

UK Towns Fund Monitoring and Guidance – Theory of Change for UK Towns – skills and business support strand

Theme	Challenge	Consequences	Solutions	Outputs	Outcomes	Medium-term impacts	Long-term impacts
Low skills and business support	Low skills that are not suited to high-paying roles. Skills are out of date or suited to previous industrial jobs. Entrepreneurs and businesses may not start or grow locally due to insufficient resources or support.	Higher-paid roles filled by commuters or outsourced. Outward migration. Poor business growth.	Create opportunities for businesses to invest and grow. Provide skills development opportunities. Reduce motivation to leave the area.	Improved infrastructure for skills and enterprise support.	More adaptable and strategic leadership within businesses. Upgraded skills. Stronger businesses.	Employment. Business growth. Investment.	Equitable improvements in income and wellbeing for residents. Sustainable, local economic growth.

Source: Based on analysis undertaken by Integrity, DLUHC and BEIS

3.1.1 Theory of Change

The UK Towns Fund Theory of Change, local data, and local policy and strategy, were all used to develop the Theory of Change for the Enterprising Ashfield project – this is set out below. In later sections, we analyse whether the project has delivered against these activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts.

Enterprising Ashfield – Theory of Change

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes	Long-term impacts	Goal	Vision
£3.8 million Towns Fund £3.7 million NTU and business match	Interventions - Business coaching & mentoring - Course offerings - Embedded graduate placements - Apprenticeships/ higher technical qualifications - Peer-to-peer networking and workshops - Collaborative R&D projects - Start-up support Partnership Development Meetings & discussions with a wide range of partners and stakeholders to develop new referral pathways/support opportunities. Dissemination & Marketing Meetings and development of marketing materials (e.g. case studies) to raise awareness of the project. Ongoing liaison with key stakeholders.	- HeadStarters: 265 - Short courses – new learners: 650 - Short courses – returning learners: 250 - Graduate placements: 50 - Business growth – non-financial support: 146 - Business growth – specialist support: 35 - Innovation, research and development collaboration: 60	- An increase in residents holding skills or qualifications. - A wider pool of employable local residents. - Increased number of start-up businesses in the area. - More businesses engaging with the Higher Education sector. - Closer contact between graduates and the local business base. - A greater number of businesses developing plans for growth, scale-up, or futureproofing.	- Increased employment opportunities. - Increased population holding a qualification equal to NVQ4+. - A more dynamic, productive & innovative business base. - Increase in inward investment. - Improved use of emerging & digital technologies in the area. - Higher graduate retention in the local area. - Higher business start-up and survival rates.	A more productive, prosperous, dynamic and skilled Ashfield, cementing it as an attractive location for business and investment.	Benefit the local economy of Ashfield by supporting entrepreneurs to start businesses, supporting established businesses to scale up, improving productivity by increasing the relevance of employees' skills, and introducing graduate talent and higher apprenticeships to the area.

4.0 Outputs

The project Theory of Change set out the outputs that the project was hoping to deliver. This section sets out the project's success in achieving these.

4.1 Final position - outputs

The table below sets out the initial contracted outputs, the revised targets as at 2024, and the final targets as of September 2026.

The table also shows the progress to achieving these targets.

We can see that all strands have overachieved their targets.

Enterprising Ashfield – outputs achieved

Outputs	Original target 2021	Revised target 2024	Final target 2026	Final position - September 2026	
				Number achieved	Percentage achieved against overall target
HeadStarters	225	225	265	271	102%
Short courses – new learners	900	650	N/A – element not extended	1,169	180%
Short courses – returning learners	n/a	250	N/A – element not extended	318	127%
Graduate placements	150	50	N/A – element not extended	69	138%
Business growth support	293	121	146	154	105%
Business growth – specialist support	n/a	35	N/A – element not extended	37	106%
R&D collaborations	50	50	60	72	120%

Source: Project progress reports, September 2026

4.2 Variation requests

This section sets out the variation requests made over the lifetime of the project.

4.2.1 2024 Variation requests

The following output variations were agreed in 2024:

- **Short Courses** - With significant demand from participants to attend multiple courses, a variation was agreed with ADC to reduce unique learners from 900 to 650, with an additional output added to the project of 250 repeating learners – i.e. learners returning to take an additional course.
- **Talent Grants** - The talent team were initially struggling to deliver the graduate placement targets. ADC agreed to lower the target to 50 graduate placements (from 150). The new target was based on research carried out by the employability team that looked at the graduate landscape in Ashfield, including trends, take-up, and estimated future engagement. The talent team reported that the main challenge in terms of the placements was that businesses who would be receptive because of the financial incentives were not recruiting to graduate roles (they are generally looking for lower-skilled positions), and the bigger businesses who may consider graduate roles don't need funding support. An additional challenge was that many of Ashfield's businesses are satellite offices of larger organisations, often multinationals – whilst these businesses do recruit graduates, these positions are often hosted at their head offices rather than in Ashfield itself - this has been the case for many of the logistics businesses located in the area.
- **Duration of Talent Grants** - Feedback from businesses was that the proposed 6-week placement was not a long-enough period of support. ADC agreed that the team could increase this to 12 weeks, allowing businesses to secure a £2,500 contribution (rather than £1,250). The team also widened the Talent Grant offer further - offering a 48-week graduate placement programme. The rationale was that by subsidising a graduate for a year, it would leave the businesses with a well-trained member of staff, encouraging them to repeat the graduate recruitment process in future.
- **Mentoring Offer** - There was a lack of uptake of the proposed mentoring offer, with feedback from businesses being that they either could not utilise the services of a mentor or could not afford to match fund the support. ADC therefore gave permission to reduce this target, and instead offer additional specialist support (e.g. marketing support/ website development) to 35 businesses and organisations. The target for delivering this support was spread between the growth strand (15) and the R,D&I strand (20).

4.2.2 2026 Project extension

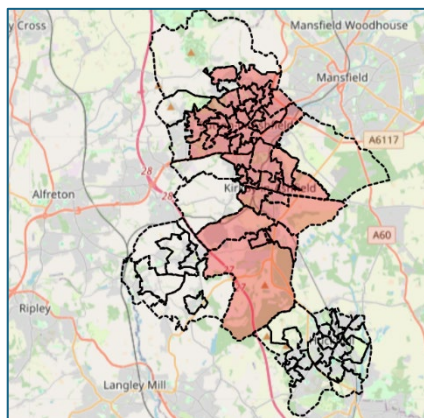
The project was initially due to be completed on the 31st of March 2026. In January 2026 the NTU project team were forecasting an underspend at project completion. The team at Ashfield District Council kindly agreed to extend the delivery phase of the project for a further 6 months, with a new completion date of September 2026. This gave the team additional time to spend the contracted funding. As part of this agreement the contracted outputs were increased as follows:

- **HeadStarters** – The target for HeadStarters was increased from 225 to 265.
- **Business Growth** - The target for Business Growth was increased from 121 to 146.
- **RD&I Collaborations** - The target for RD&I Collaborations was increased from 50 to 60.

Note, the skills/ training, graduate placement, and specialist support were not extended over the final six months. These elements of support ended in March 2026.

5.0 Reach of Project

The section considers the reach of the project, and the number of beneficiaries supported.



The map outlines in black the super-output areas in Ashfield. The areas shaded in pink show are the locations that were eligible for support from the programme. *Note, this is not an exact match, but as close an estimate as possible.*

Data from Nomis, for the Census 2021, shows that there were circa 130,000 people living in Ashfield in 2021, 70,000 of these were living within the shaded area. Of these 70,000 people, circa 41,000 were aged between 18-65 and were therefore the key group who took part in the Enterprising Ashfield project.

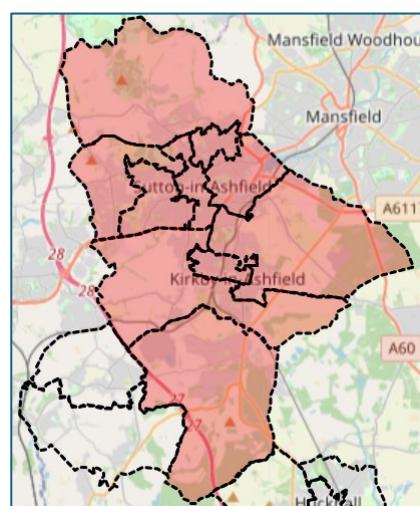
Based on the above, we can estimate that:

- **Learners** - With over 1,100 unique learners supported through the project, of which circa 760 were residents of the Towns Fund eligible area (shaded area), and a population aged 18-65 of 41,000, we can estimate that circa **one in every 50 residents took part in training through the programme.**
- **HeadStarters** – From the 271 HeadStarters supported, 248 live in the eligible area (23 have agreed to set up businesses in the eligible area but live outside). Based on a population of 41,000, we can estimate that **one in every 150 residents has been supported to become enterprise ready.**

Businesses - Business data is not available to the same level of geographical detail as population data – the map opposite therefore shows the mid-layer super output areas as closely aligned to the Enterprising Ashfield area as possible. Business data sets do not include data for very small businesses – our calculations below therefore only consider data for larger businesses registered for VAT or PAYE.

There were 1,940 VAT registered/ PAYE businesses operating in the area highlighted in pink as at 2025. (With circa 3,060 in Ashfield as a whole).

By comparison, analysis of data for the businesses supported by the Enterprising Ashfield project shows that circa 30 of the businesses supported have 2 or more employees (and are therefore assumed to be registered for PAYE) and have a turnover above the VAT threshold.



Businesses - We can estimate that we have **supported in the region of 6% of the VAT/ PAYE registered businesses in the eligible area.**

6.0 Participation and Representation

This section summarises who the businesses and individuals who took part in the Enterprising Ashfield programme were, including the age of the participants, and the sectors the businesses supported were operating in. It then compares participation to the baseline for the area, identifying any groups that are over or under-represented.

6.1 Skills

6.1.1 Skills participation – key figures (Data as at March 2026 – close of skills support)

- 280 unique courses delivered across over 150 different subjects.
- 1,169 individuals took part in one or more courses.
- The youngest learner was 17. The oldest learner was 79.
- 4% of learners enrolled in 2022, 23% in 2023, 32% in 2024 and 36% in 2025 and 5% in 2026.
- In terms of highest level of qualifications, 22% of learners had GCSE/O Level or equivalent, 20% of learners had A-Level, Scottish Higher or equivalent, 21% had an undergraduate degree or equivalent, 16% had a postgraduate degree or equivalent, 15% prefer not to say and 5% either did not know or had no qualifications.
- 11% of learners told us that they were not employed – by comparison, data from Invest in Ashfield shows that currently circa 4% of the working age population in Ashfield are unemployed. (*Note: not employed and unemployed are not necessarily a direct comparison – not employed could include retirees, those that choose not to work etc*).
- 83% of learners were employed, 5% were self-employed.
- 62% of learners were female, 36% were male, and 2% preferred not to say.
- 8% of learners reported a disability, 87% did not report a disability, and 4% preferred not to say.
- The most popular course was the social media and content creation for businesses course. 112 people attended, and the course ran 13 times.
- Bespoke short courses delivered include: Swiftool Precision Engineering - Better Writing Skills, Administration Skills for New Professionals, and Confident Presentation Skills. Mill Waters Café / Rendezvous – Sales Success. Yusen Logistics – Business Intelligence (Power BI and Python). Romo - Import/Export training. ATTFE – Neurodiversity in the workplace.

Courses delivered have included: 3D Printing, Laser Cutting and CNC for Prototyping, Administration Skills for New Professionals, Adobe After Effects for Motion Graphics, AI for Product and Service Innovation and Data Analytics, Better Writing Skills, Building Teamwork, Business Intelligence, CAD for Interior and Spatial Design, Carbon Literacy Training, Carbon Management, Confident Presentation Skills, Consumer Psychology for Designers, Copywriting and Content Writing, Customer Service, Cybersecurity, Data Analysis, Digital Design Skills for Textiles and Fashion, Digital Skills for Marketing and Communication, Event Planning and Management, Export Essentials, Fashion Design using Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator, Finances for Freelancers and Small Businesses, Tax Returns for Freelancers and Small Businesses, Graphic Design for Marketing and Communications, ILM, Import / Export, Inclusive Leadership, Introduction to Copywriting, Introduction to Marketing and Public Relations, IOSH, ITIL 4, Mental Health First Aid, Neurodiversity in the Workplace, Product Photography using Smartphones, Project Management, Quality Management and Internal Auditing, Rapid Prototyping for Businesses, Sales Success for Retail, Selling Skills: Business to Business, Social Media and Content Creation, Social Media and Digital Marketing for Professionals, Understanding Client Needs, Video Content and Production for Digital Marketing, Visual Merchandising for Retail Spaces, Website Design for Small Businesses, Women as Purpose Driven Leaders, Women as Transformational Leaders, Writing and Presentation Skills, and Writing Skills for Professionals.

6.1.2 Participation - skills

The tables below compare the demographics of those taking part in the learning and skills programmes with the baseline population of the Enterprising Ashfield eligible area. This allows us to identify areas of under or over-representation. The numbers highlighted in pink identify potential areas of under-representation, with the numbers in green identifying potential areas of over-representation. Future programmes could consider how to attract more male participants, and those aged over 50.

a) Gender – The figures show an under-representation of males and over-representation of females compared to the local population baseline in the Enterprising Ashfield area.

Gender	Enterprising Ashfield population (18-64)	Enterprising Ashfield learners
Female	20,949 (50.9%)	690 (63.0%)
Male	20,199 (49.1%)	406 (37.0%)
Total	41,148	1,096 (100%)

Source: ONS - TS009 Sex by Year of Age. Baseline figures for the EA eligible area (18-64 yrs). EA learners include those from outside the area. EA skills project data as at March 2026. Figures exclude those who preferred not to say or identified as 'other gender' - this data was not captured within the ONS population estimates therefore there is no data set to compare against.

b) Age – The figures show an under-representation of those over 50 for the skills programme compared to the local population baseline in the Enterprising Ashfield area..

Age	Enterprising Ashfield population (18-64)	Enterprising Ashfield learners
18 – 24	4,855 (11.1%)	117 (10.9%)
25 – 29	4,176 (10.1%)	130 (12.1%)
30 – 34	4,624 (11.2%)	132 (12.3%)
35 – 39	4,835 (11.8%)	147 (13.7%)
40 – 44	4,383 (10.7%)	137 (12.7%)
45 – 49	3,943 (9.6%)	133 (12.4%)
50 – 54	4,719 (11.5%)	114 (10.6%)
55 – 59	5,087 (12.4%)	108 (10.0%)
60 – 64	4,526 (11.20)	58 (5.4%)
Total	41,148 (100%)	1,076 (100%)

Source: Single Year Census Data for EA eligible (18-64 yrs only) and EA project data as at March 2026 for the equivalent age range. EA numbers are for all learners, including those from outside of area. Figures exclude those who preferred not to disclose their age.

c) Disability – Whilst the disability figures shown are for the Ashfield District Council population as a whole, not just the Enterprising Ashfield area/ eligible population/ target age group, we can see that the project performed relatively well in terms of supporting those with disabilities.

Identifies as disabled	Ashfield District Council – Baseline (Disabled under the Equality Act)	Enterprising Ashfield Learners
Yes	22.1% (10.2% are limited a lot, 11.9% are limited a little)	93 (8.5%)
No	78.0%	996 (91.5%)
Total	100%	1,089

Source: Disability Census Data for Ashfield. EA project enrolment data as at March 2026. Note, figures exclude those who preferred not to disclose their disability status as there was no comparable data set. Learners were asked to self-report their disability.

6.2 HeadStarters

6.2.1 Key figures (Data as at September 2026)

- The youngest HeadStarter was 17.
- The oldest HeadStarter was 68.
- 18% of HeadStarters reported a disability, 75% did not report a disability, 7% prefer not to say.
- 56% of HeadStarters were female, 41% were male, 3% preferred not to say/ other.
- 55% of HeadStarters were starting their business in Sutton. 38% in Kirkby and 6% in Annesley.
- 10% of HeadStarters enrolled in 2022, 24% in 2023, 24% in 2024, 26% in 2025 and 16% in 2026.
- Circa 30 individuals who have completed the programme have been referred into the programme by the DWP or Job Centre Plus.
- From the 271 HeadStarters supported, 248 live in the eligible area, with a further 23 who have agreed to set-up businesses within the eligible area but live outside.

