

ENTERPRISING ASHFIELD PROGRAMME

FINAL IMPACT REPORT - SEPTEMBER 2026



Funded by
UK Government



Nottingham Trent
University



Ashfield
DISTRICT COUNCIL



This report celebrates the outcomes and insights from:

The Enterprising Ashfield Programme

Enterprising Ashfield was a £7.5 million programme that supported businesses and residents in the Ashfield Towns Fund area to access Nottingham Trent University's research, expertise, facilities and training offer.

This report draws on feedback from over 300 individuals and businesses who were supported by the Enterprising Ashfield programme.

Foreword: Nottingham Trent University, Ashfield District Council and Discover Ashfield

The Enterprising Ashfield programme demonstrates what can be achieved when local government and partners, higher education and business work together with a shared ambition to create lasting economic opportunity.

Through funding from the Towns Fund programme for Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottingham Trent University and Ashfield District Council with the support of the Discover Ashfield Board have delivered an ambitious programme that has helped transform opportunities for local residents, entrepreneurs and businesses. Over five years, Enterprising Ashfield has supported more than 1,100 individuals to access free training and skills development, enabled 271 entrepreneurs to progress towards starting their own businesses, provided tailored growth support to over 190 established businesses, facilitated more than 60 research and innovation collaborations between businesses and the University, and created 69 graduate placements within Ashfield organisations.

These achievements represent far more than numbers. Behind every statistic is an individual who has gained new skills, a business that has become more resilient, an entrepreneur who has taken the first steps towards building a successful

enterprise, or an employer that has embraced innovation to improve productivity and competitiveness. Together, these outcomes are helping to build a stronger, more inclusive and more prosperous local economy.

For Nottingham Trent University, Enterprising Ashfield reflects our commitment to being a recognised force for good in the communities we serve. By connecting our academic expertise, research capability and business support services with local need, we have helped widen access to education and innovation while strengthening long-term relationships with businesses across the district. Significantly, more than 60% of programme participants had never previously engaged with the University, demonstrating our success in reaching new audiences and establishing partnerships that we hope will continue long after the programme has concluded.

For Ashfield District Council, the programme has been a key contributor to the district's wider ambitions for economic regeneration. Through investment in people, businesses and innovation, Enterprising Ashfield has complemented the Council's strategic priorities around skills and employment, business growth, regeneration and town centre renewal. As Ashfield continues to

benefit from over £100 million of regeneration investment (including the Automated Distribution and Manufacturing Centre, Robotics Centre, and Science and Discovery Centre with Planetarium) the district is increasingly well positioned to attract investment, create high-value employment and support sustainable economic growth.

This report captures the impact of the Enterprising Ashfield investment. It highlights the achievements of the programme, celebrates the success of the individuals and businesses who have participated, and demonstrates the value of collaboration between local government, higher education and industry. More importantly, it shows how strategic investment in skills, innovation and enterprise can create lasting benefits for communities and leave a legacy that extends well beyond the lifetime of a funded programme.

