



European Union

European Structural
and Investment Funds

ERDF 2016-2023

Priority Axis 3

‘Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises’

Inspiring Enterprise and Growth (IEG)

Final Report 2023

**Report Completed by
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IEG supported 803 participants and cost £4,072,384 of which £2,024,884 was contributed by EDRF. Total spend at project end corresponds to the prudent costs presented in the original application form – in real terms, higher outcomes were achieved for £1% less than planned. The Inspiring Enterprise and Growth Project (IEG) was funded under Investment Priority 3a European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Programme; “Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating economic exploitation of new ideas and fostering the creation of new firms, including through incubators”.

IEG equipped 803 potential entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises in London, with skills and competences to become more enterprising, start up new businesses and grow to ensure their sustainability. 99% of targets were met despite unforeseen contextual; changes such as Brexit, Covid and the death of a long-serving key member of the IEG team.

Throughout this project, the evaluators have been able to identify and rigorously evidence that LTEN and the delivery partners designed, managed, and delivered an outstanding project to a very high standard. The interim evaluations ascertained, through thorough investigation, that the project team worked diligently and cohesively, to reach disadvantaged groups and customise individual development plans to increase chances of enduring success. A representative comment from a participant’s feedback is ‘I found the whole process very useful and [it] gave us the framework to go ahead and build on the knowledge that has been given to us.’

The final report demonstrates that IEG was Value for Money for ERDF, participants, London, LTEN and other projects. The report concludes that IEG was a dynamic robust project that made a significant, quantifiable difference to a considerable number of Londoners and, by association, to countless others. The key weakness, identified by the evaluators, is based on participant feedback and relates simply to demands for more of the IEG interventions and several resource intensive new ideas that would inform a follow-on project and/or inform other project leaders.

Recommendations include a suggestion to LTEN to promote their excellent work at a higher regional level and to policy makers to learn from IEG and other projects with a high success rate and relatively low cost.

Output Code	Output Description	Target Forecast	Actuals
P11	<i>Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready</i>	550	553 +3
C1	<i>Number of enterprises receiving support</i>	250	250
C4	<i>Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support</i>	250	250
C5	<i>Number of new enterprises supported</i>	130	139 +9
C8	<i>Employment increase in supported enterprises</i>	75	73 -2
C28	<i>Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products</i>	16	16

During evaluation activities, project partners used different terms to describe participants however, for the purposes of this report the term ‘participants’ has been used.

The evaluators thank LTEN, project partners – FashionWorks, The D-Foundation and Training Business for Growth (TBFG) and also all IEG participants who contributed to this report.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Overview

Inspiring Enterprise and Growth (IEG) over-arching aim was to start up and develop 550 potential entrepreneurs and 250 fledgling SMEs and social enterprises, targeting under-represented groups from areas in London that have high unemployment and economic inactivity rates. In many of these areas there are disproportionate concentrations of BAME and women-owned businesses and communities with limited or no business support provision.

IEG was funded under Priority Axis 3, 'Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises.' The project manager and lead partner was the London Training and Employment Network (LTEN). The three delivery partners were: The D-Foundation, FashionWorks, and Training Business for Growth (TBFG).

All delivery partners have long experience in growing businesses and advising on every aspect of development, formulating solutions and in reacting positively to volatile markets and unpredictable business concerns; they draw on each other's fortes and coordinate their skills. In the evaluator's view, the strengths of the management and delivery partners resulted in a robust and impactful project that demonstrably inspired enterprise and business growth - further enhanced by the diversity of participants, business ideas and partner skills.

1.2 The Evaluation Team and Methodology

EU Projects Consultancy has over thirty years' experience in internally evaluating projects funded by the E.U. and sixteen years' experience assessing E.U. and UK projects as external evaluator. We have worked with LTEN on several occasions and our values align with theirs in enabling the most disadvantaged groups to overcome challenges; to run highly effective and cost-effective projects; and to manage all aspects ethically and sustainably whilst further promoting sustainability. We gathered data for this report from several angles including:

- Desktop analysis of participants' feedback, initial assessment and exit forms
- Scrutiny of LTEN/ERDF quarterly claim forms
- Interviews and meetings

Note: Participants seem less inclined to engage in verbal feedback or return survey forms than they were pre-pandemic – it has been suggested that reasons for this may be post-pandemic malaise, struggling to work in different ways, busy and work overload, slower growth, so demoralised.

1.3 Major Changes that have impacted on IEG since the previous report

A deeply distressing occurrence in November 2022 was the death of Colin (TBFG founder), one of the IEG partners and long-time business adviser. This was a deep personal tragedy for his colleagues on the project and his clients were devastated. Colin was a gentle, compassionate man with great experience in assisting businesses and solid perseverance in helping entrepreneurs succeed. He has been greatly missed on the project. LTEN and the other advisors took on his clients immediately and later, supplementary advisors were brought in to assist.

The previous evaluation report was completed in June 2021 the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, the project endured another lockdown, months of caution and restrictions and the gradual emergence from these as the pandemic abated. The after-effects of those situations and the challenges, associated with new ways of being since the pandemic, have brought about significant changes. These are referred to in the report.

The third extension with revisions to project targets was applied for and granted. IEG end date was extended to 31.3.2023 with the final targets shown in the table below. This extra time gave all staff and participants the space to rethink and reorganise after the pandemic - many businesses and would-be entrepreneurs needed to change direction or mode of working. From here on, this report is written as though it has always been one project with the higher targets and later completion date.

Participants, project partners and the wider community began to understand and feel the effects of Brexit in the UK and the impact on businesses; this included the impact on trade deals and slow development of new UK trade agreements. This resulted in many of the participants needing to reconsider where they would need to source and/or market their products to ensure ongoing business viability and delivery partners had to raise awareness of new custom laws and regulations.

Finally, changes in the world context including downturn of economies, failure of long-established businesses, cost of living increases, war in Ukraine, perceived threat from Russia and other countries, and the effects of extreme climate change, impacted in a myriad of ways and delivery partners adapted customised support to enable participants to consider ways of working in a variety of volatile markets.

2 PROJECT OBJECTIVES & CONTEXT

Inspiring Enterprise and Growth (IEG) aim was to start up and develop 550 potential entrepreneurs and 250 fledgling SMEs and social enterprises. IEG targeted under-represented groups from areas in London that have high unemployment and economic inactivity rates and communities with limited or no business support provision. IEG aimed to design and deliver effective, customised interventions.

The project was devised in 2016, UK. At this time there was cautious optimism regarding economic growth but growing uncertainty around political direction regarding European membership. There was widespread, mounting unease as Brexit loomed. Disadvantaged groups were further disadvantaged due to UK-wide paring back of local services. Mainstream business support was funded to offer general services, but nothing was customised for, or targeted at, under-represented groups.