6.2.2 Industry sectors supported

The table below shows the key sectors in which the entrepreneurs who have been supported through the HeadStart programme are/ were operating.

Sectors that the HeadStart businesses supported were/ are operating in

Industry Type	Total
Retail / e-Commerce / Product Design / Handmade Items	68
Education / Coaching / Training / Workshops / Consultancy	33
Digital / Marketing / Events / PR / Consultancy	30
Beauty / Aesthetics / Hairdressing / Nails	22
Health / Wellbeing / Wellness / Massage / Fitness	17
Catering / Baking / Cafe / Pub	16
Vet / Pet Care / Dog Grooming / Dog Walking	12
Maintenance / Handyman / Decorating/ Gardening	12
Services / Sales / Rentals / Subscriptions	11
Cleaning / Home Help / Carer / Childcare	12
Tattoo / Piercing	3
Wholesale / Supplies	3
Manufacturing / Production	2
Singer/Entertainer	1
Mystery Customer	1
Community-Led Initiative	1
Total	271

6.2.3 Participation: HeadStart

The tables below compare the demographics of those taking part in the HeadStart programmes with the baseline population in the Enterprising Ashfield eligible area to identify areas of under or over-representation. The numbers highlighted in pink identify potential areas of under-representation compared to the baseline, with the numbers in green indicating potential areas of over-representation.

- a) Gender** – The figures show an under-representation of males and an over-representation of females when compared to the local population baseline for the HeadStart programme.

Gender	Enterprising Ashfield population (18-64)	Enterprising Ashfield HeadStarters
Female	20,949 (50.9%)	150 (57.7%)
Male	20,199 (49.1%)	110 (42.3%)
Total	41,148	260 (100%)

Source: ONS - TS009 Sex by Year of Age. Baseline figures for the EA eligible area (18-64 yrs). EA project data as at September 2026. Figures exclude those who preferred not to say or identified as 'other gender' or did not answer - this data was not captured within the ONS population estimates therefore there is no data set to compare against.

- b) Age** – The figures show an under-representation of those over 50 taking part in the HeadStart programme.

	EA area population 18-64	Enterprising Ashfield HeadStarters
18 – 24	4,855 (11.1%)	31 (11.9%)
25 – 29	4,176 (10.1%)	28 (10.7%)
30 – 34	4,624 (11.2%)	42 (16.1%)
35 – 39	4,835 (11.8%)	50 (19.2%)
40 – 44	4,383 (10.7%)	42 (16.1%)
45 – 49	3,943 (9.6%)	28 (10.1%)
50 – 54	4,719 (11.5%)	19 (7.3%)
55 – 59	5,087 (12.4%)	13 (5.0%)
60 – 64	4,526 (11.20)	8 (3.1%)
Total	41,148 (100%)	261 (100%)

Source: Single Year Census Data for EA eligible (18-64 yrs only) and EA project data as at September 2026. Figures exclude those who preferred not to disclose their age. This includes: 8 who prefer not to say, also 2 over 65, not included due to low sample size.

- c) Disability** – Data shows that the HeadStart programme is performing well in terms of attracting participants who report a disability, with circa 20% of those taking part in the programme self-reporting a disability.

Disability of Participants - Enterprising Ashfield Project v the Ashfield baseline

Identifies as disabled	Ashfield District – Baseline (Disabled under the Equality Act)	Enterprising Ashfield HeadStarters 'Do you have a disability?'
Yes	22.1% (10.25% are limited a lot, 11.9% are limited a little)	50 (19.8%)
No	77.9%	202 (80.2%)
Total	100%	252

Source: Disability Census Data for Ashfield. EA project enrolment data as at September 2026. Note, figures exclude those who preferred not to disclose their disability status: HeadStart - 19 prefer not to say.

6.3 Support for established businesses – participation

Overall figures regarding business participation have been set out below. Over 190 established businesses have completed their support through the programme and have been claimed as an output for the project.

- 47% of businesses enrolled were based in Sutton, with 41% based in Kirkby and 12% in Annesley.
- 12% of businesses enrolled in calendar year 2022, 22% in 2023, 36% in 2024 and 26% in 2025 and 4% in 2026.
- 6% of businesses were large, 12% medium, 15% small, and 67% micro. By comparison, for ADC (*source: Nomis, UK business counts numbers 2024*) 0.5% are large, 4.5% medium, 15.9% are small, and 79% are micro - the project performed well in terms of attracting large businesses.
- 60% of businesses were limited companies, 29% were sole traders. The remainder were a variety of other types of businesses, including schools, charities, CIC, PLCs.
- 17% of the businesses were in the manufacturing sector, 16% in the wholesale and retail trade/repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, 12% in the other service activities sector, 8% in the information and communication sector, 8% in the professional, scientific and technical activities sector, 8% of businesses were in the administrative and support service activities sector.

7.0 Barriers to participation

The previous section focused on those taking part in Enterprising Ashfield. This section collates any barriers that stopped potential beneficiaries from participating, and identifies how any of these issues could be overcome on future projects. Feedback has been captured from businesses, individuals and staff.

Key barriers identified:

- **Mental health** - The delivery team reported that they had seen a significant number of clients with mental health issues and neurodivergences. Many of these individuals needed additional support. Whilst the team were happy to support these needs, this increased the time needed with each individual. To overcome this challenge, the HeadStart strand of the project recruited an additional member of staff to support those with additional needs. (see over the page for more details)
- **Lack of IT software** - It was noted that the team worked with a lot of clients without access to IT equipment, this made some elements of the project difficult to deliver. Many participants did not have access to computers or laptops and tried to do everything on their phones.
- **Lack of digital skills** - It was noted that a lack of digital skills was a barrier – for some participants it was their first time using videocalls/ Teams etc. The delivery team agreed that this did make interventions more time-consuming.
- **Additional support needs** - It was noted that many of the participants had additional support needs, particularly in the entrepreneur/ business support elements of the programme. It was suggested that delivering softer skills training through the project, particularly around confidence building and resilience, could have supported this.
- **Office base** - It was suggested that not having a base in the ADC area was a barrier in terms of raising awareness. It was suggested that an office/ premises would have increased visibility in the area and potentially could have been seen as more accessible/ approachable. This type of facility could have also offered free access to IT equipment.
- **Lack of time** - For microbusinesses and sole traders, finding the time to take up the support offered by the Enterprising Ashfield project was a real challenge. The team noted that a target audience for the project had been retail shops, beauty salons etc. Owners/ managers of this type of business tend to have less flexibility - they have customers booked in all day. The team reported that they ran after-work and weekend sessions to try and address this.
- **Lost revenue** - It was noted that to take a day off work for a training course for a small business means lost revenue, even though the course itself may be free of charge.
- **Changing mindsets** - Some businesses reported that they were not interested in making huge amounts of money, and as a result were not maximising their businesses full potential. Future projects could support with boosting ambition/ raising awareness around growth opportunities.
- **Interactions** - The team reported that parts of the delivery area included hard-to-reach communities, with examples of dissatisfaction amongst residents, people who feel that they have been left behind, or were disengaged. Attracting these participants and gaining their trust had been time-consuming, but the team felt that by the end of the project they were 'getting there'.
- **Scepticism** - The staff team noted that there was a historic scepticism about the fact that the offer was too good to be true. The team have worked hard to change perceptions.
- **Graduate Placements** - Some businesses reported that they weren't big enough to make use of the graduate scheme. It was suggested that these smaller businesses may have benefitted from a more informal internship scheme.

7.1 Overcoming barriers to participation

The Enterprising Ashfield team did all they could to encourage and support participation amongst Ashfield businesses and residents. For example, the HeadStart team found that they had a significant number of potential beneficiaries who were interested in taking part in the programme but were struggling to 'get over the line' in terms of paperwork and data requirements. They were therefore not enrolling on the project. The case study below explains the challenges and how these were addressed.

Emma Coveney was recruited into the Enterprising Ashfield HeadStart team in 2025 as the Enterprise and Project Officer, with a remit to support beneficiaries who were struggling with the enrolment/ paperwork requirements of the programme. Emma worked with circa 25 beneficiaries to help them to secure a HeadStart grant.

Emma found that key challenges faced by those she has supported included:

- Lack of access to a computer, with participants trying to complete paperwork, cash flows, and enrolment forms on their phones.
- Lack of access to a printer, with participants having to pay for printing facilities, e.g. at local libraries.
- Lack of knowledge of the IT programmes needed to complete the documentation requirements – Word/ Excel.
- Lack of confidence/ knowledge in terms of completing the forms/ and what information to provide – with challenges around general literacy, dyslexia etc.
- Participants have been struggling with mental health challenges, with many having depression or anxiety – as a result participants regularly cancelled/ were not able to attend scheduled meetings.
- Many participants face childcare/ other caring responsibilities that they must work around.

Emma worked to support these participants, offering face-to-face meetings with those struggling with the process. Emma found that using a relaxed and informal approach, and taking the time to explain the process in an accessible, clear, and straight forward way really helped the beneficiaries. On a practical level, Emma was able to take hard copies of the paperwork along to the meetings to reduce the need for a printer, and also guided the applicants through the forms/ processes at their own pace.

Emma told us: *"Some of the people who have received this additional support – their confidence has really taken a knock over the years; they don't know where to start when it comes to setting up a business. Many have undiagnosed health conditions, and many left school early with no qualifications. I've noticed that many of those setting up their businesses in the building, gardening and handyman trades have really struggled with their literacy – so just some basic help to complete the paperwork and allow them to access the grant has been such a support. It's been fantastic seeing people come in with an idea, and leave with the confidence to start their business – many of the participants I've been working with have been on Universal Credit for many years, this programme is giving them a safe space to explore their business – it's giving them back their agency, their control over their future."*

Emma told us: *"The job has been challenging but rewarding. I've had to be very flexible with participants, but it's great to see some of those that I've supported now in the early stages of setting up their own businesses. Offering the grants has been very beneficial - some of those I've worked with have really struggled with cash flow, and the grants have allowed them to purchase the vital equipment that they need to set up."*

"I'd say that my role has been as a facilitator – the entrepreneurs have the great ideas - I just help them to get their words on the paper. Many of the entrepreneurs that we have worked with have been very emotional in a positive way in the meetings – they are overwhelmed that someone finally believes in them and their future."

8.0 Outcomes, Impact and Legacy

This section sets out the outcomes, impact and legacy of the Enterprising Ashfield project as evidenced by the businesses, entrepreneurs and individuals who have been supported. It collates data from an evaluation survey, from case studies with businesses and individuals supported, and includes data captured by the wider project team during the course of their work. The evaluation survey was sent to circa 1,300 beneficiaries of the Enterprising Ashfield project (via both email and text message). There have been 259 completed forms - a 20% response rate - which is significantly higher than recent return rates from similar NTU evaluations. Each strand of the project has been analysed individually.

8A.0 Individuals/ learners on short courses

This section sets out the impact and outcome data for those taking the short courses delivered through the project. 182 learners completed the evaluation survey with regard to the skills and learning that they took part in.

8A.1 Impacts

The table below sets out the impacts that the training has had on the learners who completed the survey.

Enterprising Ashfield: Short courses - impacts

Has the training?	Yes	No	Maybe/ too early to say	Not applicable
Increased your confidence in the workplace	136 (75%)	17 (9%)	14 (8%)	15 (8%)
Given you new skills which will help you to further your career or increase earning potential	122 (67%)	10 (6%)	43 (24%)	6 (3%)
Allowed you to introduce new ideas and initiatives into the business you work for, run or are setting up	114 (63%)	12 (7%)	33 (18%)	21 (12%)
Increased your ambition for your future career	111 (61%)	24 (13%)	28 (15%)	18 (10%)
Allowed you to secure a job after being unemployed, helped you secure a promotion or move to a higher-skilled job, or set up a business	39 (22%)	44 (24%)	16 (9%)	81 (45%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

Learners were asked: *“Have the short course/s had any other positive benefits for you?”* A selection of the comments received are shown below:

- *“Given me a fresh lease of life, it’s helped boost my ability to do things better & I’ve achieved so much!”*
- *“Helped me learn new aspects of a new role”*
- *“Promotion within my current company”*
- *“Given me the knowledge to build on my own website once I start my new business”*
- *“Yes - I wanted to change my job, but I needed to increase my confidence in IT skills, particularly Excel. I did change roles at my current employer from frontline to admin - it increased my confidence too - as I am in my early fifties and didn’t think a change in role was possible at my age”*
- *“Improved my skills and boosted my confidence to apply for jobs”*
- *“I want to change job, and this course has helped me with skills to do that”*
- *“Opened my mind to what can be achieved”*
- *“Given me the tools I need for my job”*

8A.2 Counterfactual

Learners were asked whether they would have taken the short course/s if they had not been available through the project. We can see that the project has delivered significant added value – with 63% of learners reporting that they would not have undertaken similar training without the project.

Enterprising Ashfield: Short Courses – Counterfactual	Yes	No	Maybe
Would you have taken the short course/s (or something similar) if it had not been offered through the Enterprising Ashfield project?	14 (8%)	115 (63%)	53 (29%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

8A.3 Training Legacy

Learners were asked whether undertaking the courses had encouraged them to undertake further training. The results are overwhelmingly positive and show how the project has changed mindsets in terms of training. This is a very positive legacy from the project.

Enterprising Ashfield: Short Courses -Training Legacy	Yes	No	No change
Has undertaking the course/s encouraged you to undertake further training with NTU or other training providers?	147 (81%)	9 (5%)	26 (14%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

Comments received from businesses around this training legacy include:

- The training has: *“Generated an interest in developing my knowledge further”*
- After the training: *“I began an apprenticeship in the same field as the course”*
- *“I’ll be booking onto the longer copywriting and content writing course”*

9A.4 The impact of taking multiple courses

Although not part of the initial proposal, the Ashfield District Council team kindly allowed NTU to offer the option for individuals to take part in multiple courses.

The table below analyses the impacts achieved for those who have taken one course versus those who have undertaken multiple courses. We can clearly see that the impacts were significantly greater amongst the learners who took multiple courses.

Enterprising Ashfield: Short Courses – Impacts: Those who said ‘Yes’ to the impact	All	One course	Multiple courses
Given you new skills which will help to further your career or increase earning potential	122 (67%)	48 (55%)	74 (80%)
Increased your confidence in the workplace	136 (75%)	56 (63%)	70 (86%)
Allowed you to introduce new ideas into the business you work for, run/ are setting up	144 (63%)	46 (52%)	68 (74%)
Increased your ambition for your future career	111 (61%)	43 (48%)	68 (74%)
Allowed you to secure a job after being unemployed, helped you secure a promotion or move to a higher-skilled job, or setup a business	13 (15%)	41 (48%)	26 (28%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026, based on 89 respondents who took one course, and 93 who took multiple courses.

8A.6 Impacts by demographic characteristics

The impacts from the skills support have been analysed by gender and age to understand if there are any emerging trends or any lessons learnt for future projects.

Figures in green are above the overall average for the project, with figures in pink below the average.

Note: sample sizes are reduced as the evaluation data had to be matched with the baseline data on age/ gender etc.

8A.6.1 Gender

The data shows that male participants reported greater impacts from the skills training, with the exception of 'confidence', which was higher for females.

Impacts by Gender: Those who said 'Yes'

Has the training:	Overall	Female	Male
Given you new skills which will help you to further your career or increase earning potential	92 (64%)	55 (61%)	37 (70%)
Increased your ambition for your future career	84 (59%)	53 (58%)	31 (60%)
Increased your confidence in the workplace	108 (75%)	70 (80%)	53 (72%)
Allowed you to introduce new ideas into the business you work for, run or are setting up	93 (65%)	53 (60%)	40 (75%)
Allowed you to secure a job after being unemployed, helped secure a promotion/ move to a higher skilled job/ set up a business	25 (17%)	13 (14%)	12 (24%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, Sept 2026. Excludes those who did not to specify/ other, as a small sample size.