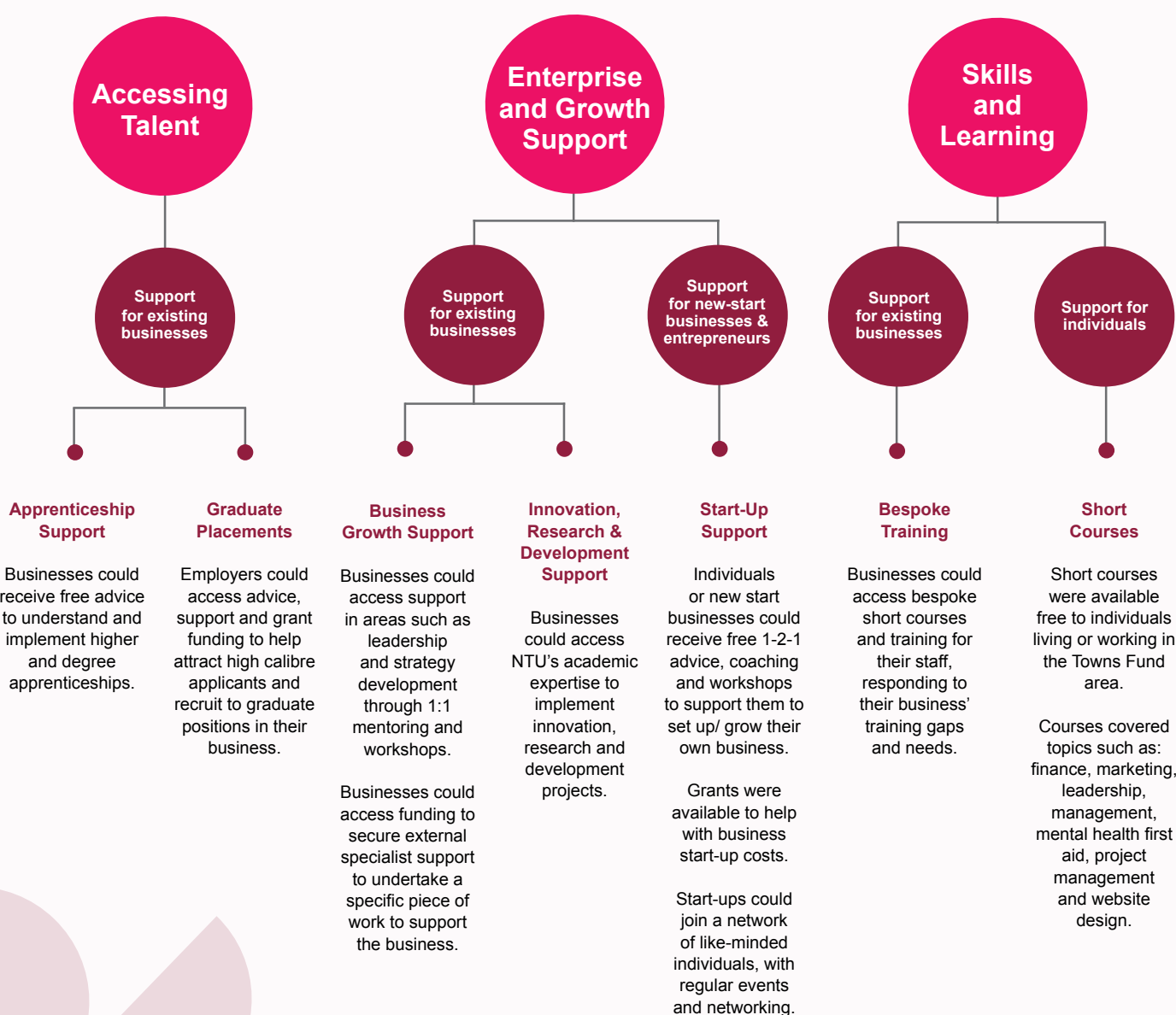
We hope you enjoy reading about the difference Enterprising Ashfield has made and the foundations it has helped establish for Ashfield's future prosperity.

Cllr Matthew Relf
Executive Lead Member for Growth, Regeneration and Local Planning
Ashfield District Council

Kelvin Eatherington
Economic Programmes Manager
Nottingham Trent University

The Support

The Enterprising Ashfield programme was developed to provide businesses in the Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield Towns Fund eligible area with access to NTU's research, expertise and facilities, and to provide support for residents, employers and employees to undertake training and enhance their skills.



Facts and Figures

£3.8 million core funding via the Sutton-in-Ashfield and Kirkby-in-Ashfield Towns Fund • **£3.7 million funding from NTU** and the private sector • **62%** of those supported had **never worked with**, undertaken any learning at, or been supported by NTU before • **Over 100,000 mailed leaflets** to over **35,000 people** to raise awareness of the programme • **Over 150 different short courses** delivered • **Over 1,100 learners** completed a short course • **63%** of those who took a short course or undertook learning through the programme **would not have undertaken the training** or something similar had it not been offered through the programme • **81% of learners** have been encouraged to undertake **further training** as a result of the programme • **69 graduates** placed into local companies through the programme • **Over 270 entrepreneurs** aged from 17 to 68 yrs old given the skills to start up new businesses • **£700,000 awarded in grants** to support new start businesses, business growth, and graduate recruitment • **85% of businesses** supported through the programme say that they are now more likely to work with a university or recruit graduates • **Circa 30 individuals** who received a HeadStart grant were referred into the programme by the DWP or Job Centre.

Supporting Learners

Short courses were available free of charge to individuals living or working in the Towns Fund area.