2.1 Description and Measure of Project Output Targets with Actuals

Output Code	Output Description	Measure	Target Forecast	Target Actuals
P11	<i>Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready</i>	Individuals completing at least 12 hours of support	550	553 +3
C1	<i>Number of enterprises receiving support</i>	Enterprises completing at least 12 hours of support	250	250
C4	<i>Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support</i>	Enterprises completing more than 12 hours of non-financial support	250	250
C5	<i>Number of new enterprises supported</i>	New enterprises completing at least 12 hours of support	130	139 +9
C8	<i>Employment increase in supported enterprises</i>	Jobs created as result of activity of the project (FTE)	75	73 -2
C28	<i>Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products</i>	Self-declaration and product launch date with supporting documentation	16	16

The strong rationale shown on project logic model (below) was derived from extensive research and findings of previous projects. Under-represented groups lacked confidence in mainstream generalised business support because it was not customised to support smaller businesses with innovative and/or specific cultural focus. For potential entrepreneurs and SMEs there was a lack of information regarding services/product research and development, market awareness and market testing, and focussed, individualised support. Also, the lack of a supportive eco-system, business acumen/know-how, access to finance and affordable workspaces in London.

The design and delivery model were based on and developed from successful pilot projects resulting in IEG outputs and outcomes all being achieved and over-achieved in the majority of cases. The model used a wide range of tested interventions and was delivered by long-experienced business advisers who could all design and adapt in order to solve challenges and/or individualise their information, advice and guidance.

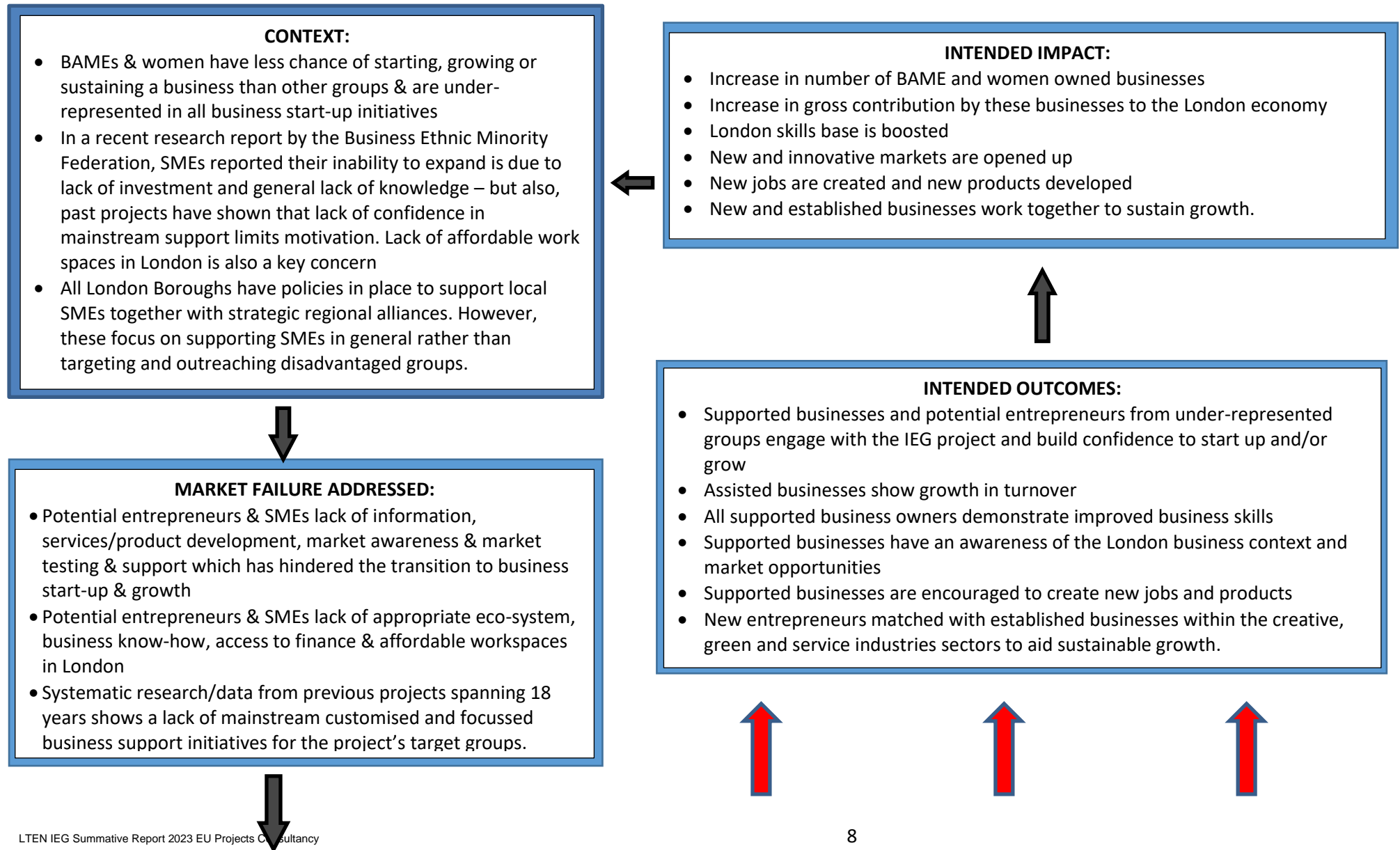
In 2016, when the targets were set, the projected outcomes and outputs were based on the experience gained from previous projects. They were entirely realistic and achievable in the time and initial expectations, based on preceding feedback and expert topical knowledge, was