8A.6.2 Age

The data shows that overall, the biggest impacts have been for those aged under 40.

Impacts by Age: Those who said 'Yes'

Has the training:	Overall	Under 30	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Given you new skills which will help you to further your career or increase earning potential	94 (65%)	12 (80%)	26 (87%)	26 (59%)	22 (56%)	8 (50%)
Increased your ambition for your future career	85 (59%)	11 (73%)	24 (80%)	28 (62%)	19 (50%)	3 (19%)
Increased your confidence in the workplace	108 (74%)	11 (73%)	27 (90%)	33 (73%)	28 (72%)	9 (56%)
Allowed you to introduce new ideas into the business you work for, run or are setting up	93 (64%)	12 (80%)	22 (73%)	27 (60%)	23 (59%)	9 (56%)
Allowed you to secure a job after being unemployed, helped you secure a promotion or move to a higher-skilled job, or set up a business	25 (18%)	5 (33%)	7 (23%)	6 (13%)	6 (15%)	1 (6%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, Sept 2026. Excludes those who prefer not to say.

8A.6.3 Skills case studies

The team collected case studies from a selection of those who have been supported by the skills/ learning element of the Enterprising Ashfield project. A selection of these are set out below.



Nana Prints Personalised Gifts - Steve owns Nana Prints Personalised Gifts Shop in Sutton-in-Ashfield. Steve attended one of the Enterprising Ashfield short courses and is also working with the team to further support the growth of his business. *"I did the Video Production for Marketing using Smartphones course which was really good. We do a lot of product photography, and I was just using a normal DSLR camera. However, the capability of now using our smartphones is absolutely much better and has been a game changer. The course I did will benefit us massively long term."*

Asked if he would recommend the project he told us: *"Absolutely 100%, and we already have. We've been recommending and suggested the courses and project to a number of businesses in the area."* Asked about the future he said: *"We're hoping to look into the graduate programme to get some support and we're also working with Adrian from the growth programme who is mentoring us at the moment."*

Team Prom - Lisa owns Team Prom, a prom dress shop in Sutton-in-Ashfield. She has attended a number of the free courses offered by the Enterprising Ashfield project. Lisa told us: *"I have been feeling a bit left behind in the world of social media which was making me feel very old."*



"I saw the courses advertised on Facebook and I attended the Product Photography course and the Social Media and Content Creation course. The Social Media course has been fantastic - the course tutor Debbie is so engaging and fun. I've met some other lovely business owners throughout this process, and I would like to think we have all helped each other in one way or another - whether that's with business related advice or just been a sounding board for new ideas."

"I'm proud of how far my business has come in the last 3 years since starting just before the pandemic, and it can only continue to grow with the help of courses like this."

Asked if she would recommend the courses to other people she told us: *"I would 100% recommend the courses to other people. I have always said I would never be 'that person' that videos myself for Instagram but after a few words of advice, and Debbie showing us on the course and allowing us time to practice I did it and it wasn't that bad at all. The skills I have picked up on the courses have been invaluable."*



Jeaneil Holistic Therapists – Jean and Neil run Jeaneil Holistic Therapists providing complementary treatments throughout Nottinghamshire. They also sell crystals, and run workshops and give talks on health and wellbeing.

They attended a Build your Website class delivered through Enterprising Ashfield. They told us: *"Through us both attending this workshop we have now been able to create our own website. Without this course we would not have been able to design and build our own website. We also have attended a social media course and found that very helpful. NTU are always there to ask their advice to help grow your business and are a great asset."*

Flower Life - Laura owns Flower Life, a florist based in Sutton-in-Ashfield and attended the Website Design for Small Businesses course as she wanted to be able to create a website for the business that included an online shop.



Laura told us: *"I knew absolutely nothing about websites and was a bit overwhelmed by the thought of it. I couldn't afford to have someone create a website for me, so I was very happy when I heard about this course. It has saved me a few thousand pounds in having to get someone to build a website. It has also made me create the policies, terms and conditions for the shop, which needed doing and made me review the prices and costings of all the products, so I know they are correct before they go live on the website. It has been the kick I needed to get organised. I am sure that having this website will generate another income stream for the business."*

When asked whether she would recommend the courses and Enterprising Ashfield to other people, she told us: *"I already have! One of my staff is doing the Visual Merchandising for Retail Spaces course, and another is going to do the Social Media and Content Creation for Businesses course."*



Twisted Tink'z - Ewa owns Twisted Tink'z barbers in Kirkby-in-Ashfield and has attended several free courses offered by the Enterprising Ashfield project. Ewa told us: *"I cannot recommend these courses highly enough. Not only did they enhance my professional skill set, but they also boosted my confidence and self-assurance. These courses have also opened up new opportunities and avenues for personal and professional growth. Thank you once again for offering such valuable and enriching courses."*

"Your courses provided me with invaluable insights, strategies, and practical tools to enhance my abilities. They equipped me with the essential skills needed to communicate effectively in a professional setting. I now feel more confident in my written communication abilities. I look forward to exploring more opportunities for learning and growth with your organisation in the future. I wholeheartedly recommend skill courses to anyone looking to invest in their future."

Inspire: Culture, Learning & Libraries - Inspire have been supported by the Business Growth, Research, Development and Innovation and Skills and Talent strands of the Enterprising Ashfield project. Inspire delivers high-quality college and adult education courses across Nottinghamshire, including a focus on Ashfield. Michael Reid - Deputy Director of Inspire Learning - told us of his experience of the Enhance Growth workshop programme.



"The content was great. NTU were happy to listen to our needs and make slight changes to courses that made the content suitable for our organisation. The trainers were clearly experienced and leaders in their field. The pace was spot-on. The workshops have already had an impact towards our business planning, innovation and marketing. Line managers have gained confidence in their abilities to be effective and supportive of their direct reports."

Asked whether he would recommend the project, Michael told us: *"Yes! Don't miss the opportunity to benefit from the funding whilst it lasts. There are lots of workshops to choose from and there will definitely be something you and your business can benefit from."*

8B.0 HeadStart Programme

This section sets out the impact and outcome data for those taking part in the HeadStart Programme. In total, 66 individuals completed the evaluation survey with regard to this strand.

8B.1 New start businesses

Those supported through the HeadStart programme were asked whether they have set up a business or are in the process of setting up a business since receiving support from the project.

Enterprising Ashfield: HeadStart – Setting-Up	Yes	No	Had already set up	Not yet, but still hoping to
Have you set up a business, or are you in the process of setting up, since receiving support from NTU's HeadStart start-up support programme?	58 (88%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	7 (11%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

8B.2 Counterfactual

It is important to understand whether these businesses would have been set up without support from the project - this way we can understand the added value that the project has delivered. The HeadStarters who have set-up a business since receiving support were asked if they thought they would have setup their new business without the support from the project.

Enterprising Ashfield: HeadStart - Counterfactual	Yes	No	Maybe
Do you think you would have set up this business without the HeadStart programme?	22 (38%)	18 (31%)	18 (31%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

Those who answered yes to the above question were asked: *“Even though you would have set up without the support from NTU, did the support from the HeadStart programme help you at all in your start-up process?”* Answers included:

- *“Yes, very informative. Not very logical myself, so it helped with all the paperwork side of things”*
- *“Yes very helpful in consolidating ideas and focus”*
- *“Definitely helped with initial funding and support network”*
- *“Yes the team were really helpful thorough the process with opportunities to network with other start-up businesses and I'm now at the next stage of discussing support available from NTU”*
- *“Yes. Another perspective was given, challenging the original plan, thus enabling a robust business”*

8B.3 HeadStart network

The HeadStart Network has given participants the opportunity to gain peer support and exchange information and ideas – feedback suggests this has been empowering for many and much appreciated. The quarterly events regularly attracted 40 people. It is hoped that these events can continue post-programme. To facilitate this, the group began to take more ownership of the network in 2026.

Many of the HeadStart participants who met through the course are now working together - demonstrating how Enterprising Ashfield support is connecting businesses in the area. The team have also set up an Enterprising Ashfield WhatsApp group with over 50 members. This is an extension of the events where members can stay connected via a virtual community through which they can share ideas and information, give updates, make requests and suggestions. This platform also allows members to have a voice and a sense of being in a wider local entrepreneurial community

Overall, the networking was positively received:

- *“Been useful to connect with other new starters in the area”*
- *“Yes, great network and like-minded individuals in a similar situation. Good to talk to others and bounce ideas and also support each other’s journey and business”*
- *“Very. Made lots of new friends and business connections”*
- *“Love them. Look forward to them. Really good for networking, and to share ideas”*
- *“Extremely. I have made many contacts and developed some great friendships that offer some valuable support when you need it on a personal level”*
- *“They’ve been great. I’ve not been to as many as I’d like, but I plan to keep attending”*
- *“Yes, good to hear to the speakers and what local businesses are doing and have the chance to network with them”*
- *“A great network and like-minded individuals in a similar situation”*
- *“Good to talk to others and bounce ideas and also support each other’s journey and business”*
- *“Richard’s knowledge and the atmosphere he created at the events were superb”*
- *“The networking events are very beneficial. The local speakers give you a chance to hear their stories and network with them and others afterwards. The courses offered are useful for businesses and all staff members are helpful and knowledgeable”*



Active Release Therapy - Jennifer runs Active Release, a sports massage business. She told us: *“Starting this business was never part of my plan, that’s why it’s more beautiful, I studied psychology at university and I was going to go on and do a masters, but I needed to earn some decent money, so I started training in sports massage. The support from NTU changed everything - I talked to Adrian and he made me realise that I was trying to do so much, so I postponed the masters. Sports massage, and dealing with people’s bodies is what I want to do, I’m not looking back.”* Jennifer received support from the HeadStart and Growth Programmes. *“I would absolutely recommend the Enterprising Ashfield project, Adrian was able to look at things from the business perspective, but also from the coaching perspective, he gives you time to think about things, he sits with you while you ponder everything. I was also able to secure a start up grant to help with the start up process and allow me to develop my marketing materials.”*

Jennifer also took part in the HeadStart networking events: *“When you see a room full of so many people who are in the same position as you, and you might be a year ahead of them so you can offer support and insight and share ideas. The networking events that they put on are just spectacular, I’ve recommended them to some of my clients. The Headstart programme gives you an opportunity to have a go at something that you might have been putting off, or just contemplating. With the project you can make it a reality.”*

8B.4 HeadStart survival rates

We can only understand the true impact of the HeadStart support by understanding how many of the businesses who have been supported are still operating. Business survival rates have been established following a desk-based analysis of the social media/ web presence of the businesses that were set up through the HeadStart programme. Those counted as 'still active' in the table below have been active on social media within the last 2 months or have an active web presence as at 31st August 2026.

8B.4.1 Industry

Whilst some sectors only have a small sample size, data suggests that the more service-based sectors are showing better survival rates.

HeadStart Survival Rates – Industry

Business Industry	Total	Still active	%
Tattoo / Piercing	3	3	100%
Community Led Initiative	1	1	100%
Catering / Baking / Cafe / Pub	16	11	69%
Vet / Pet care / Dog Grooming / Dog Walking	12	7	58%
Cleaning / Home Help / Carer / Childcare	12	7	58%
Business Support / Admin / HR / Recruitment	7	4	57%
Beauty / Aesthetics / Hairdressing / Nails	22	12	55%
Photography / Videography / Production	10	5	50%
Mechanical / Vehicle Repair	4	2	50%
Manufacturing / Production	2	1	50%
Services / Sales / Rentals / Subscriptions	11	5	45%
Education / Coaching / Training / Workshops / Consultancy	33	14	42%
Digital / Marketing / Events / PR / Consultancy	30	11	37%
Health / Wellbeing / Wellness / Massage / Fitness	17	6	35%
Retail / e-Commerce / Product Design / Handmade Items	68	23	34%
Illustration / Design / Printing	6	2	33%
Wholesale / Supplies	3	1	33%
Maintenance / Handyman / Decorating/ Gardening	12	3	25%
Mystery Customer/Customer services	1	0	0%
Singer/Entertainer, Painting/Decorating, General Handyman	1	0	0%
Total	271	118	44%

Source: Internet Search – August 2026

8B.4.2 Age of Entrepreneur

The data shows that the 40–44-year age group has seen the highest business survival rates.

HeadStart survival rates – age

	All	16-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65+	Prefer not to say
Total	271	31	28	42	50	42	28	19	13	8	2	8
Survival	118	14	11	19	21	23	12	7	4	3	0	4
%	44%	45%	39%	45%	42%	55%	43%	37%	31%	38%	0%	50%

Source: Internet Search – August 2026

8B.4.3 Year of Support

44% of those supported are still operating a business.

HeadStart survival rates – HeadStart grant defrayal year (startup year)

	All	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Total	271	8	62	62	93	46
Survival	118	5	26	24	37	26
%	44%	63%	42%	39%	40%	57%

Source: Internet Search – August 2026

8B.5 HeadStart case studies



Your Signage

Your Signage, based in Sutton in Ashfield, are at the early stages of setting up a business selling digital marketing screens. They received support from the HeadStart Programme.

Mark Palfreyman from the business told us: *“Initially I approached the council for any help and guidance on offer. They signposted me over to the HeadStart programme and it’s helped me get the business up and running and off the ground. The project has provided me with the marketing support and with creating an outline business plan – this has given me the focus I needed.”*

“Everything we do from a marketing perspective has been done on a tight shoestring and without help from Richard & the NTU Enterprise Grant the business would not have started. The assets that have been created will allow us to gain a presence out there and engage with clients.”

Johnny 5 Replica

Ryan Howard first found out about the Enterprising Ashfield when he saw a leaflet at the Job Centre. Ryan contacted the project and received help from the project in setting up his own business - Johnny 5 Replica which builds replicas of Johnny 5 from the 1986 sci-fi film Short Circuit. As well as start-up support, Ryan has undertaken training in social media and 3D printing courses. Ryan has been to 50 conventions, been on the BBC, and to Texas, USA, to talk about his design.



Ryan told us: "I just thought I would reach out and say thank you for all your support when setting up my business, it's taken us to a place we never dreamed of. We have had Sony, Tristar and Columbia Pictures contact us and we have been licensed by them to make 500 special edition Johnny 5 models for the 40th anniversary of Short Circuit. We are the first ever to produce official merchandise for the Short Circuit franchise!"

"They are also paying for us to fly over to Astoria, Oregon for the 40th anniversary with our Johnny to the original set and meet with all the cast and production staff of the film, as well as fans from all over the world!"

You were definitely right when you said the people of Ashfield have something to offer the world!"



Aileron Digital Works

Andrew was supported by Enterprising Ashfield as he set up Aileron Digital Works Ltd - a one-stop website design, social media management, digital marketing service and eCommerce set-up and management service.

"I was told about the HeadStart programme by the Job Centre after I said I was looking to start my own business. They arranged an appointment with Richard and his passion for what he was doing really came shining through. I'd been thinking about starting a business for a while but kept putting it off for one reason or another, including not really knowing quite where to start."

"The project gave me the chance to understand what I needed to plan and gave me great advice on how to complete my aims. It sounds cliché, but my only real stumbling block was having the confidence to take that final step!"

When asked whether the programme had helped him get to where he needed to be he told us: *"It really has. The business is up and running and knowing that a lot of my business costs were covered by the grant means that I am able to concentrate on my work, rather than worrying about making sure my overheads are being paid each month. Going forward, I've got a couple of long-term contracts already which are going to ensure that the business is sustainable for my future."*

When asked if he would recommend the support Andrew told us: *"Not only would I recommend the support, I already do."*

8C.0 Business Support – Overall

Businesses could receive support through the Enterprising Ashfield project from a range of business support functions including: Growth Support, Innovation, Research, Development and Innovation Support, Graduate Placements, and Bespoke Training.

All businesses receiving business support through the project, regardless of the package of support/ type of support they received, were asked a range of questions. 78 businesses responded, and the results can be seen below.