Of the 1,100 learners we worked with:

Age

79 yrs **17 yrs**

Oldest learner

Youngest learner

Gender

62% **36%** **2%**

Female

Male

Other/ prefer not to say

Disability

87% **8%** **4%**

Did not report a disability

Reported a disability

Prefer not to say

Employment

83% **11%** **5%**

Employed

Not employed

Sole trader/ self-employed

Highest Qualifications

22% **21%** **20%** **16%** **15%** **5%**

GCSE or equivalent

Undergraduate degree

A-levels or equivalent

Postgraduate degree

Prefer not to say

No qualifications/ qualifications not known

Over 300 people took more than one course.



Key Figures

182 learners completed the evaluation survey for the Enterprising Ashfield programme. Of these:

81%

Reported that the programme has encouraged them to undertake further training.

61%

Told us that the training has increased their ambition for their future career.

75%

Reported that the training has increased their confidence in the workplace.

63%

Would not have undertaken training had it not been for the Enterprising Ashfield programme.

67%

Reported that the training has given them new skills which will help them to further their career or increase earning potential.

63%

Told us that the training has allowed them to introduce new ideas into the business they work for, run, or are setting up.

22%

Told us that the training 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.

The most popular course was the Social Media and Content Creation for Businesses course - 112 people attended and the course ran 13 times.

Over 280 unique courses delivered, across 150 subjects, including:

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, **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**, Writing Skills for Professionals, **Selling Skills: Business to Business**.



Learner Impacts

"Given me a fresh lease of life, it's helped boost my ability to do things better and I've achieved so much!"

"Given me the confidence to start my own business."

"After the training I began an apprenticeship in the same field as the course."

"Knowledge to build my own website once I start my new business."

"Opened my mind to what can be achieved."

"I want to change jobs and this course has helped me with the skills to do that."

"Improved my skills and boosted my confidence to apply for jobs."

"Promotion within current company."

"A better understanding of myself and the confidence to advocate for myself."



Steve Abbott

Nana Prints Personalised Gifts

Steve owns and runs Nana Prints Personalised Gifts in Sutton-in-Ashfield. Steve attended one of NTU's courses and worked with the team to further support the growth of his business.

Steve told us: *"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."*

"We've been recommending the programme, and suggested the courses to a number of businesses in the area."

Lisa Gadsby

Team Prom

Lisa owns Team Prom, a prom dress shop in Sutton-in-Ashfield. She attended a number of the free courses offered by the Enterprising Ashfield programme.

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."*



Laura Bacon

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 for me. I am sure that having this website will generate another income stream for the business."*

Ewa Tinklin

Twisted Tink'z Barbers

Ewa owns Twisted Tink'z barbers in Kirkby-in-Ashfield and has attended several free courses offered by the programme.

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 opened up new opportunities and avenues for personal and professional growth. Thank you once again for offering such valuable and enriching courses. I look forward to exploring more opportunities for learning and growth with your organisation in the future. I wholeheartedly recommend these courses to anyone looking to invest in their future."***



Jean Eatoe and Neil Boocock

Jeaneil Holistic Therapists

Jean and Neil run Jeaneil Holistic Therapists providing complementary treatments throughout Nottinghamshire. They also sell crystals, run workshops, and give talks on health and wellbeing. They attended a Build your Website class delivered through Enterprising Ashfield.

They told us: ***"Without this course we would not have been able to design and build our own website. We also attended a social media course and found that very helpful. NTU are always there to ask their advice to help grow your business – they are a great asset."***



Michael Reid

Inspire: Culture, Learning and Libraries

Inspire were supported by the Business Growth, Research, Development and Innovation, and Skills and Talent strands of the Enterprising Ashfield programme.

Michael Reid, Deputy Director of Inspire Learning, told us:

"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."

Supporting Entrepreneurs and New Start Businesses

Enterprising Ashfield's HeadStart programme provided support to entrepreneurs looking to start a new business.