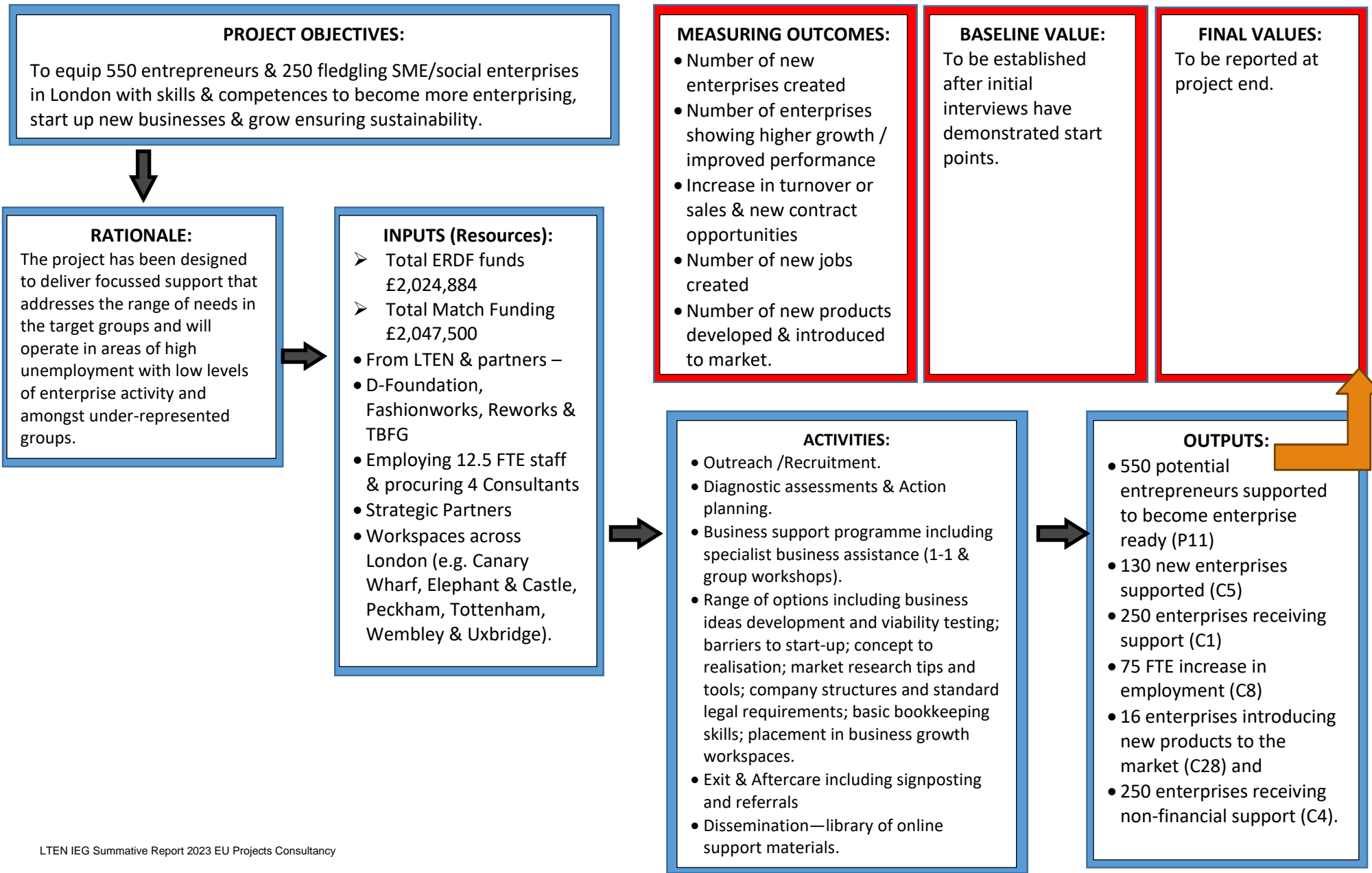
potential lack of project places, to meet prolific demand. This expectation was identified and two further extensions were requested, and granted, with successful outcomes.

Pre-Brexit assumptions and then Brexit itself, unsettled everyone in different ways, but they persevered. A large number of participants, approximately 80%, reported concern for changes in trading laws, customs and excise tariffs and taxes, and many had to redesign their business plans to alter their suppliers and/or market routes. The Covid pandemic and lockdowns meant communicating in different ways; changing business ideas e.g., fall-off of customers; or even closing businesses due to lack of income. However, despite the Covid pandemic slowing delivery and target achievement, subsequent project duration extensions enabled targets to be exceeded and met successfully.

The IEG project has now ended and undeniably demonstrated that it performed very well against its targets.

2.2 IEG LOGIC MODEL





3 PROJECT PROGRESS

The project has expertly delivered nearly all anticipated outputs within budget – caveat, 2 participants short in C8 and 1% underspend (further details below). Some reasons for this high-level achievement are:

- The project was carefully designed and based on 18 years' experience of working with the target groups and projected outcomes and the London context
- Delivery partners brought a range of skills and experience gained over many years of business advising in different contexts; they had worked on projects together several times and this facilitated sharing information and effective referral of participants
- The extensive knowledge of the partners and the fluidity of the project structure and interventions, created dynamic and evolving content as appropriate to each participant.
- The lead partner organisation (grant recipient) is comprised of a small but very experienced team of committed professionals with over 20 years' of managing projects supporting similar target groups. Evaluators found that their hard work and dedication to IEG meant their support of participants and partners was constant and effective. They also stepped in to work directly with participants whenever required to cover for absences and to recruit or follow up participants.
- Robust outreach to potential participants ensured the right people were enrolled onto the project and benefitted.
- Continual networking generated pro bono professional opportunities for participants, at every stage of their journey.

As this report has been written after the completion of the project, we can attest to the robust achievement of IEG – as forecast in the 2nd Interim Report. The achievements demonstrate that, with a well thought through time extension to overcome the negative impacts of the pandemic, the project was definitely designed to achieve what it set out to do.

The final outputs demonstrate great IEG achievement. Only one output under achieved despite the extensive impact of environmental factors e.g., Brexit and Covid. Two out puts over achieved. The way the funding works, this shows as an overall under achievement of two, whereas, it could be argued the project over achieved the contracted values by 10 in total. Below shows the contracted/actual values.

C1 - Number of enterprises receiving support – 250/250

C4 - Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support 250/250

C5 - Number of new enterprises supported 130/139

C8 - Employment increase in supported enterprises 75/73

C28 - Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products 16/16

P11 - Potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready 550/553

Total contracted outputs were 800 and the project achieved 803.

3.1 Progress against the objectives in the IEG Logic Model

The second Interim Report noted that 'IEG is progressing well in all areas and expects to have achieved all anticipated targets by the end of the project.' This has been achieved apart from the tiny 1% underspend and 2 fewer participants, although, it is probable that this is due to lack of paperwork because participants did not respond to requests to complete feedback at project end.

Out of 553 potential entrepreneur participants, 293 (53%) were female; 314 (57%) were BAME and over 50 (9%+) had a disability – some undisclosed.

3.2 Context

The project has delivered activities to address individual needs created by the changes in context; has recruited participants as planned; and has overcome significant contextual challenges, either by having designed the appropriate responses in advance and/or by pivoting in response to changes.

For example, during the pandemic, everyone worked from home and partners quickly readjusted the programme for virtual delivery of workshops that addressed new worrisome issues.

In emerging from the pandemic and post-project, the context, in an article from Forbes is summarised thus: 'the tough trading conditions that have characterized the U.K. economy since the beginning of the Covid pandemic have left scars. Entrepreneurs may be looking forward to better times but many of them are also struggling with confidence issues. In practical terms, spending on marketing, recruitment and digital skills has been pared back or suspended by some businesses. And according to a new [report](#) published by [Small Business Britain](#) in collaboration with [Clearpay](#) and [Square](#), this could impair future growth.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/trevorclawson/2023/04/18/back-from-the-storm-britains-small-firms-optimistic-but-scarred-after-a-hard-winter/?sh=129f49057032>

These contextual concerns occupied the IEG team and participants in the closing months of the project.