Over the following sections, we consider the impacts achieved from the individual strands of business support in more detail.

8C.1 Impacts – business support as a whole

The key impacts achieved from the whole suite of business support options are shown below.

Do you think the business support from NTU has/ will have any of the following outcomes for your business?	Yes	No	Maybe/ too early to say
Do you think the support has/ will lead to an increase in your business productivity?	57 (73%)	1 (1%)	20 (26%)
Do you think the support has/ will lead to an increase in your business turnover?	47 (60%)	3 (4%)	28 (36%)
Do you think the support has/ will help your business to innovate, adapt, or change in a positive way?	67 (86%)	0 (0%)	11 (14%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026, 78 responses

8D.0 Business Growth Support

This section sets out the impact/ outcome data for those receiving Business Growth Support. In total, 48 individuals completed the evaluation survey with regard to this element of support.

8D.1 Impacts

The table below sets out the impacts that the support has had on the businesses completing the survey.

Do you think the business growth support from NTU has/ will have any of the following outcomes?	Yes	No	Maybe/ too early to say	Not applicable
Enabled you to take on new staff / self-employed associates	18 (38%)	7 (15%)	14 (29%)	9 (19%)
Increased your client base or market share	22 (47%)	4 (9%)	17 (36%)	4 (9%)
Increased your financial sustainability/ viability of business	25 (54%)	2 (4%)	15 (33%)	4 (9%)
Allowed you to introduce new products or offer new services	28 (60%)	6 (13%)	10 (21%)	3 (6%)
Increased your contacts	30 (64%)	5 (11%)	9 (19%)	3 (6%)
Increased your networking	33 (72%)	4 (9%)	6 (13%)	3 (7%)
Increased confidence/ understanding running a business	39 (85%)	1 (2%)	5 (11%)	1 (2%)
Helped you to complete a grant application/ secure funding	21 (45%)	11 (23%)	4 (9%)	11 (23%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

Businesses were asked whether the support had had any additional impacts for them:

- *“Yes, improved production efficiency and lowered energy costs. We are an intensive energy user and so this is very important to us”*
- *“Adrian’s support and positive working relationship has been hugely beneficial to supporting leaps in our marketing, advertising, logistics and developing business standards to enhance quality and support our workforce”*
- *“Increased local confidence in local area of what and who to go to for advice. We’ve been flying solo for 3 years; this has given us clarity and a business focus”*

8D.2 Counterfactual

Businesses were asked whether they thought they would have achieved the above outcomes and impacts if they had not had support from the business growth team. We can see that the project has delivered significant added value.

Enterprising Ashfield: Business growth support – Counterfactual	Yes	No	Some of them
Do you think you would have achieved these outcomes and impacts if you had not had support from the business growth team?	3 (7%)	17 (37%)	26 (57%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

8D.3 Change in perception

Businesses were asked whether the growth support that they have received has changed their perception of accessing business support from a university. 92% are now more likely to work with a university.

Enterprising Ashfield: Business growth support – Change in perception of university support	More likely	Less likely	No change
Has the support changed your perception of working with a university?	44 (92%)	1 (2%)	3 (6%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

8D.4 Business Growth – case studies

A selection of case studies for businesses supported by the Business Growth stand are shown below.

Digital Start-Up Academy - Shawn is the founder of the Digital Startup Academy, an e-learning and live interactive platform. The Academy teaches new and pre-existing businesses how to build a digital presence, as well as a customer journey to help them grow online. Shawn took part in the Growth Strand of the Enterprising Ashfield project. He told us: *"I was introduced to Richard and Adrian through the DWP after having been made redundant from my previous role of 22 years. I realised that there were a lot of things I didn't know about starting a business and being self-employed and I wanted to give my business the best foundation that I could, so talking to the experts was a no brainer! Although I knew in my own mind what I wanted my business to look like, my offer didn't have the right level of clarity!"*



"I really valued the help that I got from Enterprising Ashfield and from Adrian specifically – he gave me some incredible support with my business model. The programme has definitely moved me forwards as it's enabled me to gain so much more clarity around how my business should operate as well as how to structure and cost my different offers. My plans now are to work on my marketing so that I can get my cash flow to a dependable and predictable state. I have already recommended this programme to other local business owners that I have spoken to!"

Mansfield Hosiery Mills Sports & Social Club - Mansfield Hosiery Mills Sports and Social Club was established in 1947 and is located just off Huthwaite Road in Sutton in Ashfield. They offer sporting facilities for football and cricket and a spacious function room. Victoria, who is involved in running the club, took part in the Enhanced Growth programme, part of the support available from the Enterprising Ashfield Business Growth strand. *"After having a brief discussion with Adrian at the networking event it was clear that Enterprising Ashfield had the potential to offer support and advice in helping to promote our business. We hoped that the project would help Mansfield Hosiery Mills Sports and Social Club to develop a website, help with social media promotions, and general business advice on how to make the club more sustainable financially."*



"With not coming from a business background, I was apprehensive about the content of the course prior to attending. However, I found the whole the programme extremely interesting and informative. The pace of the lessons was perfect and everyone who delivered the courses were very helpful and knowledgeable. The support that I have received from Adrian has been very reassuring and incredibly helpful. We are only really at the start of our growth journey, and we have a long way to go yet. The biggest difference for us currently is that we don't feel alone, already we have made great connections with other amazing local businesses and having the support from Adrian and the team has given us a new lease of life and hope that we can succeed and continue to provide a community space for local people to enjoy." Asked whether she would recommend the programme, Victoria told us: "Absolutely, it has been invaluable so far."



Mr Nice Removals - Sabrina and Sebastian run their family business Mr Nice Removals providing domestic and commercial moves, waste removals, house clearances and storage facilities. They took part in the Growth Strand of the Enterprising Ashfield project. They told us: *"We were recommended by our local Job centre to Enterprising Ashfield and its Growth Programme during a difficult time for our business in 2023. We were at a crossroad with our business at that time and needed some guidance and support to*

move forward. The business was facing staffing issues and financial pressures. The programme motivated us by helping us to understand, and have a clear breakdown of, every aspect of the business and where improvements were needed - understanding and recognising problem areas and the knock on affects to other services provided."



Longwood Maven Ltd – Longwood Maven Ltd is a small strategic consultancy based in Ashfield. They work nationally across the home improvement and construction sectors, supporting organisations to build stronger, more sustainable businesses, through brand strategy, workforce development and communications. Founder and director, Anna Scothern, told us: *“I first heard about the Enterprising Ashfield project through a mix of emails and LinkedIn posts from NTU. The updates stood out because they felt genuinely relevant, not just another generic training offer, but something designed to support small, purpose-driven businesses like mine. Seeing familiar local names involved gave me the confidence that it was worth exploring further.”*

“After several years of steady growth, I wanted to take a step back and refocus on strengthening the business foundations. When I heard about the Enterprising Ashfield project it felt like the perfect opportunity to pause, reflect, and invest time in improving how the business works behind the scenes. I took some free courses to build my confidence in areas like carbon management, business development, and leadership, and then progressed to the Growth Programme with Adrian. The programme appealed because it combined practical, hands-on learning with personal mentoring, which is exactly what small business owners often need but rarely make time for.”

“Like many small businesses, Longwood Maven had grown quickly and organically, which meant some of our internal systems and processes hadn’t kept pace with the scale or complexity of our work. I was juggling multiple client projects, managing a small team, and leading national programmes, but I didn’t always have time to step back and think strategically about how we worked as a business. I knew we needed to improve structure, clarity, and sustainability, from financial planning and marketing systems to team roles and client delivery models. I was also aware that, as a founder, I needed space to reflect on my own leadership approach and confidence in setting direction. Enterprising Ashfield came at exactly the right time to help me do that in a supported, structured way.”

“Taking part in Enterprising Ashfield has had a transformational impact on both me and the business. It’s helped me to step back from the day-to-day delivery and really focus on direction, structure, and growth. I’ve gained greater clarity about what makes Longwood Maven unique, how we add value to our clients, and where to focus our energy as we grow. Personally, it’s also given me a renewed sense of confidence and perspective as a business leader. Running a small company can often feel isolating, but having access to tailored mentoring and local peer support reminded me that growth doesn’t always mean doing more, it can mean doing things better. We’ve already started applying what I learned: refining our client offer, improving internal systems, and planning for sustainable expansion in 2026. The project has helped me reconnect with my own purpose as a founder, and that’s something I’ll carry forward long after the project ends.”



Nottingham Zinc Group - Based in Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Nottingham Zinc Group provide surface finishing and metal product refurbishment services. They told us that whilst business has been challenging over the last five years, it was the 2021 energy crisis that hit them the hardest - costs soared, and they had to make fundamental changes in order to survive and grow. The business received funding from the ADC Business Growth Fund to invest in plant and technology, allowing them to lower their costs and improve production efficiencies. Subsequently they were contacted about

the Enterprising Ashfield project – *“When we were contacted about the Growth Programme we jumped at the chance to complement our efficiency improvements. We were supported to advance our marketing activities, to create brand awareness, and raise our profile - our marketing materials had not been updated for a number of years and we were not geared for search engine optimisation to help us promote our services and find new customers. The impact of the project has been significant. For a longtime I felt meaningful business support wasn’t available to businesses like mine – but I was wrong. I would definitely recommend the project and the support to any businesses.”*

“The support and encouragement from NTU with the Enterprising Ashfield project has been first class. NTU has been flexible and understanding, allowing us to adjust our plans as our project unfolded. We would highly recommend working with the team to improve key business objectives.”



Growth workshop programme.

Inspire: Culture, Learning & Libraries - Inspire have been supported by the Business Growth, Research, Development and Innovation and Skills and Talent strands of the Enterprising Ashfield project. Inspire delivers high-quality college and adult education courses across Nottinghamshire, including a focus on Ashfield. Michael Reid - Deputy Director of Inspire Learning - told us of his experience of the Enhanced

“The content was great. NTU were happy to listen to our needs and make slight changes to courses that made the content suitable for our organisation. The trainers were clearly experienced and leaders in their field. The pace was spot-on. The workshops have already had an impact towards our business planning, innovation and marketing. Line managers have gained confidence in their abilities to be effective and supportive of their direct reports.”

Asked whether he would recommend the programme, Michael told us: *“Yes! Don’t miss the opportunity to benefit from the funding whilst it lasts. There are lots of workshops to choose from and there will definitely be something you and your business can benefit from.”*

Tanglewood Florals - Julie owns Tanglewood Florals, based in the Idlewells Indoor Market in Sutton-in-Ashfield, and took part in the Growth Strand of the Enterprising Ashfield project. Julie told us: *“After retiring from full-time employment, I began pursuing my long-term hobby of floral design. I eventually started selling my arrangements at craft fairs and artisan markets around the country. Following lots of encouraging and positive comments from customers, I decided to further evolve my business when an opportunity arose to rent a unit within the Idlewells Market Hall.”*



Whilst discussing the terms for opening the unit within the Idlewells Market Hall, Julie was told about Enterprising Ashfield. Julie told us: *“Whilst I knew what I wanted to do and achieve, and feel well equipped with life skills, it is also good to get guidance and advice from people who are experts and can help provide both the reassurance about what you are doing, but also help to steer you and show you alternatives which can be better and more efficient. The Growth Programme provided invaluable guidance, templates, and a methodology to ensure everything is in place to create a successful business. I would definitely recommend this programme.”*

Open Door 1 - Open Door 1 supports those whose lives are affected by dementia, offering support to both carers and service users through complementary therapies, arts, singing, games, travel and regular carers events. Open Door 1 took part in the free skills courses, growth programme and innovation, research and development support stands of the Enterprising Ashfield project.



Rob Huskinson from Open Door 1 told us: *“The programme has allowed us to access creatives to develop our marketing and web presence. We had some challenges explaining what we actually do, and how people can access our services. Through the programme we refined the website and worked with designers, builders, photographers and publishers to transform our online spaces and showcase who we are and what we do. We are now able to showcase a heightened professional offer that feels like a premium service. Learning how to really sell our business also opened up opportunities for successful National Lottery grants. The programme has also supported us to enhance the communication and culture in our staff and managers. We are able to see the true value in having our leaders operate with vision, trusting staff to manage the day-to-day activities. I 100% cannot recommend the Enterprising Ashfield scheme enough, Enterprising Ashfield solved a lot of our problems and provided the support to make our goals a reality.”*

8.5 Growth Programme – Specialist Support

When the University could not provide the bespoke support needed, businesses were able to access funding through the project to engage an industry specialist. A case study is included below.

Specialist support case study for a conveyor systems business - A family-run mechanical engineering company based in Sutton-in-Ashfield that specialise in the design, manufacture, installation and maintenance of conveyor systems for industrial and manufacturing environments was supported by Axon Point via funding from the Enterprising Ashfield project. Axon Point is an independent marketing consultancy based in Nottingham, UK, specialising in data-driven digital marketing for small and independent businesses. Axon Point captured the following case study with regard to the intervention.

The challenge was clear: transform their digital presence from a low-traffic website with minimal Google visibility into a site that consistently generates enquiries from organic search - and demonstrate a return on investment that justifies continued investment in digital marketing.

Project Impacts – As a result of the support: website traffic increased 4× compared to the campaign start, the business is now ranking #1 for 'Conveyor Belt Maintenance Nottingham', the business has 6 first-page rankings secured across core service keywords, there has been a 162% year-on-year increase in Google Business Profile view, the business is the first tracked inbound lead from organic search.

Support Offered – The business received the following support:

- Built out industry-specific service pages targeting manufacturing, food processing, e-commerce and more.
- Expanded and re-optimised existing service pages.
- Published targeted blog content to support service pages and capture broader search demand.
- Added conversion-focused CTAs, click-to-call buttons and contact forms across the site — with full conversion tracking set-up to measure calls, emails and form submissions.
- A rolling citation campaign of 80+ business directory listings to build domain authority and backlink presence.
- Published linked articles on Axon Point's own website, passing domain authority directly to the client.
- Actively managed the Google Business Profile with regular posts.

Ranking Improvements

Keyword	Before	After
Conveyor Belt Installation Nottingham	#72	#4
Conveyor Repair Nottingham	#11	#4
Packing Conveyors Nottingham	#5	#2
Conveyor Belt Maintenance Nottingham	Not ranking	#1
Conveyor Systems in Nottingham	Not ranking	#8
Conveyors for Food and Processing	#16	#10

The table shows selected keyword position changes achieved during the campaign. Targets were chosen for their direct commercial value.

Axon Point delivered consistent growth across every tracked metric throughout the six-month campaign. Website sessions quadrupled from around 100 per month to consistently over 400, with organic search accounting for 60–70% of all traffic throughout — driven entirely by SEO, with no paid advertising involved. Google Business Profile engagement surged 162% year-on-year, generating direct calls and direction requests month after month.

The campaign produced its first fully tracked inbound lead in March 2026 — a form submission from a food manufacturing prospect identified as coming from organic search - the clearest possible demonstration of SEO delivering commercial value.

Case study reproduced with thanks to Axon Point.

8E.0 Innovation, Research & Development Support

This section sets out the impact and outcome data for those taking part in the Innovation, Research and Development support. In total, 19 businesses have submitted their feedback with regard to this strand.

8E.1 Impacts

Businesses were asked how the innovation, research and development support had benefitted their business, and what the business impacts might be for the future. They told us:

- *“We received help in sales and marketing that as put us on track to achieve our next goals with a more structured focused approach.”*
- *“The students looked at how I could better display goods in my shop and gave me plenty of new Ideas.”*
- *“They helped us develop a carbon management plan following a review of the premises.”*
- *“It allowed us to explore our IT options without a bias from external consultants.”*
- *“Outstanding support that looked at how we market our school in the community and beyond. It really made us think about our target audiences for the product (school) and how we get our messages across.”*
- *“Sue has been instrumental in assisting our growth strategy and opening new opportunities as well as pulling in marketing support and direction.”*
- *“Guidance and application for IP with NLS were provided and implemented.”*
- *“We benefited from having fresh eyes on our approach to marketing and our online presence. We were given advice and direction on how we could improve this. This did result in having a stronger online presence and reaching more customers within our industry.”*
- *“We had help every step of the way. It’s been amazing. We had a wonderful team and lots of guidance from both sides. Well worth the exercise.”*

8E.2 The counterfactual

Businesses were asked whether they thought they would have undertaken the Research, Development and Innovation research project without the support from the university. 63% said no, which demonstrates the significant added value of the project.