Of the 271 HeadStarters we worked with:

Age

68 yrs **17 yrs**

Oldest
HeadStarter

Youngest
HeadStarter

Disability

75% **18%** **7%**

Did not report
a disability

Reported
a disability

Prefer
not to say

Gender

56% **41%** **3%**

Female

Male

Other/ prefer
not to say

Geography

55% **38%** **6%**

Sutton

Kirkby

Annesley



Entrepreneurs were supported in sectors including: catering, tattooing, education, welfare vehicle service, clothing, jewellery, online publishing house, CPD training for teachers, graphic design, home furnishings, therapeutic services, home care, online tutoring, dog grooming, print making, textiles, garden services, marketing consultancy, digital marketing agency, café, dog walking, roofing, life coaching, manufacturing keyless lockers, retail of art work, software development, events management, cleaning solar panels, retail of wooden products, fitness, handy man, carpet cleaning, 3D printing, kitchen supplies, dental, craft workshops, wellbeing, digital repairs, removal services, haircare courses, haircare manufacturing, reiki, photography, customs compliance consultancy, book publishing, post-natal health and wellness, aluminium fabrication, retail of personalised gifts, painting, music promotor/events, coaching, craft retail, sewing, car sales, garden services, public house, barbers, sports massage, celebration cards, nail technician, sports coaching, property management, book re-casting, film production, geo-landscaping, retail of fishing tackle, driving instructor, retail of custom models for war games, vet, HR, personal styling, insurance and mortgage broker, lingerie brand, florist, mobile food van, illustrator, dog accessories retailer, beauty.

Key Figures

66 HeadStarters completed the evaluation survey regarding the support they received.

Of these:

- 95% told us that they would recommend the support (5% too early to say or maybe).
- 31% of those who set up a new business told us that they would not have done so without the support of the programme.
- Analysis shows that circa 45% of the businesses supported are still operating, as at August 2026.
- 48% had never worked with NTU before.

HeadStart Businesses Supported

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
Cleaning / Home Help / Carer / Childcare	12
Services / Sales / Rentals / Subscriptions	11
Photography / Videography / Production	10
Business Support / Admin / HR / Recruitment	7
Illustration / Design / Printing	6
Mechanical / Vehicle Repair	4
Tattoo / Piercing	3
Wholesale / Supplies	3
Manufacturing / Production	2
Singer / Entertainer	1
Mystery Customer	1
Community Led Initiative	1



Ian Sawyer

Driving Instructor

Ian received support from Enterprising Ashfield to help him to set up his new business as a driving instructor and also attended a number of the free courses offered by the programme.

Ian told us: *"My wife heard about the Enterprising Ashfield course on the radio. The programme has provided me with the opportunity to fulfil my ambition and move to the next chapter in my career. I cannot praise the scheme highly enough; it helps people in their chosen business and does everything possible to ensure success."*

Aileron Digital Works

Andrew set up his new business - Aileron Digital Works Ltd - with support from the HeadStart programme. Aileron Digital Works is a one-stop website design, social media management, digital marketing service and eCommerce setup and management service. Andrew was told about the HeadStart programme by the Job Centre.

Andrew said: *"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 HeadStart programme 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."

Not only would I recommend it, I already do. I've recently been attending another course with Enterprising Ashfield and have recommended HeadStart to people on that course too."

"Everything we do from a marketing perspective has been done on a tight shoestring - without help from Richard and 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."

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 marketing that supported me to create an outline business plan - this has given me the focus I needed."*

Ryan Howard

Johnny 5 Replica

Ryan Howard first found out about the Enterprising Ashfield programme when he saw a leaflet at the Job Centre. Ryan contacted NTU and received help from the programme 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 through the Enterprising Ashfield programme.