3.3 Market Failures Addressed

IEG and project activities were expressly designed to correct the market failures listed in the 2016 Logic Model. The project outputs in the table in the previous section clearly indicate the progress made here. Many of the achievements were brought about by the dogged determination of the team to keep going through the pandemic and continue supporting participants during the difficult post-Covid months of emergence and re-adjustment.

3.4 Project Objectives

At the most basic level, the objective was defined as, 'to equip potential entrepreneurs, fledgling SME/social enterprises and SMEs in London with skills and competences to become more enterprising, start up new businesses and grow, ensuring sustainability'. IEG met this objective by achieving 99% of all targets by the end of the project. Participant feedback, evidenced, in vibrant human terms, the commendable progress that the final results are indicating.

3.5 Rationale

The rationale for the project is based in the myriad needs identified in the Logic Model and the special expertise of the partners. IEG has consistently adhered to the undertakings written into the application and logic model and continues to deliver as per the rationale, whilst very much regretting that the rationale still exists and many of the issues were disproportionately exacerbated by all changes in context including the pandemic.

3.6 Inputs

IEG Inputs are defined as ERDF funds plus 50/50 match funding and were achieved. Expenditure of the grant was only 1% off target due to fewer hours being worked during Covid and ill-health of the evaluators. Every setback was quickly and professionally met and resolved by LTEN. The match funding remains at the same level as anticipated but proportions of the sources of contributions have changed slightly as one partner Reworks left the project in the early stages.

3.7 Activities

A significant range of customised activities and interventions were developed and delivered throughout the project. They followed the programme content indicated in the logic model and were added to in response to new needs and problems such as applying for grants, managing all aspects of business online, how to ensure your business survives in an emergency and building up your personal resilience. The high number of outputs and outcomes achieved seems directly attributable to the success of the tailored activities and expertise and dedication of the partners.

3.8 Outputs

Commendably achieved as planned with little variance from anticipated; this includes achievement of extra targets in line with the extended project duration. Amazingly, every target met relates to people who are striving to overcome disadvantage and IEG has assisted many to realise their ambitions and/or set them on that path.

3.9 Intended Outcomes

Output numbers, together with the information from partner and participant feedback, demonstrate that the project met expectations that were voiced in the second interim report – ‘IEG is on target to achieve or even exceed the numbers forecast and is surpassing expectations in the quality of outcomes.’ Having now conducted the final evaluation, the evaluators can attest to this.

3.10 Intended Impact

The outputs and outcomes have undoubtedly impacted positively upon the participants involved but the intended impacts in the logic model go even further e.g., regional impacts such as boosted skills base, new markets, jobs and produce. That IEG impacted on the region is supported by the project targets met and applied to the London Mayor’s own strategic targets.

4 PROJECT DELIVERY AND MANAGEMENT

Throughout this project, the evaluators have been able to identify and rigorously evidence that LTEN and the delivery partners have designed, managed, and delivered an outstanding project to a very high standard. The interim evaluations ascertained, through rigorous investigation, that the project team worked diligently and cohesively, to reach disadvantaged groups and customise individual developments plans to increase chance of enduring success.

“Found the whole process very useful and gave us the framework to go ahead and build on the knowledge that has been given to us.”

The external evaluation monitored project delivery and management regularly, through face-to-face meetings, paperwork checks and participant feedback. At project close, evaluators identified that the governance and management structures were appropriate and implemented robustly; evidenced through rapid response and project continuance throughout Brexit, Covid, death of a senior delivery partner and the ability to drive a project that required additional funding and an extension, to meet high demand for IEG, identified from their marketing and outreach strategies.

“Provided a great service and a lot of effort.”

Project activities included outreach, assessment and engagement, entrepreneurial interventions and opportunities, business start-up, sustaining and developing small businesses and project day-to-day management that ensured ongoing success. Evaluation identified that all activities were delivered to a high standard, adapted successfully through adverse external impacts and met challenges and need in hard-to-reach areas with groups least likely to engage, evidenced by the diverse participant intake, participant feedback and exit reviews.

“They have supported me and have pasted [sic] me freelance work from other companies, which has helped me over the lockdown. Now lockdown is coming to an end looking to get back and start up my business.”

The evaluators ascertained that budget limitations naturally impacted on the number of hours participants had with their business advisors. This was commented frequently on participant feedback forms, as were requests for advisors to complete their business plans; this purports a need to manage expectations. However, all participants were thoroughly informed of project deliverables from the start; this argues that expectations were managed, but participants desired more, despite a number of the partners continuing support, without recompense, well after participants' project end dates.

“The business support and knowledge that I have gained has been amazing. I wouldn't have known any of this.”

Evaluators determined that the project partners used prior knowledge and had thoroughly investigated participant demographics at project inception and created a robust end-to-end process that ensured the right participants were targeted and engaged. Project advertising was clear and outreach methodologies were designed to ensure prospective participants met output criteria. At project start-up, a further check of eligibility ensued, through robust interviewing. Continued, regular monitoring practises ensured participants' pathway remained true to the output requirements.

"I decided to do the course to get a taster for the creative industries before I started a degree. It was a great experience and was a baptism of fire, on leaving I decided that the creative industries was not for me and went to work at the NHS. In the long run it saved me a lot of wasted time, effort and money in getting a degree that wouldn't of really been worth anything."

To ascertain perceptions of individual activities and IEG as a whole, evaluators undertook rigorous assessment of stakeholder and participant feedback e.g., surveys, interviews and anecdotal evidence. Throughout, the quality and quantity of activities has been of a very high standard and exceeded expectations of individualised support, training activities and information, advice and guidance. Participant reported a desire even more individualised support and of longer duration, and many commented that they had created excellent relationships with their advisors and developed profound peer networks.

"Very professional and truly competent in the support I needed which I really appreciated. Patient, always coming with new, relevant information, in a timely manner, so I don't feel overwhelmed"

IEG clearly supported participants to consider and implement horizontal principles into their businesses.

- The difficulty with environmental awareness was the need for start-up businesses to procure materials, which were, reportedly, five to ten times more expensive if sourced locally. IEG signposted, where possible, to local cheaper sources and suggested alternatives. If this was not feasible, participants were supported to consider environmental issues in other ways and highlighted future considerations in the business planning.
- Equal opportunities and non-discrimination were role modelled to very high standards and participants considered their role in incorporating non-discriminatory principles into their businesses. Many had cultural considerations in their own working ethos and had experienced discrimination due to their gender, life-choices and/or ethnicity. Therefore, many started with sympathetic awareness.