Enterprising Ashfield: Research, Development and Innovation: The counterfactual	Yes	No	Maybe	Partially
Would you have undertaken this innovation, research, development work had not had support from the NTU team	3 (16%)	12 (63%)	2 (%11)	2 (11)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

8E.3 Change in perception

Businesses were asked whether the Research, Innovation and Development support that they have received has changed their perception of accessing business support from a university.

Enterprising Ashfield: Research, Innovation and Development – Change in perception of university support	More likely	Less likely	No change
Has the innovation, research and development support you received changed your perception of working with universities on this type of initiative in future?	14 (78%)	0 (0%)	4 (22%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

8E.4 Case studies



Autopak Machinery Ltd - Autopak are a family business that design and manufacture bag filling and weigh equipment across various industries – they support businesses to automate - to put products into bags. Enterprising Ashfield has helped the businesses to develop and modernise over the last couple of years. One of the team took a Help to Grow course, and was then signposted into the

Innovation, Research and Development programme. The NTU team did an audit of the businesses, looking at how they could simplify processes and identify any gaps within the business. The team were able to support with growth models, business planning and bringing the directors together in terms of future development. The business had struggled with their marketing, and through Enterprising Ashfield they were able to access support from marketing professionals and academics. They have now developed a marketing strategy/ plan which has helped them drive forward.

Asked what the future is for the business they told us: *“We are looking at how we can build the company for the future, how we can improve the marketing, bring in more customers, build the brand, get the business out there, understanding how we can get in front of businesses who need this type of automation support. The support that we have had has been amazing, not just the grant support, but the emotional support – it has helped us through some challenging times, I would recommend any business take up the support.”*

Wider support - Many of the collaborative projects supported by this strand are still in delivery, and there is limited information that we can currently celebrate – many of the businesses have asked NTU to sign Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) and we therefore need to be careful not to disclose any sensitive information. It is hoped that more can be said at the final evaluation, and we are hoping to progress a more detailed programme with businesses who have been supported by the Research, Development, and Innovation strand during the final phase of the evaluation.

We can report that the team feel that some of the developments currently taking place through this strand could have national, international and worldwide significance and there is evidence that the support delivered through the strand is starting to lead to KTPs with the university.



Insight Planning and Analytics

Craig Danby, Managing Director

Craig is in his fifth year of running Insight Planning and Analytics. The business provides project management and consultancy in the construction and utility sectors with a specialism in programme and schedule planning.

The Enterprising Ashfield team supported the business with a range of specialist support including:

- **Marketing strategy** - Developing a marketing strategy for the business.
- **Website development** - Supporting the website development for the business, including providing support with the development of the copy.
- **HR health check** - Identifying key HR areas that the businesses needed be aware of as they consider future expansion.
- **AI and data support** - Identifying areas that the business could start to explore with regards to AI based on the datasets that they held.



Craig told us:

“Due to limited staffing we’ve never done any marketing – we didn’t want to overcommit, and we’ve never had a website for the same reason. We’d never even entertained the thought of having a marketing strategy – we had no idea how to go about that.

But we are now growing the business, so plan to do this alongside the new marketing strategy and website. The website is just about to be launched. The team at Enterprising Ashfield helped us to finalise the text for the website – we already had the draft copy but NTU helped us shape it – they sorted the tone and the language. We will also be starting to deliver the new marketing plan in the coming months. NTU have provided a solid strategy that we can all follow – we are having a meeting at the end of the month to get the team on board and allocate responsibilities.”

As part of the support, the Enterprising Ashfield team delivered a LinkedIn training session for Craig and other senior leaders. Craig told us: *“After the workshop Roisin set us all a task of posting on LinkedIn. I’ve never received so much feedback as I did from that post – I was blown away. I’m not from the social media generation, but I can’t believe the impact that just that one post had. I was so surprised at the instant impact and that was just from someone giving us some guidance and advice.”*

In terms of the quality of the support offered Craig told us: *“The personnel were great, Roisin who delivered the marketing support - she was a fantastic asset to have available to us. She genuinely cared about the business and in helping us succeed – it was the same for Daniel and Natalie who also helped us. They all understood the challenges of running a small business and were prepared to go the extra mile to support us - it wasn’t just a tick box for them. I’d recommend the Enterprising Ashfield support to other businesses within a heartbeat.”*

As a result of working with the Enterprising Ashfield project, Craig was also put in touch with the NTU graduates team. He is now advertising his graduate job vacancies directly to NTU alumni.



Ashfield Springs

Luke Orton, Office Manager

Ashfield Springs is a spring manufacturing company based in Huthwaite with local, national, and international clients. They have been operating since 1983, and currently employ circa 20 members of staff.

Luke bumped into Sue Edwards, Enterprising Ashfield Innovation Advisor, at the East Midlands Manufacturing Network and they got chatting. Sue went out to visit the business and talked them through the support that was available from the programme.



Luke told us:

“Sue was so helpful, she guided us through the paperwork that was needed to enrol on the programme and took the lead on all of the admin, I don’t think we would have managed it without her to be honest.”

Ashfield Springs took part in three different Research, Development and Innovation projects with Nottingham Trent University.

“We were supported by the University on a couple of projects focused on energy and energy consumption – we had an architectural premises audit to assess the cost benefit analysis of potential energy efficiency measures within the building, and also a review of our equipment to see if anything could be done to make us more energy efficient.”

Ashfield Springs also received website support from NTU: *“The Enterprising Ashfield project supported us to do a big website update, including support to try and boost us up the SEO rankings by improving the terminology we use on the website. The website also didn’t have a click through option to send enquiries, but the NTU support has allowed us to add that function.”*

The website work has only just been completed, and the team are planning a six-month review to assess what the impacts of the website improvements have been, but initial feedback of SEO rankings shows that for some internet searches they are now ranking first or second on the search engines, when previously they were third or fourth. The business is also now getting enquiries directly from the website.

Ashfield Springs also received wider marketing support from the programme: *“We haven’t had a dedicated marketing plan before – it was more of scatter gun approach. The NTU team supported us to develop a marketing strategy that we are now starting to implement. It specifically targets a couple of specific sectors, but also acts as a general framework that we can use across other industries. The plan has a really great framework for the marketing that we should be able to easily deliver.”*

Asked whether he would recommend the support from the project, Luke told us: *“I’d definitely come to the university again for help – and I’d 100% take part in a similar programme again – especially if it was locally focused like the Ashfield project and offered such a broad range of support.”*

8E.5 Consultation with academic delivery team on the R,D&I project



Roisin Kirby - Business consultant and part-time lecturer in marketing for Nottingham Business School.

Through the Research, Development, and Innovation strand of the Enterprising Project, Roisin has been advising Ashfield businesses on marketing strategy and planning, digital marketing and brand development. To date she has supported, or is in the process of supporting, twelve businesses.

Roisin is working with:

- **An engineering consultancy firm** - to develop their marketing plan, improve their brand positioning, and better understand the market segmentation.
- **A manufacturing company** - to understand potential growth areas for the business and how to stand out from their competitors.
- **A group of local schools** - who were struggling to communicate effectively with parents to create a communication plan.
- **Two local community venues** - to reinvent themselves, ensuring long-term sustainability. Roisin has supported them to better understand their purpose, to define their target audiences and customer offer, to develop online booking systems, to identify new income generation opportunities, and to review their systems and processes.
- **A manufacturing company** - to undertake a market assessment exercise and competitor review to find a more profitable sales market for their business. The business had been focusing on a high-volume, low profit model but Roisin was able to identify new markets that were less price-sensitive. She created a marketing strategy and a launch plan for the new venture.

Sherwood Observatory - Funding from the Enterprising Ashfield project allowed Roisin to provide intensive support to Sherwood Observatory. The Observatory is project funded by the Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield Towns Fund that saw the creation of a 59-seater Planetarium with an immersive 10-meter diameter screen, an exhibition hall, a science discovery centre, café, classrooms, and conference rooms. Initially a volunteer led organisation, the Observatory had limited staff capacity. Roisin acted as their marketing manager for a year - she developed their marketing strategy and plan, set up their online ticketing system, supported them to choose a website supplier, wrote much of their marketing / website copy, ran their social media campaigns, and set up their systems and processes. As the support available from the project came to a close, Roisin also helped the team at the Observatory to recruit their permanent marketing manager. She subsequently provided mentoring support to the new recruit to ensure that they were set up for success.

Impact - Asked whether the support from Enterprising Ashfield has had an impact for businesses who have been supported, Roisin us: *"Absolutely, one business owner was worn out when we first met him - he was working so hard and not really taking home an income. The transformation post-project has been amazing – the positivity he has now, and his energy and enthusiasm, is just remarkable."*

"There are definitely firms that we have supported through Enterprising Ashfield that could have gone under. Some of the businesses I worked with were really in a dark place. The support from the project has helped businesses grow in the right way, understand how to focus, and realise they don't have to be all things to all people - to be clear on their offer for the future."

Lessons Learnt - In terms of lessons learnt for future projects, Roisin told us: *"The most successful interventions have been where we have built in some sort of implementation support alongside the policy and strategy advice. We found that where the support was falling down initially was not having someone within the business with the time and ability to put the plans we had created into action – we started factoring this into subsequent projects – showing businesses how to do it in practice and ensuring a smooth hand over so that they are self-sufficient going forwards."*

8F.0 Graduate Talent Programme

This section sets out the impacts felt by businesses making use of the graduate talent support. 10 businesses have completed the survey with regard to this support.

8F.1 Impacts

Businesses were asked whether recruiting the graduate/s had brought any positive impacts. Comments included:

- *“Yes, all positive from the graduate, helped us to organise and have a proper vision.”*
- *“Yes, we were able to recruit confidently and felt supported through the process. We now have a few options for exploring more graduates through different NTU schemes once the Enterprise Ashfield scheme has finished.”*
- *“Our graduate has settled in very well, is learning quickly, and now a key part of our team.”*
- *“Yes allowed us to mentor and coach new staff. It allowed us to employ the staff earlier so they were up to speed for the new academic year.”*
- *“Fresh skills, new ideas.”*
- *“Yes, the recruitment is proving a very positive one. The graduate is bringing a lot to school and this is improving the offer we can give to the children in our care.”*
- *“Hiring the graduate has had a positive impact on outcomes for the children in our academy.”*

8F.2 The counterfactual

Businesses were asked whether they thought they would have recruited the graduates without the support from the team.

Enterprising Ashfield: Graduate Placements and Talent Grant: The counterfactual	Yes	No	Some of them	Maybe	Not sure
Would you have offered this placement/s without the Talent Grant and support from the NTU team?	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

8F.3 Change in perception

Businesses were asked whether the support that they have received has changed their perception of recruiting graduates. We can see that the project has had a significant impact in terms of the perceptions of recruiting graduates.

Enterprising Ashfield: Graduate placements and Talent Grant: Change in perception of university support	More likely to recruit	Less likely to recruit	No change	Not applicable
Has your involvement with the project changed your perception of recruiting or employing graduates	7 (70%)	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

8F.4 Sector of graduate roles

The table shows the number of graduate roles which were recruited into the region by sector.

Role types by graduates placed

Role types	Graduates placed
Engineering (Mechanical, Electrical, Manufacturing)	16
Education	14
Marketing and Communications	8
Data, Digital & IT	7
Business, Finance & HR	6
Creative, Design	5
Architecture, Construction & Civil Engineering	5
Operations & Supply Chain	4
Science, Chemistry & Technical R&D	3
Charity & Community	1
Total	69

Source: Employability Team, March 2026. Note: Marketing roles, IT and data roles placed were not within marketing agencies/ IT businesses, but positions within engineering-related organisations.

The roles that the project placed graduates into include: Project, Portfolio and Programme Analyst, Teacher, Pathways Advisor, Graduate Digital Transformation Co-Ordinator, Design Engineer, CAD Designer, UAV Operator / Engineering Surveyor, Design Assistant, Architectural Assistant, Electronics Engineering Intern, Management Accountant, Continuous Improvement and Operational Excellence Intern, Design Engineer, Graduate Civil Engineer, Design Intern, Design Graduate, English Lead, Marketing & Sustainability Coordinator Development Chemist, Chemist, Manufacturing Improvement Lead, Design and Marketing Executive Junior, Mechanical Engineer, Marketing Communication Manager, Buyer, Design Engineer Class Teacher, Employment Specialist, Graduate Sales & Marketing Representative, Class Teacher, Graduate Recruitment Consultant, Glad Rags Charity Shop Manager, Junior Product & Brand Designer, Design Placement, Graduate IT Business Analyst/Project Coordinator, Business and Marketing Executive, Supply Chain Analyst, Graduate Engineer, Graduate Marketing Executive, Projects Co-Ordinator, Foundation Stage 1 – Teacher, Assistant Quantity Surveyor, Class Teacher, EHV Cable Design Engineer, Project Manager, Trainee Education Recruitment Consultant, Design Assistant, Graduate Engineer, Schools Enrichment Coordinator, Graduate Engineer, Classroom Teacher, Part time class teacher, Curriculum Manager, Graduate Data Analyst, Marketing Executive, Debt Adviser, Graduate Partnerships Executive, Quality Assurance Technician, Newstart Activities and Theatre Programme Lead, Electrical Engineering (Manufacturing) Intern, Data Scientist, Design Engineer, Data and Systems Executive, Graduate EHV Cable Design Engineer, Associate Business Consultant, NPI Engineer, Speech and Language Therapist, HR Business Partner, Marketing Executive.

8F.4 Case Studies

Our Centre - Based in Kirkby-in-Ashfield, the Our Centre charity employs 12 people. They deliver a range of projects that address the needs of the local community.

Our Centre has received a wide range of support from the Enterprising Ashfield Project – they received funding towards a placement in their charity shop *“He was brilliant, he was amazing, he sorted out the shop out and he supported the volunteers”* and support from a group of students who developed the charity website and social media accounts *“It was lovely having the young people around, and it brought us into the present day – with facebook etc”*. The charity are also being supported with the development of a database that will increase efficiency, and for the marketing of a new furniture project initiative. Asked whether they would recommend the support they said – *“I’d say contact them immediately, the amount of things they can do is massive.”*



Svella Connect - Svella Connect operate across the telecoms, digital infrastructure, utility, and energy sectors. They received support from Enterprising Ashfield to take on a graduate.

Chris Parker, Recruitment Business Partner at Svella Connect told us: *“At first, I was sceptical about*

the project as it seemed too good to be true, but after speaking with the team they put my mind at ease and showed us that the project was something not to miss out on. I was originally hoping to create brand awareness and working relationships - I never thought that we would secure a placement and then receive the grant, so the project exceeded my expectations. I could not speak highly enough of the programme as everyone involved was informative and helpful with any questions that I had, and the process was always straightforward.”

“We had the challenge of not being directly involved with local colleges and universities, but since being a part of this project we have managed to attend a lot more local careers events to speak with future possible employees and make students aware of the telecommunications industry. The project has had a positive impact by providing a talented and knowledgeable individual in our IT department who is still employed with Svella Connect and progressing well. I am hoping we will be able to make more placements like this going forward using the project.”

When asked if he would recommend Enterprising Ashfield, Chris told us: *“Certainly, I think this project is a must for any business no matter their size.”*

8G Bespoke Courses

In addition to courses for individuals, the skills team also delivered bespoke training courses for local businesses. Nine businesses have responded to the survey.

8G.1 The counterfactual

Whilst based on a small sample size, the data suggests that much of the training would not have taken place without the support the project.

Enterprising Ashfield: Bespoke staff training – providing training	Yes	No	Not sure
Would you have provided this training for your staff had it not been provided free of charge from the Enterprising Ashfield project?	1 (11%)	5 (56%)	3 (33%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

8G.2 Changing perceptions

Whilst based on a relatively small sample size, the data suggests that the support has had a significant impact on the businesses' perception of providing staff training.