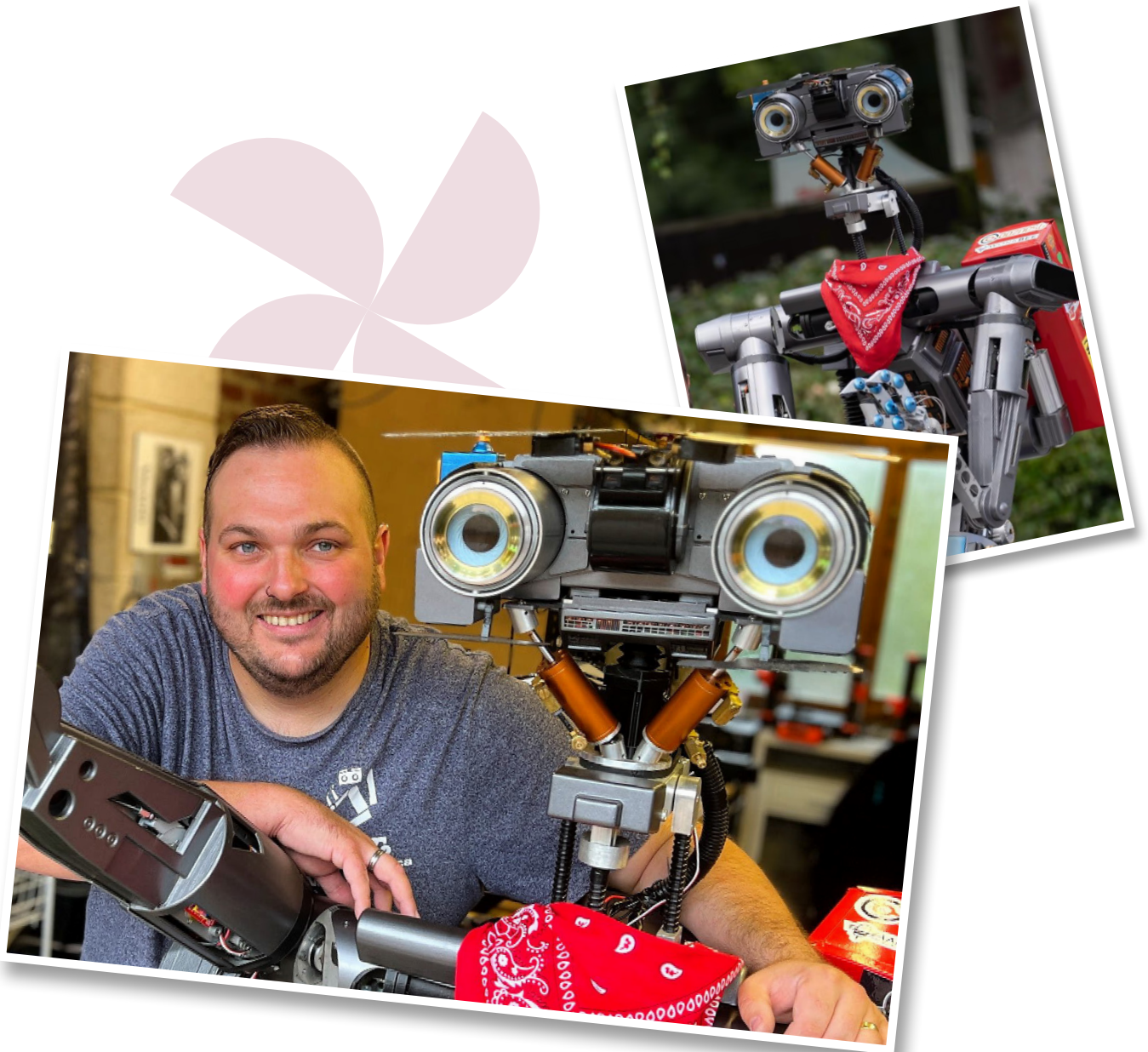
Ryan has been to 50 conventions, been on the BBC, and to Texas, USA, to talk about his design.

Ryan told us: *"I just thought I would reach out and say thank you for all your support when I was 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 to meet with all the cast and production staff from 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!"



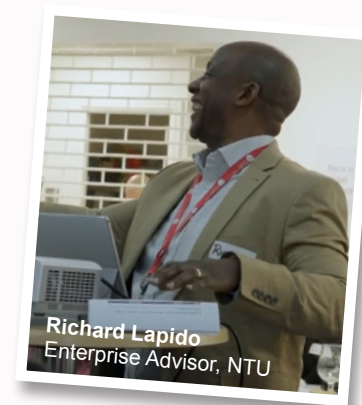
HeadStart Network

The HeadStart Network gave 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.

These events will continue post programme. Many of the HeadStart participants who met through the course are now working together - demonstrating how Enterprising Ashfield support connected businesses in the area.

Communications - The NTU team also set up an Enterprising Ashfield WhatsApp group with over 50

members. This is an extension of the HeadStart Networking 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.



Mentoring - The NTU team are in the process of setting up a Mastermind Group. A Mastermind Group is a peer-to-peer support and mentoring group where members regularly share their experiences, knowledge, and insights to help each other achieve goals.

"The events were useful in connecting with other new starters in the area."

"Richard's knowledge and the atmosphere he created at the events were fab."

"The HeadStart workshops were excellent."