"Loved the whole team and learned so much"

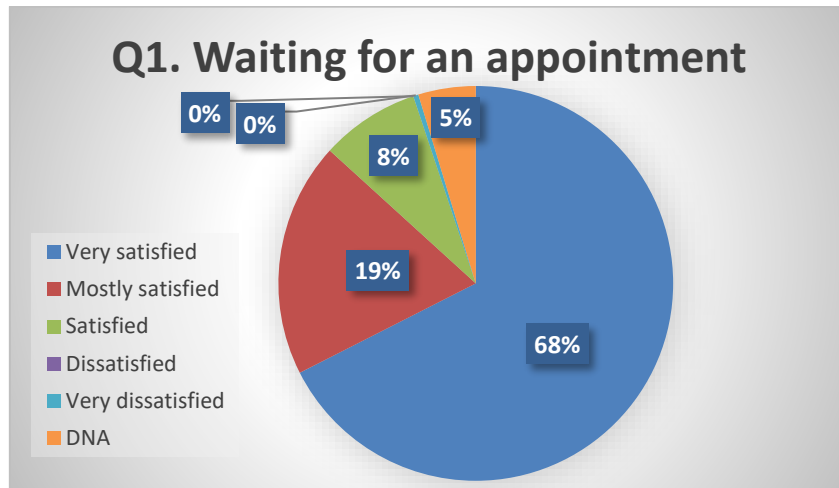
4.1 Participant Feedback

The evaluators tried extensively, with the support of the project team to undertake a final survey to gain qualitative and quantitative data from the participants at project close. A random selection of 25% of the participants were targeted but did not elicit a single response. Subsequently, 100% participants were targeted and sent a survey, but due to the lack of responses, data was not a reliable representation of the target group.

From follow up telephone calls and partner information, primary reasons for the lack of responses were: -

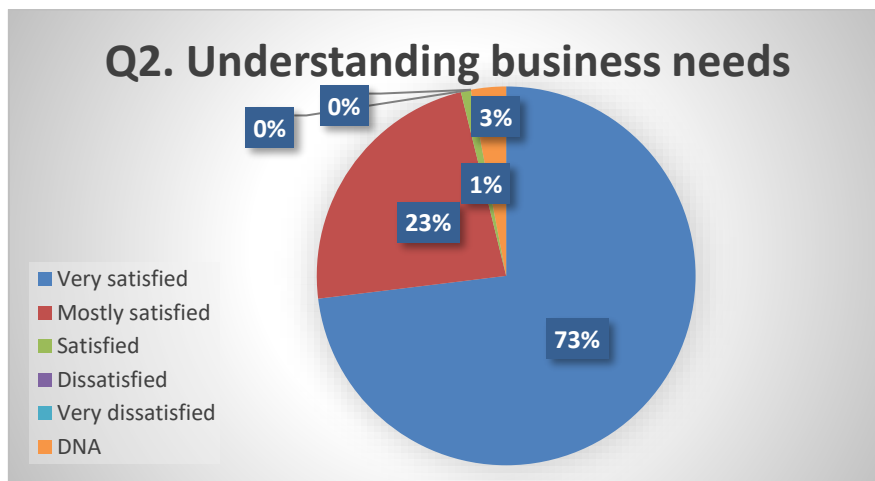
- Changes in contact details with no forwarding information
- Business development beyond the scope of the project
- Post-pandemic and post-Brexit challenges
- Complete change of working and/or life situations
- Too busy/successful to allow time to respond effectively

Therefore, we undertook a desktop review of all exit feedback forms and collated quantitative and qualitative responses, to identify a reliable data source that elicited informed statements about the quality of the project deliverables.



Q1 Waiting for an appointment: This question was designed to identify the levels of satisfaction regarding all appointments e.g., time with advisors, visits, meetings, training courses. The responses indicate the majority of project interventions started promptly. This would have given participants a positive experience throughout. 95% were satisfied with the time it took to get a response or start an intervention. A small 5% did not respond to this question, and 0% answered dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Participant comments:

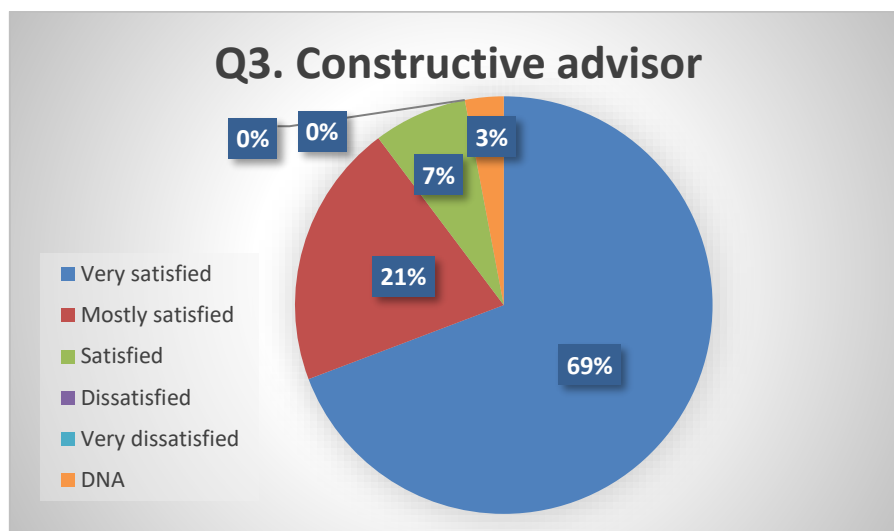
- They were so quick to respond
- Any questions and if they didn't know, they knew someone who did
- Always got back to me
- No hanging about
- Always started courses on time
- Were always there when I needed them



Q2 Understanding Business Needs: The purpose of this question was to ascertain if the project met need by fully understanding the participant requirements and customising support appropriately. 97% were positively satisfied, 0% dissatisfied and only 1% failed to respond to this question. The evaluators can assume from these responses, partners' expertise at 'understanding business need', was instrumental to the highly successful project achievements and delivering a compelling project overall. Participants comments:

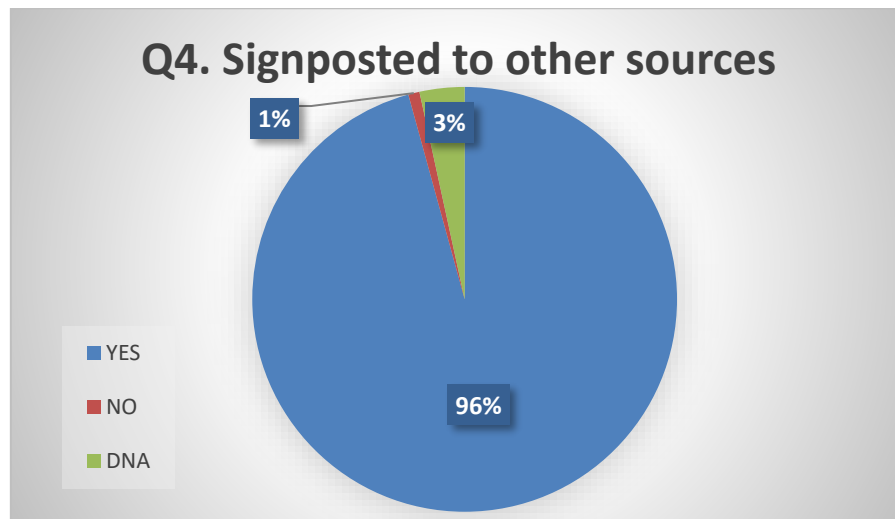
- Very understanding of my company's needs