Enterprising Ashfield: Bespoke staff training – providing training	More likely to provide	Less likely to provide	No change
Has your involvement with NTU changed your perception of providing staff training?	6 (67%)	0 (0%)	3 (33%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

8G.3 Impacts

Businesses were asked how the staff training benefited their business, and what the business impacts might be for the future. Comments included:

- “It was great to get people together and focus on learning new skills that they can then apply in the workplace and also feel more confident about working with data.”
- “As a local charity raising all our own funds we would not have either the capacity or the funds to allow staff to go on these courses. The feedback from staff was they thought the courses were amazing and they felt like we were investing in their future.”
- “Our academy has high levels of deprivation and as a consequence we have a high level of pupils with social and emotional mental health needs. We used the bespoke training to train staff on Thrive (social and emotional intervention package). We also tapped into the apprenticeship levy to train staff to be lead practitioners in the academy. We were able to train the whole staff on the approach and principles in order to embed the program. Without this support we would not have been able to afford the training/package. Already the Thrive Approach has had a profound impact on our academy - attendance has improved, children's well-being has improved. As a consequence of this professional development, overall academy attendance has increased, behaviour has improved across the academy (staff well-being has improved) and pupils are making better academic progress.”



Yusen Logistics UK Ltd - NTU developed a short format Business Intelligence course for this local logistics company, tailoring the standard course content so that it matched the needs of the business.

They told us: *“We put 35 people through a short format Business Intelligence course which consisted of four modules. NTU were able to adjust the content to match our specific requirements and deliver it in a hybrid format -2 days on campus, 2 days remote - that suited us. Everyone I have dealt with throughout this engagement from both Ashfield and NTU have been great, very helpful and supportive at all times.”*

Romo Group - NTU worked with The Romo Group to develop a bespoke ITIL 4 course for its IT team, ensuring all staff operated with a shared level of knowledge to enhance IT systems and processes. Business Growth Support, Graduate Talent Grant, Innovation and Research and Development Support.



The Enterprising Ashfield team collaborated with academic colleagues from NTU's School of Science and Technology to assess business needs and design a tailored training solution. Additionally, the Enterprising Ashfield team worked with The Romo Group and the British International Freight Association to deliver Import and Export training in customs procedures, supporting effective global trade.

Following this, a further need was identified for 'Rules of Origin' training with The Chamber of Commerce, all funded through the Towns Fund. Beyond technical training, NTU supported The Romo Group in leadership and management development, delivering courses in Mental Health First Aid and Insights Profiling for team development.

The team at Romo reported: *“The EA team have been exceptionally helpful and reassuring and took the time to thoroughly understand our business needs. A large group of Romo staff members have attended the funded courses, and we extend our gratitude to Enterprising Ashfield for their unwavering support. These courses have not only solidified our employees' knowledge but also empowered them to confidently share their expertise with the wider team. We would like to extend a special thank you to Aimee and the entire Skills team for their invaluable help and guidance.”*

Whitemeadow Furniture - *“Whitemeadow Furniture have utilised the free courses available to upskill our employees. We have sent over 80 employees on a range of courses. We have restarted our Wellbeing Champions programme thanks to the Mental Health First Aid and Neurodiversity courses. These course leaders were so knowledgeable, and the trainers were highly skilled in their programmes.”*



9.0 Testimonials

Testimonials were captured during the evaluation. A selection is included below.

“I recently completed the Social Media Marketing course at NTU and couldn’t recommend it highly enough. Debbie Clark is a fantastic tutor - she structured each lesson clearly, explained the learning outcomes from the start, taught the content in a really engaging way, and always took the time to evaluate the learning at the end. She was friendly, helpful, and incredibly encouraging throughout, creating a supportive and informative learning environment. I finished the course feeling much more confident in my knowledge and skills. I would 100% recommend this course to anyone looking to develop their personal skillset and knowledge, and it’s particularly valuable if you run a small business and want to boost your marketing impact.” **Tropic Skincare with Kellymarie. Support Received - Short Course, Social Media Marketing**

“If you’re thinking of a new business this is a brilliant programme. The short courses are excellent with a lot of useful learning, attend as many as you can, you will not be disappointed.” **Ian Sawyer, Driving Instructor. Support Received - HeadStart Programme and Short Courses**

“The EA team have been exceptionally helpful and reassuring, and took the time to thoroughly understand our business needs. A large group of Romo staff members have attended the funded courses, and we extend our gratitude to Enterprising Ashfield for their unwavering support. These courses have not only solidified our employees’ knowledge but also empowered them to confidently share their expertise with the wider team. We would like to extend a special thank you to Aimee and the entire Skills team for their invaluable help and guidance.” **Hope Christian, HR Coordinator, The Romo Group. Support Received - Bespoke Training for Staff, Business Growth Support, Graduate Talent Grant, Innovation, Research and Development Support**

“I learnt many new important factors about starting, running and developing a business. I met new enthusiastic entrepreneurs in Ashfield and the support I received during the course and after the course from Richard was wonderful. I was living in a women’s refuge when I joined the course - now I’m all set to start my floral business.” **Tulip and Peony Floristry. Support Received - HeadStart Programme**

“Thank You Adrian! All of the support we have received has made a massive impact on our service and marketing, serving our community and improving aspects of our business that really make it feel like a new level of service. Your support has been wonderful, thank you so so much!!!! From all of us at OD1 it’s such a massive privilege. Thank you for helping us.” **Rob Huskinson, Open Door 1 Community Adult Day Service. Support Received - Business Growth Support**

“Collaborating with NTU through the Enterprising Ashfield project has enabled Longwood to enhance our interactions with clients. It has also ensured that we are providing relevant products and services to both our current and potential clients. The courses have been incredibly valuable, offering us a much-needed opportunity to step away from client delivery for a few hours each week and focus on our own business needs and aspirations. Enterprising Ashfield is a vital resource for any business in the Ashfield area. It connects us to world class research knowledge and expertise at the university and provides opportunities to grow, learn and connect.” **Longwood Maven. Support Received - Short Courses, Apprenticeship Support, Business Growth Support**

“Enterprising Ashfield turned ambition into action. We arrived with a head full of ideas and not enough structure; we left with a sharper strategy, clearer messaging, and the confidence to scale Mindful Sprouts CIC. The blend of NTU expertise, hands-on workshops, and kind accountability meant we could apply learning the same day - no fluff, just practical tools that moved us forward. What stood out most was the care; the team met us where we were, challenged us thoughtfully, and connected us with people who genuinely want local ventures to thrive. As a result, we tightened our plan, improved our communications, and unlocked new partnerships. It’s rare to find support that is free, first-class, and human.” **Carl Ellis, Mindful Sprouts CIC. Support Received - Short Courses, HeadStart Programme, Business Growth Support**

“Working with Enterprising Ashfield and Nottingham Trent University has been a genuinely positive experience. Their business support has been invaluable in helping us grow, offering both practical guidance and encouragement at the right times. Adrian and Jesse, in particular, have been real assets to the programme. Their knowledge, approachability, and willingness to go the extra mile make a huge difference. They understand the challenges businesses face and provide tailored advice that helps turn ideas into real growth. I’d highly recommend the support offered through Enterprising Ashfield and NTU to any business looking to develop, innovate, or simply gain clarity on the next steps. It’s not just advice; they genuinely invest in helping you succeed.” **Gavin Hawkins, SENSible SENCO CiC. Support Received - Graduate Talent Grant, Business Growth Support, Short Courses.**

“Ashfield is a place full of innovative people. This project has encouraged people to think about what they are capable of. It has given so many people the opportunity to shine.” **Sarah Waring, Dream with Colour - Storytelling and Creative Writing. Support Received - HeadStart Programme and Short Courses**

“I have no hesitation in recommending engagement with Enterprise Ashfield! The ability to consult with business experts who can take a truly impartial view of business operations and focus on resolutions for critical business problems is beyond value!” **Mark Lees, Larwood Park Limited. Support Received - Innovation, Research and Development Support, Business Growth Support, Bespoke Training for Staff**

“I just wanted to pass on my personal thanks for the work that you have been undertaking on behalf of Larwood Park Sports Club / Ashfield Rugby Club. The quality of support you have provided is excellent and the follow-up offer of help will be excellent, to support the club to deliver their plans. The strategic guidance and research has been excellent and the plans identified, will undoubtedly lead to long term gains, both off and on the field. Many thanks and I look forward to continuing to work together.” **Steve Smith, Business Operations Manager. Support Received - Innovation, Research and Development Support, Business Growth Support, Bespoke Training for Staff**

“It gave me the push to create a business that I always wanted to do, but the financial side of it always put me off as it felt like such a big commitment. The programme helped me take that plunge without the financial worry as much and it was very much worth it. The networking events and group chat is also brilliant to meet and talk with other like-minded individuals, helping along every step of the journey.” **William Streeter, Silurian Studios, HeadStart Support**

10.0 Management, Governance, Delivery, and Quality

This section sets out the findings from the staff and beneficiary consultation with regard to the management, governance, delivery approach and quality of support, for the Enterprising Ashfield project. It also identifies any lessons learnt and suggestions for delivery of future projects.

10.1 Beneficiary consultation

10.1.1 New connections with NTU

Respondents were asked whether they had received support from NTU before. 62% of those who completed the evaluation survey told us that they have never been involved with, undertaken any training at, or supported by NTU before.

10.1.2 Recommending the support

Beneficiaries completing the survey were asked whether they would recommend the support on offer. With 88% saying that they would, we can see that the project was considered high quality.

Enterprising Ashfield: Recommending Support	Yes	Maybe	Partially	No	Too early to say
Would you recommend the support you received from Enterprising Ashfield project to others?	226 (88%)	12 (5%)	8 (3%)	3 (1%)	9 (3%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026

Many positive comments were received about the quality and delivery of the support on offer, including:

- *“Think it’s great what you’re doing. A great scheme”*
- *“Just amazing to attend - keep up the amazing work”*
- *“Glad to see the support in the local area”*
- *“We interact with Enterprising Ashfield for many aspects and have always found everything great”*
- *“I was very well supported especially with the networking events”*
- *“Not only would I recommend it, I already do. I’ve recently been attending another course with Enterprising Ashfield and have recommended it to people on that course too”*
- *“Big Thank you to Enterprising Ashfield funded by Ashfield District Council and Nottingham Trent University for all their support with our grants, courses, faith and general promotion, mentoring and help! Cannot shout them out enough!”*
- *“The training provided was fantastic. It was great to have a university lecturer who was such a skilled teacher. This was the best training I have received on management skills, with comprehensive coverage and plenty of examples and facts and figures, excellent handouts”*

a) Recommending the support – by strand

The table below sets out whether the beneficiaries would recommend the support that they received split by strand. (note, some may have received multiple strands of support)

Enrolment date	Overall
Skills/ Learners	154 (87%)
HeadStarters	63 (95%)
Established businesses	74 (95%)

Source: Evaluation Survey, September 2026. Respondents who answered yes.

10.2 Lessons learnt, challenges, and opportunities for the future

A summary of the lessons learnt/ opportunities for future projects is shown below, the more operational comments have been shared directly with the project manager.

Opportunities, delivery challenges, and lessons learnt

Theme		Comments	Lessons learnt for future projects
Project initiation	Project delays	The project got off to a slow start. Delays in contracting, recruiting challenges, the extra time needed to understand the requirements of a new funding programme, and the need to set up new processes/ systems, all reduced the anticipated delivery phase of the project.	Ensure sufficient time is factored into the set-up phase for all future projects. Profile outputs to reflect a slow start.
Staffing	Line management	The project manager did not have line management responsibilities for the whole project team - this reduced their control / oversight over some members of staff.	Where possible, team members should report to the project manager directly.
	Line management	The staff team were recruited in advance of the project manager, giving the project manager limited say in the make-up of the delivery team.	Where possible, the project manager should be recruited in advance of the rest of the delivery team.
	Staff turnover	There was a relatively high turnover of staff in the early years of the project within NTU, including: a change in staff for the R,D&I strand, a change in staff working on the finances of the project, three changes in terms of the staff members working on the talent strand, and four different staff involved in the administration of the project. Changes in staff are not unusual with short-term projects, as those on temporary/ short term contracts often leave in favour of more permanent roles. This said, staffing has been much more stable over the last two years, and the team believe this stability is reflected in the higher outputs and impacts achieved during this period.	Use of permanent staff where possible. Where this is not possible then succession planning and clear hand-overs should be built into future projects.
	Shadowing	It was suggested that it would have been useful if colleagues shadowed other strands/ team members on occasion. This would have been useful in terms of getting an understanding of what's offered and when to cross-refer, how each strand operates and good practice etc.	Opportunities for shadowing considered for future projects – not just for the delivery teams, but also for support/ admin staff to support career development.
	Finance staffing	It was noted that the team member who was responsible for the project finances sat remotely from the team. This meant that they sometimes were a little 'out-of-the-loop' in terms of activity.	It would be useful to have the finance staff sitting alongside/ in the office with the project manager on a regular basis.
	Relationship building	The project relies heavily on teamwork/ communication between team members, but the team have never really been in the habit of spending time together beyond the monthly team meetings - partly because most strands sit in teams outside of KE.	For future projects the whole team could have a workday together every two weeks (or similar).
Admin/ reporting	Paperwork	The paperwork requirements were much less onerous than for ERDF/ ESF programmes – the team felt that overall, the forms were easy to complete and the process was streamlined.	N/A
	Data collection	As the funding stream was new, and the team were new to the requirements, there was a risk that the team 'over-collected' data as they came from an ERDF/ ESF background.	It would be useful to have a clear steer from the outset in terms of what data would need to be reported on/ what is needed by the managing agent.
	Meetings	Monthly team meetings tended to focus on what outputs had been achieved, rather than planning for the future.	Team meetings used as a forum for more team discussion or short workshops around strategy & delivery focus e.g. engagement, legacy, delivery techniques, best practice.
	Guidance	The team reported that it had been useful having the CRM guidelines written down, and that it would have been useful to have more written guidelines for other aspects of the programme (e.g. purchasing). This would make it easier as new staff join a project.	Consider developing a project handbook and a guide to success for future projects. Set-up guidance and templates across all university projects.
	CRM	Better use of the CRM system would assist each strand when approaching new leads - it was noted that the CRM system is very antiquated and doesn't link well with Outlook / appointments and converting these to records / claimable. Whilst this is an NTU issue rather than an Enterprising Ashfield issue, it has impacted the project – it was noted that the limitations of the CRM system mean there had been a lot more duplication of admin and there is a high risk for human error when information is replicated in various databases.	Lobby within NTU for improvements to the CRM system to make it more fit for purpose for delivering external projects.
	Chasing paperwork	It was noted that businesses and individuals have to be repeatedly chased for paperwork, each chase has to be logged and the email saved as evidence. This is a very time-consuming process.	Factor sufficient admin support into future projects to deal with these issues.
Attracting participants	Business development	It was noted that the team have developed an integrated approach to business development, with delivery teams now 'cross-selling' - but it was agreed that it took a while to reach this point.	Consider a centralised business development person(s) rather than each strand doing their own.
	Competition	It was noted that having output targets for each strand can lead to competition.	Promote collaboration in terms of delivering outputs.
	Attracting participants	The project has had to develop a new pipeline of participants as NTU had limited existing presence in terms of business support provision/ training delivery in the Ashfield area. It took a while for the message to get out about the new project and what it could offer. This is reflected in the participation numbers, which started off low, but have grown steadily year-on-year.	Factor a slow start into output projections. And ensure sufficient marketing budget.
	Unknown market	It was noted that some of the output targets had been challenging to achieve and had to be revised. This was partly as pre-project, the university had limited experience of delivering projects in Ashfield and had nothing to benchmark against.	For future projects, the bid development team could create a list of potential businesses who could be targeted. This would give a better idea of market potential, and give the team a list of businesses to target on day one of delivery.
	Signposting/ progression	The team were keen to ensure that businesses and individuals who took part in the project received the best support possible support, whether this was within the project or from the wider NTU offer. The team have maximised all opportunities to signpost to other support on offer from NTU - there have been examples of businesses using the NTU free legal support service, referrals have been made to student projects, individuals have been signposted to the NTU Women in Leadership Programmes, and Service Level Agreements setting out long-term collaborations between businesses and NTU (KPIs) are in the process of being developed.	Ensure that these internal collaboration opportunities are factored into, and budgeted for, in future projects.