"A great network of like-minded individuals in a similar situation. Good to talk to others and bounce ideas and also support each other's journey and business."

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. I was able to secure a start-up grant

to help with the start-up process and allow me to develop my marketing materials."

Jennifer 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 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."*



Widening Participation

An interview with Emma Coveney

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. Emma worked with 25 beneficiaries to help them to secure a HeadStart grant.

Emma found that key challenges faced by those she has supported have included: lack of access to a computer and printer, lack of knowledge of the IT programmes needed to complete the documentation and lack of confidence/ knowledge in terms of completing the forms. She has also supported participants who have been struggling with mental health challenges, and many who are trying to juggle setting up a business with childcare/ other caring responsibilities.

Emma has been working to support these participants, offering face-to-face meetings with those struggling with the HeadStart process.

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 some people 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.”



Supporting Existing Businesses

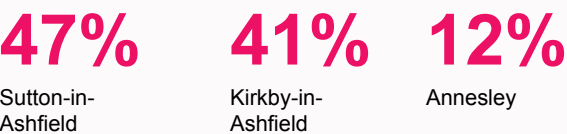
Existing businesses could access a package of support through the programme including: grants to allow them to take on new graduate employees, access to university academic expertise, workshops and 1:1 support for business growth.

78 businesses completed the evaluation survey with regards to the support they received.

- 86% of businesses think the support will help them to adapt, innovate or change in a positive way.
- 73% of businesses think the support has/ will lead to an increase in business productivity.
- 60% of businesses think the support will lead to an increase in their business turnover.

Of the 193 established businesses we worked with and claimed outputs for:

Geography



Size



Type



Sector



Supporting Existing Businesses - Growth Support

Businesses could access support in areas such as leadership and strategy development through 1:1 mentoring and workshops. They could also access funding to secure external specialist support to undertake a specific piece of work to support the business.

Over 150 businesses received growth support from the programme.

48 businesses completed the evaluation survey with regards to the business growth support. Based on the findings, the programme has enabled:

- 85% of businesses to increase their confidence / understanding of running a business.
- 60% of businesses to introduce new products or offer new services.
- 38% of businesses to take on new staff and/ or self-employed associates.
- 72% of businesses to increase their networking.
- 54% of businesses to increase their financial sustainability/ viability.
- 92% of businesses are now more likely to work with a university.
- 64% of businesses to increase their contacts.
- 47% of businesses to increase their client base or market share.

Digital Startup Academy

Shawn is the founder of the Digital Startup Academy - an e-learning and live interactive platform that he has built himself. 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, all using free platforms to achieve this. Shawn took part in the Growth Strand of the Enterprising Ashfield programme.

"I was introduced to Enterprising Ashfield through the DWP after being 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! Also, sales and marketing is an area that I still need to evolve in and so these two problems combined formed quite a blocker for me.

Each module and course that I attended contained great information. It was always delivered at a comfortable pace and I was always made to feel that my questions and contributions were valued. I really valued the help that I got from Enterprising Ashfield and from

Adrian specifically who 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 already have recommended this programme to other local business owners that I have spoken to!"

Mr Nice Removals

Sabrina and Sebastian run their family business Mr Nice Removals which provides domestic and commercial moves, waste removals, house clearances and storage facilities. They took part in the Growth Strand of the Enterprising Ashfield programme.

"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 course was delivered to a high standard and was very informative, the support we have received during and after the course has been exceptional. The pace of the course was

perfect for us, manageable for us to follow and keep up with additional tasks.

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 impacts to other services provided. We were offered funding, however, didn't need to follow this up, after the changes we implemented.

Our plans for the future of the business are to have a removals software programme - this would enable us to operate everything under one system, such as insurance reminders, bookings, invoices, leads, etc. Also, continue with improvements to our storage facilities."



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 increased and they had to make fundamental changes in order to survive and grow.

The business received funding from the Ashfield District Council 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 programme.

"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 long-time 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 business."

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 programme.

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 - to help 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.”*



Mansfield Hosiery Mills Sports and 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 Enhancing Growth programme, part of the support available from the Enterprising Ashfield Business Growth strand. She told us:

“After having a brief discussion with Adrian at a 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 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 is that we don't feel alone now, 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.”*



Kirkby Christmas Sparkle

Through the Business Growth strand, Enterprising Ashfield funded shop window artist Reggie Pugh to paint designs on nine shop fronts in Kirby town centre for Christmas 2025.