- As an individual the support that I receive opened my mind about how a business should be, how to start a company and many others useful things needed to business [sic]
- Made me have a long hard look at what I wanted to do, give me the support and experience to gain employment in my industry, once I've got enough experience I can then at starting my own company [sic]
- As an individual, classifying aims and objectives of pre-release and initial trial of app. As a business - website development
- Helped focus on marketing channels relevant to our business. Introduced us to new products to increase our understanding of what customers are doing when they reach our website
- It has reassured me on the direction I have been taking and that I am not far off or incorrect. Has helped me identify flaws in myself and has made me think about methodologies I have not thought about



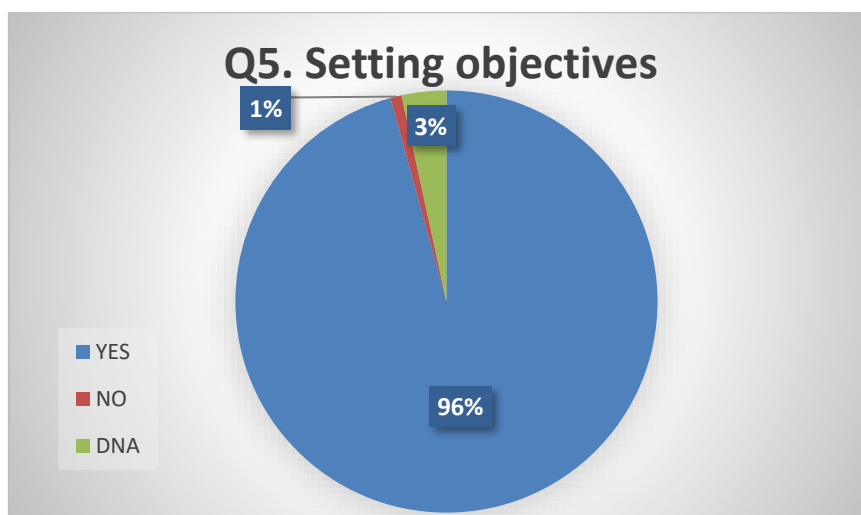
Q3 Constructive Advisor: Participants spent a lot of time with their advisors and it was important to the success of the project that they received expert information, advice and guidance, and felt supported through the project. 97% were satisfied and left very positive comments about their relationship with their advisors. Again, there was no level of dissatisfaction and only 3% did not respond to this question. Participants comments:

- Very prepared, accommodating, great communicator
- Willing to go the extra mile, broad experience of the industry
- He was extremely helpful and I believe has gone above and beyond to help me meet my business needs
- They really knew their stuff and were more useful than my degree course
- Understanding and dedicated to my success, very good at exploiting difficult concepts in a step by step way
- Extremely hands on, took time to understand my idea and provided relevant information. Clear goals were set at the beginning and end of every meeting, allowing progress to take place really early on. Without the advisor I wouldn't have made the progress that I made.



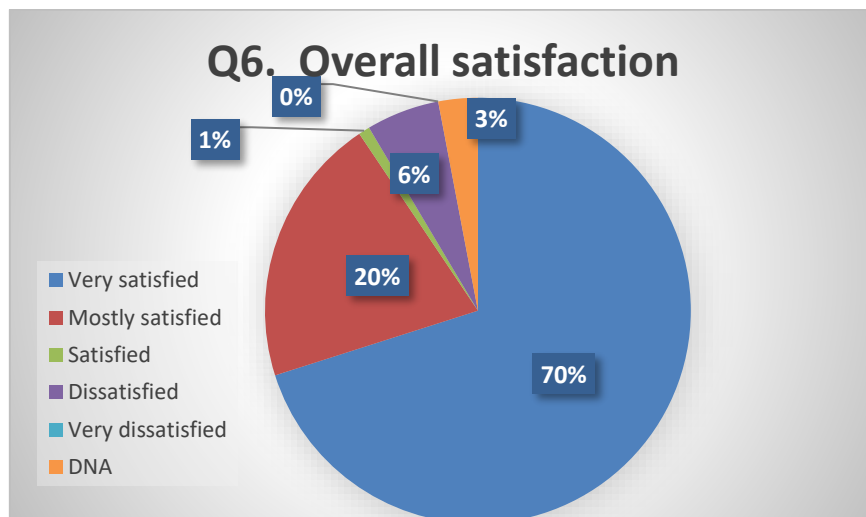
Q4 Signposted to other sources: To ensure greater participant success and broadening the scope of the project offer, all partners were able to offer networking and signposting opportunities beyond their own specialism. This was due to their in-depth market knowledge and industry experience. 96% participants were signposted to appropriate other resources only 1% stated that they were not, but did not leave any explanatory comment. Participants comments:

- He gave me contacts at Mac. With this company I can get a work and get to know the product, build my kit and do more shadowing with a professional. I'm just not ready yet.
- Always makes time and worked hard on my behalf
- Very professional and informative, goes above and beyond to ensure results
- They had an amazing network in which they had no hesitation in opening
- Took the time to signpost me to other useful resources which has been a brilliant addition.
- BRILLIANT! Walked me through step by step and knew the industry inside out and opened the door to all their contacts.



Q5 Setting objectives: The evaluators identified, through the results of this response, that participants were set appropriate objectives, with 96% stating that the objectives met need and supported their development. As objectives were directly linked to the logic model and identified project need, the evaluators can confidently assume this significantly contributed to IEG's successful conclusion. Participants comments:

- It was a very structured and planned step by step exercise including discussions and practical implementations
- It was given me a clear understanding of steps I need to take prior to releasing a product to the market/setting up in business. It has given me knowledge of important things that need to be done behind the scenes
- Clear explanation, step by step process
- Useful for starting a business and as a new entrepreneur, key guidance required for starting a business
- Helped us with informations, advices, plan to action, guide us to improve our ideas [sic]
- I was taken through step by step what it will cost and what it's like to be a make-up artist. I worked as a makeup artist on a on a shoot.



Q6 Overall satisfaction: These responses show an overwhelming satisfaction level of 91% with only 3% not leaving a response and 6% unsatisfied. This correlates to the final yes/no question of whether participants would recommend the project for which 94% said they would and 6% not responding. This demonstrates an irrefutable conclusion that the vast majority of participants felt their expectations were met, that their needs were supported and that they gained something from participating. Their comments speak for themselves. Participant comments:

- All very positive, I enjoyed the experience, I feel more prepared now, with the necessary knowledge and tools to start my own business
- Answered every question I had, provide with great solutions to problems I was facing [sic]
- It was an amazing experience
- Better than my lectures at university and much more helpful
- Loved the whole course, getting my work in print and meeting deadlines
- Very helpful service, quite a few of the tips were implemented into the business
- Feel more confident to start, approximate risks
- There was a constant and vast source of support, ideas and initiatives,
- The support brought confidence to start my own business and create a clearer vision over the next period
- Everything was perfect!!