	Other competitor projects	A number of projects were launched during the delivery phase of the Enterprising Ashfield scheme that did add an element of competition and potentially impacted on the outputs that could be achieved – e.g., during the delivery phase the Chamber of Commerce began delivering a skills/ training programme in the area, and ADC launched a business grants programme.	The team were careful not to duplicate provision and have found ways to complement these schemes, however more detailed planning/ collaboration with any emerging projects will help to alleviate any conflicts/ competition.
	Geography	The project was only open to those living / working in the Towns Fund area. Whilst the rationale for this was clear, it was suggested that it would have been easier for the delivery team had the project been delivered across the whole district.	It was suggested that the enforced boundaries were easier to manage for the capital programmes funded through the Towns Fund.
	Changing business priorities	The team noted that in many instances they had spent a significant number of hours with businesses, providing advice/ support, only for the businesses priorities to change and the business decide not to progress with their involvement. Whilst this is completely understandable from the business perspective, it is very time consuming for the project staff team.	There is currently no way of claiming/ reporting this work as a formal output – future projects could investigate how this work can be reported against outputs.
	Visibility	Some team members felt that the project would have benefitted from having a physical base within the Towns Fund area. The team did investigate the potential of using the newly refurbished High Pavement House in Sutton, but due to delays outside of the control of NTU this was not able to be progressed.	Consider a permanent base in the area for future projects – somewhere central – on a bus route.
	Managing expectations	The team reported that they have spent a significant amount of time managing expectations as to what can be supported through the project, with the biggest challenge being that people expect the project to be able to support them with large financial grants. It has been challenging to get the message across, and this has taken up valuable staff time.	Ensure clear messaging to businesses from the outset.
	Profile	It was suggested that more could have been done at the start of the delivery phase to raise the profile of the project within the university. However, it was felt that by the time the project came to a close, it was being recognised for the good work it was doing.	Increased profile raising within the university of any new projects from the outset. This could be achieved through celebrating the businesses, e.g. business of the month.
Graduate Talent Grants	Type of support	Some businesses reported that they weren't big enough to make use of the graduate scheme or were not prepared to take the risk of recruiting in a challenging business environment.	Offer short term, fully funded placements, with graduates employed by NTU. This would allow smaller businesses, and those with no experience of employing graduates, to benefit, reducing the red tape, and opening their eyes to the benefits of using student and graduate talent.
	Graduate training	None of the graduates placed into businesses took advantage of the free courses offered by the project. This was considered a missed opportunity by the project team.	Include a training requirement for the funded graduates, to ensure they continue to develop their knowledge.
Skills	Training courses	Many courses began at 10 am which worked well for school drop offs, but they often finished at 4.30pm which can cause childcare problems.	Align courses with the school timetable to ensure accessibility.
	Accreditation	It was noted that participants appreciated receiving certificates and accreditations.	Consider more accredited courses. Although it was noted that achieving accreditation can slow down the process of developing new courses and reduces responsiveness.
	Qualification	It was noted that one of the project outcomes was 'Increased number of the population holding a qualification equal to NVQ4+', but the project did not directly deliver against this.	Consider more higher-level courses in future/ assess demand for these courses.
	Alignment	Many of those taking part in the business growth support and HeadStart programmes made use of the skills training. This cross-referral was seen as a success of the programme.	Continue to ensure cross referral in future projects.
	Drop-outs	There were high numbers of dropouts for the skills programme. Learners often signed up to multiple courses, often six-months in advance, but then failed to attend.	Send out a calendar invite at enrolment and then reminders to participants in advance. Reduce the time between sign up and course delivery.
HeadStart	Handholding	A lot of handholding was needed by many of the HeadStart participants. Many struggled with mental health problems, additional challenges, lack of access to IT, no access to printers, lack of confidence with writing etc.	The team introduced a new team member to do more of the hand holding with the hard-to-reach clients – suggest this is built into future projects from the very start.
Research, Development And Innovation	Academic engagement	The team found it challenging to get academics engaged in the project due to timing/ availability/ financial reward. The academic schedules are agreed a year in advance – this makes it difficult to be responsive to project work.	The project ended up using some part-time academics who had more time available. Future projects need to factor in the long lead-times to academic involvement.
	Confidentiality	A number of the businesses who received support from the project were working on confidential/ highly commercially sensitive projects, with the NTU team often required to sign non-disclosure agreements (NDAs). This has made it hard to shout about some of the successes of the project/ use them to promote to/ attract new participants.	Using interviews with academics to capture information, ensuring that it is general and not too specific to any one business.
Business Growth Support	Support	The businesses supported were often at different stages of their journey/ were working in different sectors, meaning that attendance at workshops could be from a wide range of businesses with different needs.	It was suggested that grouping the attendees by their levels of experience, size or by sector would enable better contributions for shared learning and conversations.

10.3 Marketing

Overall, the marketing for the project, particularly in more recent years, has been considered very successful by the project team.

Some comments from the delivery team included:

- *“The marketing has been brilliant – it helps that we had a good budget, but I’ve never known another project that was able to saturate the whole area – I mean 70,000 flyers – it’s just been amazing, and it’s reaped its reward...really good”*
- *“We had a good budget and a small target area, that made it easier to flood the area with marketing”*
- *“We had a sustained and targeted approach... we kept up a presence in the area”*
- *“I think the ‘old school’ approach – fliers, door drops, radio etc. really worked well for the target audience”*

10.3.1 The approach

The marketing used the following approach:

- **Traditional marketing** - An emphasis on traditional marketing including leaflet drops in the area, articles in local newspapers, posters, radio campaigns, adverts in bus shelters, telephoning around businesses etc. The project did a direct mailout of hard copy leaflets to over 35,000 people in the area. The team also drove around the local area, delivering leaflets and directly approaching businesses.
- **Events** - The team made a concerted effort to attend local community events to raise awareness of the project in the area.
- **Sponsorship** - The team sponsored local business awards to raise their profile.
- **Online marketing** - The team ran an extensive online campaign, setting up social media profiles, and creating content such as videos and case studies.
- **TV** - The team recorded episodes for Mansfield 103 TV to promote the project and celebrate the successes of the businesses taking part.
- **Facebook** - The project had over 400 followers on Facebook, reached over 324,900 accounts (including both organic and paid posts), achieved over 2.5 million impressions, and had 7,400 unique visits to the page.
- **LinkedIn** - The project had over 150 followers on LinkedIn and reached over 54,000 impressions (42,000 of which from paid posts).

11.0 External Partnerships and Alignment

The table below sets out the delivery partnerships identified for the project in the Enterprising Ashfield business case. It then assesses how successful these partnerships have been, and any lessons that could be implemented for future projects.

Partner	Partnership role – as identified in the EA business case	How successful has this been and suggestions for the final phase of the project
MakeUK	Strategic partner, helping NTU promote the project to their members.	NTU attended MakeUK meetings and referred businesses to MakeUK for support. It was noted that the relationship tended to be NTU referring towards MakeUK rather than vice versa.
Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)/ Confederation of British Industry (CBI)/ East Midlands Chamber/ FSB	Strategic partner, helping NTU promote the project to their members.	Enterprising Ashfield promoted the FSB/ CBI to the businesses that they worked with. It was noted that the relationship tended to be NTU referring towards FSB/ CBI rather than vice versa.
Vision West Nottinghamshire College (VWNC)	VWNC is a strategic partner, with a well-established presence in the area.	The Enterprising Ashfield team delivered bespoke courses for college students looking to start businesses, and the skills team utilised VWNC tutors to deliver bespoke courses through the project.
The Mansfield Chad	Strategic partner, helping NTU promote the project to their readers.	The team worked closely with the Mansfield Chad, sponsoring their business awards for three years. It was noted that The Chad had been supportive and shared positive news stories.
Mansfield & Ashfield Business Network	Strategic partner, helping NTU promote the project to their members.	An NTU director currently sits on the board, and the Enterprising Ashfield project manager sat on the sub-board. Enterprising Ashfield helped the network by putting on a series of events for the network using their experts and also by sponsoring their business awards.

11.1 Alignments with other Towns Fund projects

Whilst there was no interdependency with other Towns Fund projects, the Enterprising Ashfield Business case set out some potential opportunities for working with other Towns Fund projects to maximise the benefits that could be achieved.

The team felt that there were potentially more links that could have been developed with other Towns Fund projects over the duration of the project. It was suggested that for future schemes, this type of networking/ collaboration could be facilitated/ encouraged by a third party.

Some links with other Towns Fund projects have been made including with the Automated Distribution and Manufacturing Centre, and with Sherwood Observatory.



Sherwood Observatory

Sherwood Observatory in Sutton-in-Ashfield reopened in November 2024 after a £6.8m transformation. Funding was secured from the Ashfield District Council Towns Fund, along with additional contributions including from The Garfield Weston Foundation, Foyle Foundation, Wolfson Foundation, and National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The new world-class centre has built on the existing facility, transforming what used to be a disused underground Victorian reservoir into a 59-seater Planetarium with an immersive 10-meter diameter screen, an exhibition hall, a science discovery centre, café, classrooms, and conference rooms. Initial expectations projected that the new facility would help the team to grow visitor numbers at the site from 2,800 per year to around 20,000.

Nottingham Trent University supported the Sherwood Observatory through the Research, Innovation and Development strand of the Enterprising Ashfield project, linking them with experts providing; marketing and website support, guidance on the development of procedures and policies, support with the launch of the new facility, and help to develop the customer experience.

Roisin Kirby, who delivered much of the support on behalf of NTU said: *“The Enterprising Ashfield funding allowed Sherwood Observatory to access marketing expertise that they didn’t have themselves. Being mainly a volunteer run organisation, Enterprising Ashfield allowed them to get that professional marketing support. Schemes like this are really important to support businesses that are growing or new – they give access to that professional support that they otherwise wouldn’t have access to.”*

Dr. Steve Wallace, Chairman of Sherwood Observatory said: *“We really needed some marketing expertise, both to help us to develop the new website, and also to set-up the ticketing system. When we first started out on this we didn’t know anything about marketing. Getting that expertise in from the Enterprising Ashfield programme was what we needed to get us up and running - it meant we hit the ground running on day one of opening. We built the business plan on 20,000 people a year, but with all the marketing effort that has gone into this - with Roisin (NTU) and the rest of the team, at the end of our first year of operation, we’ve actually achieved 36,000 visitors instead of 20,000 visitors.”*



Automated Distribution & Manufacturing Centre (ADMC)

The ADMC will be a 3,500m² purpose built, multifunctional, automation centre. It will become a catalyst for innovation, designed to help businesses of all sizes harness the power of automation to boost productivity, streamline operations, and enhance competitiveness.

The ADMC will work with businesses to create and implement bespoke automation strategies and solutions that improve productivity and enable prosperity and growth.

The Enterprising Ashfield Team supported this Towns Fund project. The NTU Knowledge Exchange Director sits on the ADMC board, and NTU is supporting the project via academic staff and by helping to support the development of a pipeline of opportunities.

11.2 Wider Impact in Ashfield: Spend multipliers

The project has also supported the local area in terms of its spending - the project has spent a significant proportion of its budget locally.

Evidence of this can be seen when we analyse how much of the Towns Fund allocation has been spent at local venues. The Enterprising Ashfield team used these spaces to host training courses, workshops and 1:1 sessions with businesses.

Room hire/ refreshment costs – budget spent in the Towns Fund area	Project spend
Inspire Libraries	£ 2,340
Portland College	£ 9,396
Summit Centre	£ 61,825

Enterprising Ashfield - Spend tracker spreadsheet, September 2026 (figures exclude VAT)

Over £70,000 has been spent in these local venues (excluding VAT) on room hire/ catering costs alone - this spend is likely to have supported employment within these facilities and their supply chains.

12.0 Impact Summary

12.1 Summary Table - The table below summarises the impacts, outcomes, and legacy of the project and how this aligns with the Theory of Change.

Expected project outcomes/ impacts as identified in the Theory of Change		Evidence of how the outcomes and impacts as set out in the Theory of Change have been met?	
		Outputs, outcomes, impacts, and legacy	Comments and quotes from the beneficiaries supported
Skills, qualifications and employment opportunities	An increase in Ashfield residents holding skills or qualifications	280 unique courses delivered across over 150 different subjects. - Over 1,100 individuals have taken part in one or more courses. 63% of learners completing the evaluation survey reported that they would not have undertaken the training if it had not been offered through the Enterprising Ashfield project. - One in every 50 residents (18-64) took part in training through the programme. - One in every 150 residents have been supported to become 'enterprise ready'.	"I wanted to do this course to learn new skills as I'm hoping to find a job in Administration" "I have gained skills in excel and I feel that I can use it in a more professional manner" "I've taken away so much - every week I've left with loads of information" "For anyone else thinking of taking one of these courses I would say just definitely do it, don't miss the opportunity because it doesn't come along that often" "I'm so looking forward to the next courses"
	Increased population holding a qualification equal to NVQ4+	- Whilst the courses delivered were not accredited and the project was not directly delivering NVQ level 4 or equivalent courses, the project did help to change learners' perceptions of future training. 81% of learners who completed the evaluation survey told us that undertaking the course/s had encouraged them to undertake further training with NTU or other training providers.	- After the training: "I began an apprenticeship in the same field as the course" - The course: "Generated an interest in developing my knowledge further" "Looking forward to seeing what other courses are on offer" "I'll be booking onto the longer copywriting and content writing course"
	Increased employment opportunities in Ashfield	22% of those completing the evaluation survey told us that the training through Enterprising Ashfield has allowed them to secure a job after being unemployed, helped them secure a promotion or move to a higher-skilled job, or set up a business. 67% of those completing the evaluation survey told us that the training has given them new skills which will help them to further their career or increase their earning potential. 138 apprenticeships have been placed in Ashfield through the project.	"I wanted to change my job, but I needed to increase my confidence in IT skills particularly Excel. I did change roles at my current employer from frontline to admin. The training increased my confidence too - as I am in my early 50s and didn't think a change in role was possible at my age" "I really enjoyed the courses I went on and really thought they helped me in my marketing career" "The course I attended was fantastic and gave me the knowledge to progress into a better role!" "Helped enhance my knowledge and build my confidence in this area, this has led to me using techniques learnt to do a presentation and interview and secure a new role as a Communications Officer!"
	A wider pool of employable local residents	75% of those completing the evaluation survey told us that undertaking the training through Enterprising Ashfield has increased their confidence in the workplace. 61% of those completing the evaluation survey told us that undertaking the training through Enterprising Ashfield has increased their ambition for their future career. - There was a wide pool of learners taking part in the training – with the youngest learner aged just 17 and the oldest learner was 79. 67% of businesses who received bespoke training for their staff told us that they are now more likely to provide training for their staff as a result of the project. 8.5% of learners reported that they had a disability.	"Given me a fresh lease of life as it's help boost my ability to do things better and I've achieved so much!" "Picked up some new skills to add to my CV!" "I wanted to do this course so that I could increase my chances of future employment" "I enjoyed all of it! I've gained knowledge, skills and a sense of direction, as I wanted to do different aspects of this as a career option for a career change" "I did this course to improve my prospects for a promotion, and gained lots of invaluable information" "I did the course to improve my employment opportunities" "I took this course to learn new skills, and to explore a possible career change into a design industry" "These courses have been transformative for me, both personally and professionally"
Start-up support	Increased number of start-up businesses in the area	271 clients have been confirmed as Enterprise Ready – i.e. they now have the skills to start a business. 40 HeadStarters regularly attend networking events in Ashfield to meet other start-ups. - A wide mix of participants - the youngest HeadStarter is just 17 yrs and the oldest 66 yrs. - Businesses have been supported to setup in a range of sectors including: 22 beauty/ barbering/ aesthetics etc, 16 bakery's/ cafes/ pubs, 12 cleaning/ home help/ childcare, 12 veterinary/ pet care/ grooming/ walking businesses. - Start-up survival rates of businesses supported is circa 44%.	"I wouldn't probably have started my own business if I hadn't been on the HeadStart Programme" - Confidence to start my own business" "I have a business idea that I want to put into practice, I wanted to do this course to help make my brand more appealing. This course has helped me to evaluate my ideas, and now I've had a total re-direction for the better" "I decided to do this course and gain knowledge in how to communicate through other media. It has given me the confidence to start my own side firm" "Thank you so much for all the time you took to take me through this (the HeadStart programme). It will change my life, and those close to me. Thank you"
HE collaborations	More businesses engaging with the Higher Education sector	62% of those supported have never worked with, undertaken any learning at, or been supported by NTU before. 72 academic/ R,D&I collaborations have been developed.	"We had the challenge of not being directly involved with local colleges and universities but since being a part of this project we have managed to attend a lot more local careers events as a business to speak with future possible employees." "NTU is very good at informing you of other projects/possibilities that they are offering, and we are now in the process of doing the graduate internship scheme with NTU for 2024."
Graduates and graduate retention	Closer contact between graduates and the local	69 graduate placements completed. 70% of businesses who received a talent grant say that they are now more likely to recruit graduates.	"Yes, all positive from the graduate, helped us to organise and have a proper vision." "We now have a few options for exploring more graduates through different NTU schemes once the Enterprise Ashfield scheme has finished."