The festive illustrations were bespoke to each individual business and the project was designed to drive footfall in the town.

Each business taking part was also offered marketing support - including workshops or 1:1 advice and guidance - to help to promote their business.

A map was created to encourage families into the town centre to hunt for the windows.



Supporting Existing Businesses - Innovation, Research and Development Support

Businesses could access NTU's academic expertise to implement innovation, research and development projects.

Key Figures:

- The Enterprising Ashfield programme linked 50 businesses into the University's academic teams to develop innovation, research and development projects.
- 19 businesses completed the evaluation survey with regards to the support received from this strand. 63% of these businesses told us that they would not have undertaken the R,D&I work without the support from the programme.
- The academic team collaborated with businesses in Ashfield who had never worked with the university before.
- The support delivered through the R,D&I project is starting to lead to Knowledge Transfer Partnerships with the university.
- Academics from NTU's Chemistry, Physics, Electrical Engineering, Computing, Marketing, Art and Design, and Science and Technology teams were involved.
- Businesses were supported in a variety of sectors, including gaming, visitor attraction, charity, engineering and manufacturing.
- 78% of the businesses who completed the evaluation survey told us that they are now more likely to work with a university in future (22% no change).





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 the process - to put products into bags. The Enterprising Ashfield team did an audit of the business, looking at how they could simplify processes and identify any gaps.

The business had also struggled with their marketing, and through the programme they were able to access support from marketing professionals and academics. They have now developed a marketing strategy which has helped them drive forward over the last 12 months.

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, and understand 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 has helped us through some challenging times, I would recommend any business take up the offer.”

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 the innovation, research and development support stands of the Enterprising Ashfield programme.

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.”

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, The Foyle Foundation, The Wolfson Foundation, and The 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 have supported the Sherwood Observatory through the Research,

Innovation and Development strand of the Enterprising Ashfield programme, linking them into academic 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.”



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 programme 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 programme, 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.”



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 into 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.

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 programme Craig was also put in touch with the NTU graduates team. He is now advertising his graduate job vacancies directly to NTU alumni.



insight

Supporting Existing Businesses - Graduates and Apprenticeships

Employers could access advice, support and grant funding to help attract high calibre applicants and recruit to graduate positions in their business. They could also receive free advice to understand and implement higher and degree apprenticeships.

The Enterprising Ashfield programme funded 69 graduate placements within Ashfield businesses.

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 received a wide range of support from the Enterprising Ashfield programme, including funding towards a graduate placement in their charity shop:

“He was brilliant, he was amazing, he sorted out the shop out and he supported the volunteers.”

Our Centre also received support from a group of NTU students who developed the charity’s 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 were also supported with the development of a database to 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.”

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.”



69 Graduate Placed Roles Included:

Data and Systems Executive • **Chemist** • Associate Business Consultant • **Design Assistant** • Class Teacher • **Data Scientist** • Development Chemist • **Business and Marketing Executive** • Design Engineer • **Project Manager** • Quality Assurance Technician • **Graduate Recruitment Consultant** • Curriculum Manager • **Partnerships Executive** • Graduate Sales and Marketing Consultant • **Design Engineer** • Schools Enrichment Coordinator • **Graduate IT Analyst** • Management Accountant • **Speech and Language Therapist** • Pathways Advisor • **Graduate Civil Engineer** • Newstart Activities and Theatre Programme Lead • **CAD Designer** • Architectural Assistant • **Assistant Quantity Surveyor** • Debt Adviser • **Junior Mechanical Engineer** • New Product Innovation Engineer • **Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Operator** • Engineering Surveyor

ENTERPRISING ASHFIELD TESTIMONIALS

Testimonials

"I have no hesitation in recommending engagement with Enterprising 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

"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 and supporting our success."

**Rob Huskinson, Open Door 1
Community Adult Day Service**

Support Received - 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

"If you're thinking of setting up 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

"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

"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 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

“The Enterprising Ashfield 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

“Collaborating with NTU through the Enterprising Ashfield programme 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

“Ashfield is a place full of innovative people. This programme 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 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

“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 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, Larwood Park Sports Club
Support Received - Innovation, Research and Development Support, Business Growth Support, Bespoke Training for Staff