4.2 Participant Case Study (below)

Name

Joyce A Davis
Managing Director/Founder
Alpha Female Academy

https://twitter.com/a_femaleacademy

**The Business**

Pursuing an artistic career can be an exhausting, emotional journey. Whether your goal is to learn new skills, launch an independent business or work within the fashion industry, Alpha Female Academy (AFA) is the perfect place to build the foundation.

Joyce, the Founder and CEO, believes in giving disadvantaged but talented people opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have. She wanted to set up a space to enable women, specifically low income BAME women, to learn about fashion, acquire vital fashion skills, create unique portfolios and identify pathways and access to university and or employment (independent or PAYE). The academy will teach creativity, drawing skills (with PC software as appropriate), how to resource materials and assist budding fashionistas to enter the world of fashion with robust proposals.

Joyce has had some fantastic opportunities that make her the ideal choice for running a Fashion Academy, she has worked and studied in places like Thailand and Florence. She won the contract for making the clothes for the Voice UK winners and undertaken a contract for making musicians' tour clothes, for 33 music shows.

Joining the Project

Joyce joined the project at a time when she was working as a full time PA but still, in the evenings, sewing and cutting patterns to ensure she maintained her skills and continued to follow her passion in clothing. Having wanted to set up her own business for a while, but lacking time to be able to focus on the need of her product or to give herself space to learn, IEG supported Joyce to consider her options and offered development opportunities for starting up a business based on her passion.

Joyce was offered an advisor and they had regular sessions to consolidate her ideas and plan the business requirements and forward plan next steps. Joyce also attended most of the courses offered, eager to upskill/consolidate her experience and identify useful contacts.

Project Support & Intervention Impact

Despite an already rich experience and a depth of knowledge, Joyce had been unable to find the space/time she needed to plan and start her new venture successfully. IEG offered a number of opportunities of which Joyce attended:

- ✚ Advice, guidance and signposting with ongoing business coaching and mentoring
- ✚ 'Manufacturing, Costing and Quality Control' Workshop
- ✚ 'Tech Pack and Best Sellers' Workshop
- ✚ Diagnostic Assessment and Strategic Directions to Develop Product, Market and USP
- ✚ Business Diversification Strategies
- ✚ Linkage of Made-to-Measure/Volume Collections
- ✚ Research – Sourcing, Marketing, Production Templates, Finance and Factories

*The tools and support that I have received,
have been second to none.*

However, when the pandemic hit, it caused a number of issues for Joyce, primarily, her two main sources of income dried up. The musicians (show contract as mentioned above) were forced to stop touring, so no longer needed clothes for their shows, and her teaching dried up because her students couldn't be in the same room with the machinery.

Joyce had embroidery machinery so made face masks ("I love you but keep your distance" – see picture below), and with IEG support, she produced and marketed these successfully. With the additional time forced by the lockdowns, Joyce was able to identify a further opportunity of making masks with company logos. So, despite the drastic changes to her situation, Joyce was encouraged to use the time effectively to proactively consider how to diversify and sell to large and niche audiences, to ensure she continued to work throughout Covid.



Links to Horizontal Themes

Sustainable Development

- ✚ Materials are specifically purchased from overstock which reduces the need of landfill
- ✚ A focus on experimenting with biodegradable garments

Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination

- ✚ As a British black woman with strong Ghanaian roots, Joyce strives to reduce the inequality gaps for women and more specifically BAME women in the business sector
- ✚ AFA targets BAME women to fulfil their aspirations in an underrepresented sector

Final Comments from Joyce

The project gave me confidence and was a spring board to start my business.

Women of colour can succeed!!!



5 OUTCOMES & IMPACT

The evaluators used a version of the ERDF spend and output table to confirm that IEG met almost all anticipated outputs within budget. Essentially, higher outcomes were achieved for £1% less than planned. Only the C8 (increase in employment) output was slightly under target, achieving 73 against 75 contracted. The 1% underspend was due to reduced number of days claimed - caused by Covid and delays in the evaluation owing to ill health.

The partners followed up all businesses regularly to verify increased employment but businesses did not respond so the 2 missing C8 could not be claimed. Lack of response seems to have been a pattern since Covid as the evaluators found a similar reluctance/inability in participants to communicate. Outcomes and impacts were achieved as per the predictions on the Logic Model above and in number as per the targets.

5.1 Examples of intended outcomes achieved

- 553 potential entrepreneurs and 250 businesses were supported and recorded tangible start up and/or growth.
- All supported business owners demonstrated improved business acumen and skills
- All supported businesses learnt about the London business context and improved market opportunities e.g., attending/participating in London Fashion Week, creating pop-up businesses.
- All supported businesses were encouraged to create new jobs and products when appropriate, but circumstances often required prioritising survival e.g., moving to online sales during Covid and/or reducing growth.
- Multiple networking opportunities for participants e.g., Arts Thread for marketing; Arts Council for funding; Princes Trust for business mentoring; British Fashion Council for international showcasing and marketing; Launch It for incubation spaces and links to other ERDF such as British Library for post-programme support.

5.2 Examples of intended impacts achieved

- Increased number of BAME and women-owned businesses
- Assumed increased gross contribution to the London economy
- London skills base boosted by upskilling all 803 participants
- New and innovative markets opened up e.g., bottles turned into fibres for clothing; upcycling old football kits into an up-market collection
- New jobs created and new products developed
- New and established businesses work together to sustain growth

5.3 Attributable outcomes

803 participants joined IEG, needing help with their business or business idea and received customised support. Entry, and subsequent, forms highlight the type and level of intervention needed, but the information is qualitative. From ongoing records and individual revised targets, it seems safe to say that the outcomes were wholly realised by project activities.

5.4 Attributable impacts

Of the quantitative impacts indicated above – lists and charts, it is fair to say that they were also brought about by IEG activities. However, although many of the participants themselves have paid tribute to the project, we cannot guess numerically to what extent some of these effects would have occurred over time without the IEG intervention.

5.5 Additional benefits of the project

In the 1st Interim Report, 2018, Evaluators noted ‘In this project ... no explicit targets relating to the creation of Value Added. Given the relatively small size of the project ... little value in undertaking an estimate of the additional Value Added. Such an estimate would unavoidably need to be based on a large number of assumptions, many of which would be too “heroic” to allow reliable results. The size of the project does not justify a major calculation exercise in which the sensitivity to each assumption would be tested, which, in a bigger project, might just make estimates of the Gross and Net impacts

created justifiable.’ This statement is still accurate; however, the achieved project outcomes and impacts indicate a significant and ongoing economic, social and environmental contribution.