	business base and higher retention		“Our graduate has settled in very well, is learning quickly, and now a key part of our team.” “Yes, the recruitment is proving a very positive one. The graduate is bringing a lot to school and this is improving the offer we can give to the children in our care.” “Hiring the graduate has had a positive impact on outcomes for the children in our academy.”
Business growth and productivity	A greater number of businesses developing plans for growth, scale-up, or futureproofing, higher survival rates	60% of businesses taking part think that the support will lead to an increase in business turnover. 86% of businesses taking part in the support think that the support has/ will help their business to innovate, adapt or change in a positive way. 38% of businesses taking part in the growth programme reported that the support has enabled them to take on new staff / self-employed associates. 47% of businesses taking part in the growth programme reported that the support has increased their client base or market share. 54% of businesses taking part in the growth programme reported that the support has increased their financial sustainability/ viability of business. 60% of businesses taking part in the growth programme reported that the support has allowed them to introduce new products or offer new services.	“Enterprising Ashfield turned ambition into action. We arrived with a head full of ideas and not enough structure; we left with a sharper strategy, clearer messaging, and the confidence to scale Mindful Sprouts CIC.” Carl Ellis, Mindful Sprouts CIC. Support Received - Short Courses, HeadStart Programme, Business Growth Support “Working with Enterprising Ashfield and Nottingham Trent University has been a genuinely positive experience. Their business support has been invaluable in helping us grow, offering both practical guidance and encouragement at the right times. Adrian and Jesse, in particular, have been real assets to the programme..” Gavin Hawkins, SENSible SENCO CiC. Support Received - Graduate Talent Grant, Business Growth Support, Short Courses “I have no hesitation in recommending engagement with Enterprise Ashfield! The ability to consult with business experts who can take a truly impartial view of business operations and focus on resolutions for critical business problems is beyond value!” Mark Lees, Larwood Park Limited. Support Received - Innovation, Research and Development Support, Business Growth Support, Bespoke Training for Staff
	A more dynamic, productive & innovative business base in Ashfield	63% of those who undertook training through the project and completed the evaluation survey told us that the support has allowed them to introduce new ideas into the business the work for or run. 40 businesses are now taking part in networking events, allowing them to share ideas. 73% of businesses think that the support will lead to an increase in their productivity. 86% of all businesses supported think that the support has/ will help their business to innovate, adapt, or change in a positive way.	“We received help in sales and marketing that as put us on track to achieve our next goals with a more structured focused approach.” “Outstanding support that looked at how we market our school in the community and beyond. It really made us think about our target audiences for the product (school) and how we get our messages across.” “Sue has been instrumental in assisting our growth strategy and opening new opportunities as well as pulling in marketing support and direction.” “We benefited from having fresh eyes on our approach to marketing and our online presence. We were given advice and direction on how we could improve this. This did result in having a stronger online presence and reaching more customers within our industry.”
	Improved used of emerging & digital technologies in the area	At the outset of the Enterprising Ashfield project a strong need for digital skills emerged. To meet this need, NTU included a range of digital courses in their Enterprising Ashfield Portfolio, including: Social Media and Marketing, Administration Skills, Microsoft software, Business Intelligence and Power BI, cyber-security, video content and production, CAD,	“I learnt formulas and other excel tips to help produce better work in less time” “I’ve learnt a lot! Got a lot of information about excel and its functions, and improved my administration skills to manage my workload better” “I feel more empowered to handle my work. I have become more tech savvy and can now be more organised and efficient in my work” “I wanted to do this course to improve my photography for marketing my products in my business. I’ve gained lots of tips and advice to improve my photos” “I wanted to expand my knowledge (of 3D printing) and apply the skills to me job role. I saw the vast array of ways to produce items by different means and what is possible” “I was looking for ideas for content and how to grow my business through social media and have come away with plenty of ideas and people to partner up with, as well as the tools to use on certain platforms” “I run a small business and wanted to build my knowledge of social media to improve it. Great course content, practical knowledge and tools which will help to run the social media for the business”

Appendix 1 – Additional Course Feedback

Those taking the skills courses were asked for feedback after the training with regard to its impact on them. Comments included:

- *“Developed my knowledge”*
- *“I wanted to change my job - but needed to increase my confidence in IT skills particularly Excel. I did change roles at my current employer from frontline to admin, it increased my confidence too. I am in my early 50's and didn't think a change in role was possible at my age”*
- *“Improved my skills boosted my confidence to apply for jobs”*
- *“Overall great experience”*
- *“Confidence”*
- *“Being able to confidently submit my tax returns”*
- *“I built a website”*
- *“Meeting other business owners”*
- *“Just opened the mind to what can be achieved”*
- *“It made me confident”*
- *“Learning new skills”*
- *“It has given me the tools I need for my job”*
- *“Awareness of our carbon footprint”*
- *“Increased knowledge/ skills in other areas, widened network”*
- *“Personal knowledge and understanding”*
- *“Sincere impact professionally and personally”*
- *“Increased confidence with personal project”*
- *“Just a positive experience all round”*
- *“Introduced many new skills which are proving essential to my new business”*
- *“Upskilled key staff members”*
- *“A better understanding of myself and the confidence to advocate for myself”*
- *“More awareness”*
- *“Confidence”*
- *“Greater understanding of how to apply concepts within the workplace”*
- *“I built my own website”*
- *“Made new friends who are now customers too”*
- *“General knowledge of 3D printing”*
- *“Boosted confidence and understanding, offered insight and clarity of specifics rather than huge generalisations”*
- *“I've made new friends and amazing business connections”*
- *“Topped up my Excel knowledge”*
- *“I enjoyed the opportunity to learn”*
- *“The short courses have been well designed, insightful, and complementary to my previous knowledge and experience”*
- *“I have been able to pass some of the learning onto other team members”*
- *“Good for professional development”*
- *“Did the sales and a video editing course. They were very useful and I learnt things that I use in my everyday work now. Both tutors were fantastic experts in their field”*
- *“Keeps the mind refreshed and updated”*
- *“Through the courses, we have been able to build and publish a website”*
- *“Meeting other businesses and consultants - good to meet others with similar aims”*
- *“Women as Purpose Driven Leaders course pushed me to be more confident”*
- *“Made me look at the way I deal with issues at work, very worthwhile”*
- *“Learning new skills is always a benefit - keeping the grey matter working”*
- *“Confidence in completing self-assessment”*
- *“Improved efficiency”*
- *“Yes - mental health first aid training has helped me better support people in the workplace as a mental health champion”*
- *“Mixing with other likeminded individuals, sharing experiences”*

A selection of feedback from some of the courses offered shows the positive impacts that they have had for Ashfield residents and workers.

Administration Skills for new professionals

- *"I learnt formulas and other Excel tips to help produce better work in less time"*
- *"I enjoyed the three days of training and feel more empowered to handle my work. I have become more tech savvy and can now be more organised and efficient in my work"*
- *"I have gained skills in Excel and I feel that I can use it in a more professional manner"*
- *"Picked up some new skills to add to my CV!"*
- *"I wanted to do this course so that I could increase my chances of future employment"*
- *"I wanted to do this course to learn new skills as I'm hoping to find a job in administration"*
- *"I enrolled onto this course as I wanted to familiarise myself with up-to-date skills so that I can pursue a career in an administrative role. I now have much more understanding of PowerPoint, Excel and Word"*

Consumer Psychology for designers

- *"Really interesting and informative! Working within the retail sector, I wanted to gain further insights into consumer behaviours and trends. From doing this course I have learnt what helps to promote decision making based on insights and consumer psychology, brand identity and aesthetic choices"*
- *"I wanted to develop a greater awareness of how to position my business and stand out from the crowd, now I have a lot of questions and thoughts for changes I can make"*
- *"I'm really glad I attended this course; it's given me new directions and loads more knowledge. The information I have received is invaluable"*
- *"I have a business idea that I want to put into practice, I wanted to do this course to help make my brand more appealing. This course has helped me to evaluate my ideas, and now I've had a total re-direction for the better! I found every part of the course enjoyable, informative, and interesting... I would highly recommend"*

Event Planning and Management

- *"I enjoyed all of it! I've gained knowledge, skills and a sense of direction, as I wanted to do different aspects of this as a career option for a career change"*
- *"I've taken away industry knowledge, how to plan an event and different resources to use, as wanted to explore events as a career option"*
- *"I did this course to improve my prospects for a promotion, and gained lots of invaluable information"*
- *"I did the course to improve my employment opportunities"*

Finances for Freelancers and Small Businesses

- *"Fab course, I learnt a lot. I wanted to understand more about my business finances, and now I've done the course I've realised it's not as scary and difficult as I thought"*
- *"I chose this course because I wanted to learn how to properly and really manage finances because I want to set up my own business. Now I feel more confident to do that"*

Introduction to Copywriting

- *"I have always wanted to turn my passion for writing into a career but had no idea where to start. After doing this course I feel confident to approach copywriting in a professional way"*
- *"It's maintained my interest - I'll be booking onto the longer copywriting and content writing course"*
- *"As someone who has a communication background, I decided to do this course and gain knowledge in how to communicate through other media. It has given me the confidence to start my own side firm"*
- *"Faye's vast knowledge has helped enhance my knowledge and build my confidence in this area; this has led to me using techniques learnt to do a presentation and interview and secure a new role as a Communications Officer!"*

Introduction to Graphic Design

- *“I took this course to learn new skills in design and feel more confident using Adobe software, and to explore a possible career change into a design industry. I've taken away lots of tips and tricks”*

Product Photography using Smartphones

- *“I got 1:1 help and lots of personal information to suit me and improve my skills to sell my products”*
- *“I learnt the importance of lighting and the best lighting to use to take better photos for my business”*
- *“From doing this course I now have knowledge of how to take photos in the correct way and this will help me to sell my products and the story behind it”*

Rapid Prototyping Techniques for Businesses / 3D Printing

- *“Fantastic course thoroughly enjoyed it. I enrolled to improve and fill in knowledge around my CNC and 3D printing skills. From doing the course I've improved my CAD SketchUp skills and gained knowledge in all 3D printing types”*

Social Media and Content Creation

- *“Very valuable information! I learnt loads; behind the scenes of social media platforms, how and when to use them and what to use for content”*
- *“I took this course to help my business and have taken away a lot, lots of really useful information”*
- *“Really enjoyed it, thank you. I learnt so much! Will be using Trello to help with my work, learnt how to use Capcut for making social media reels and will be exploring Canva now too”*
- *“I've come away with all the handy tools and tips that can be used to help me understand how to utilise content creation within my role at Sherwood Forest Hospital.”*
- *“I run a small business and wanted to build my knowledge of social media to improve it. Great course content, practical knowledge and tools which will help to run the social media for the business”*
- *“I've taken away so much - every week I've left with loads of information”*
- *“I was looking for ideas for content and how to grow my business through social media, and have come away with plenty of ideas and people to partner up with, as well as the tools to use on certain platforms”*
- *“I wanted to do this course to give me a push to move forward with a specific manufacturing project. From doing this course I have knowledge of how to proceed and apply the knowledge into my work ideas and new projects”*

Visual Merchandising for Retail Spaces

- *“Fab course, fab tutor. Very enjoyable and informative. I thought it would be useful to do the course for work and give me more job satisfaction and options. I've got lots of useful information on layout designs and got to work as a team with other stores in Ashfield”*
- *“I've taken away loads! Great ideas for my business and made new friends and got to know other businesses in my local area”*

Tax Returns for Freelancers and Small Businesses

- *“I wanted to do this course to upskill and change from employed to self-employed”*
- *“I run my own business so I thought this course would be useful. I now have a better understanding of running my financial year and recording pre-payments”*
- *“I now know how to do Self-Assessment Tax Returns, and it's not as scary as it seems! I enjoyed the whole course”*
- *“I wanted to do this course as I have recently setup as a Sole Trader alongside other employment. From doing this course I have been able to submit my Self-Assessment Tax Return and the whole process has been demystified. There was a good blend of theoretical and practical elements, and I found the discussions with the group really valuable”*

Appendix 2 – Future Course Suggestions

As part of both the interim and final evaluations and on the course feedback survey, Learners were asked: *'Is there any future training, or any short courses, that the Enterprising Ashfield project could offer that would support you to develop your career, your skills, or your business?'* The comments are shown below. Courses most in demand are around photography/ photoshop, AI, social media and content creation, management and leadership, marketing and SEO.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video • Networking • Pricing work • Packing/ shipping products • Social media • More CAD design • Spreadsheets • Health and safety in the workplace • Photoshop • First aid • A Martin Lewis type course would be good • Tenant agreements • Property and taxes • Photography & filming with DSLR's • Project management • Leadership • Basic electronics • Export for small businesses • Mental health and wellbeing • Autism awareness • Marketing/ content creating • Basic introduction to accounting • Data analytics, data governance, data science, business intelligence, modern data platforms or coding languages such as SQL and python • Life coaching certificate • CAD drawing • Project management • Business rates • Management training • AI in manufacturing and design • Invisible illnesses, ADHD, Understanding autism • Business planning • Email marketing • Presentation skills • Social media marketing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and management skills • Facilities management course • Management/ leadership skills • CBAM • CAD courses • Mental health and counselling • Marketing and promotion • Photography training • Digital PR or Linked-In strategies • Photoshop • Horticulture • Social media • Leadership / management • Programming • Electronics • Marketing • Linked-in training. • Social media training • Make tax digital training • Marketing • Social media • Email marketing • Finances for small businesses • How to scale a business • Tax return • Intermediate IT • First steps to setting up business • Website design • Legal requirements for running business • Social media and marketing • Book-keeping • Microsoft Office skills • Senior business administration and board management • Grant writing and connections/ presenting with/to philanthropists | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data protection/ storing customers records • Public Relations for business growth • Social media • AI in business • SEO - Search engine Optimisation • Social media course • AI in the workplace course • Public speaking or media training course • Train the trainer course • Public speaking • Excel skills (beginners) • First Aid • Customer service skills • Photography • Trade marketing or events • AI course • Content creation • Marketing • Workplace help • People and culture • Accounts • AI for marketing • IT skills • Marketing especially digital • AI • Management • Fashion design with computers • Young people's mental health or safeguarding • AI, Data Analysis • Social media • Business coaching • Strategy development • How to apply for funding • Leadership, managing customer experience • Mental health support for employees |
|---|---|---|

Appendix 3 – Map of the Eligible Area

The eligible area for the project is marked in red.