- Economic in terms of new businesses, growing businesses and upskilled members of the community
- Social in terms of improved participation in the community and improved personal skills
- Environmental in terms of the efforts made by a significant number of participants to align businesses practices with environmental targets.

IEG final quantitative results directly contribute to ERDF aims. The qualitative outcomes and impacts are rather more difficult to quantify, however, post-project anecdotal evidence shows that the results continue to contribute materially to ERDF aims and the resulting impact develops year-on-year as businesses are sustained and grow or upskilled people are more able to enter the labour market. Evaluation has verified the claims made by the Lead Partner by examining data from the quarterly ERDF claim forms; their database detailing each claim; ERDF Summative Assessment data monitoring, and source data e.g., interviews, activity records and exit forms.

The IEG intervention has yielded little quantifiable SAV. However, participants continue to have regional impact by matching IEG achievements to a range of the Mayor of London’s strategic objectives 2021–2025 e.g. IEG’s creative industries contribute to the culture strategy; IEG contributed to the Skills for Londoners aim and economic development strategy by upskilling 803 Londoners who would otherwise be disadvantaged in the labour market.

6 VALUE FOR MONEY (VfM)

IEG supported 803 participants and cost £4,072,384 of which £2,024,884 was contributed by ERDF. The evaluators checked participants' files and LTEN financial claims against the Summative Assessment Database to validate the final claim. Total spend at project end corresponds to the prudent costs presented in the original application form – in real terms, higher outcomes were achieved for £1% less than planned. Also contributing to good value, all the staff have long experience in working economically whilst delivering quality services.

Many stakeholders are concerned in whether IEG was value for money; the evaluators have referenced the interests of different groups to determine its intrinsic value:

Was IEG VfM for ERDF?

The evaluators found that LTEN has amply demonstrated that the vast majority of targets have been met or exceeded at 99% of the budgeted cost – indicating that IEG was VfM for ERDF.

Was IEG VfM for participants?

IEG participants received a wide range of customised interventions that were delivered by professional and experienced practitioners. Evaluators found that participants are appreciative of the value of IEG, 'it was not a waste of time' – indicating that IEG was VfM for participants.

Was IEG VfM for London?

775 IEG participants are now Londoners who are contributing directly to the economy by running businesses, playing a more meaningful part in the community and in the creative industries as a result of increased confidence and skills and/or aiming to start-up a business in the future. IEG continues to contribute to several of the London Mayor's development strategies - IEG was VfM for London.

Was IEG VfM for LTEN?

IEG is another extremely successful project managed by LTEN who showed high level expertise, resilience and perseverance through very difficult phases including Brexit, Covid and the death of a valued partner. LTEN achieved what they set out to do and have seen some remarkable results - very satisfying and VfM for LTEN.

Other London-based ERDF projects

London has benefitted from many ERDF projects supporting disadvantaged people in a huge variety of ways. However, it seems the majority of these have been managed by large organisations such as universities, institutions and regional authorities. Their specialisms appear largely to be in technological and digital enterprises and medical initiatives. Very few match the profile of LTEN for benchmarking purposes and where they do have similar objectives (e.g., ELSBC – East London Small Business Centre), they are considerably larger than LTEN with significantly more resources and financial stability. Hence the evaluators were unable to benchmark against peers and can only reiterate that, based on the verified in-house evidence, IEG was a most effective project.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions

A small sample of the strengths in outputs - listed below - show that IEG was a dynamic robust project that made a significant, quantifiable difference to a considerable number of Londoners and, by association, to countless others. The key weakness, identified by the evaluators, is based on participant feedback and relates simply to demands for more of the IEG interventions and several resource intensive new ideas that would inform a follow-on project and/or inform other project leaders.

7.2 Strengths of IEG

- The LTEN IEG team achieved 99.7% of targeted outputs. This was accomplished within a lean budget and almost with a perfect zero balance – only marred by the unavoidable underspend of the evaluators due to ill health and fewer consultancy costs.
- 803 participants succeeded in progressing their business ideas and skills which is a remarkable attainment for a small organisation and small team. It is testimony to quality management and the expertise and long experience of all involved in delivery.
- 803 participants engaged in nearly 12,000 episodes of interventions/activities - an average of 15 interventions per participant across a wide range of activities which has resulted in a large number of the most disadvantaged Londoners being able to sustain their own businesses and contribute to the community and economy.
- Feedback forms from 30.4% (235) participants show that 94% would recommend IEG to others and that only 6% expressed any form of dissatisfaction.
- A significant strength is that 94% attested to increased confidence during and since IEG which is an additional demonstration that the effects of IEG will continue to have impact into the future.

7.3 Key weakness of IEG

Just one main weakness became apparent from the feedback forms and personal progress records viz, a higher level of **post IEG project engagement** was demanded by significant numbers of participants. This indicates firstly that the project people and interventions were highly valued and secondly, activities and resources could be increased to plan a project with new objectives and that, in retrospect, IEG could have enlarged its scope if funding had allowed.

Continuing post project support was requested in the following areas:

- 48% Trouble shooting and access to further personalised information from advisers
- 42% Assistance with access to funding opportunities and actual finance
- 25% Assistance locating work/office/studio space and in setting up
- 38% More and focussed marketing guidance including digital marketing.

7.4 Evaluators' recommendations to different bodies

LTEN – project manager and grant recipient:

- At the ending of ERDF and other European funding for insertion and labour market projects in the UK, LTEN must seek alternative funding in order to continue working with the disadvantaged client groups that they have long experience in supporting. LTEN's track record of over 20 years of managing projects for some of the hardest to reach participants is outstanding – as is their coordination of partners and the development of new interventions to respond to changing contexts. LTEN must now focus effort on promoting their expertise and demonstrating to funders that a small, highly specialised organisation is as fitted, if not more fitted, to respond effectively to niche issues and local participants, than others.
- New projects that pick up on the 'post project' wishes listed above would support previous LTEN participants to grow more and will attract new participants at different stages of business development. Partnerships with banks and/or government initiatives could develop schemes for hybrid social / small business loans or grants.

Those designing and implementing similar interventions:

LTEN would have been pleased to work with similar interventions in London but IEG was unique so there was no opportunity. The evaluators verified this from the reports of London ERDF projects. A key recommendation would be for those designing and implementing similar interventions to learn from the LTEN objectives and methods and to take note of the post project wish list above.

Policy makers:

- To learn from the project methodology and results of experienced organisations such as LTEN and blend their findings into future funded projects and regional strategies.
- To provide funding to enable and train organisations to effectively lift the most disadvantaged people out of their perpetual peripheral position vis a vis the labour market. IEG and a plethora of ESF funded insertion projects have continuously demonstrated that such interventions work and have a significant positive effect on the economy as well as on the lives of myriad people.

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