



eScalate IMPACT REPORT





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INTRODUCTION

eScalate was originally launched in August 2019 as a three-year enterprise support programme funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and delivered in Oxfordshire by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP). It was subsequently extended by a further year, concluding in July 2023.

The programme had a dual remit:

- 1/ To support social enterprises, enterprising charities and purposeful businesses in Oxfordshire**
- 2/ To support scale-up SMEs and those with scale-up potential**

The programme was administered centrally by OxLEP and delivery was subcontracted to two separate teams.

For the purposes of this evaluation, this report will focus on the social enterprise support side of the programme, which was delivered by OSEP CIC, the authors of this report.



OxLEP Business is the Growth Hub for Oxfordshire, part of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP), which itself is part of a nationwide network of 38 LEPs. It helps businesses to navigate the local business support landscape and find the support they need. OxLEP plays a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and job creation, improve infrastructure, and raise workforce skills within the local area.

www.oxlepbusiness.co.uk



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



OSEP was originally established in 2014 as an informal partnership and then incorporated as a Community Interest Company (CIC) in March 2019. It was set up to respond to local demand from the social enterprise sector in Oxfordshire to address its fast-growing development and support needs. OSEP's activities provide benefit to organisations, enterprises and entrepreneurs operating to make positive social and/or environmental impact. As a CIC, any profits are re-invested back into the organisation to fund more of that work.

The OSEP business model builds on best practice from others engaged in the Social Enterprise UK 'Places programme' in other regions. Its model is a lean structure that minimises its overheads, helping to ensure that almost all of the funds raised are retained within the local community and are spent on the purpose of developing and benefiting local social enterprise and social entrepreneurs. This has a welcome multiplier effect within the wider community and contributes to a more resilient and inclusive local economy.

www.osep.org.uk

Timeline

DECEMBER 2019

Six Enterprise 'Hubs' announced as programme delivery partners

MARCH 2020

Lockdown

OCTOBER 2021

First social enterprise Bootcamp

OCTOBER 2022

A further 7 month programme extension granted

AUGUST 2019

OSEP CIC wins bid to deliver eScalate for OxLEP

FEBRUARY 2020

Enterprise support event programme launched

NOVEMBER 2020

First Power of Purpose Festival (POP)

APRIL 2022

6 month programme extension granted

APRIL 2023

programme closes



PROGRAMME SNAPSHOT

The eScalate programme's mission was to support social enterprises, individuals, charities and purposeful businesses to grow their knowledge, form partnerships and increase their impact. The programme delivered this support in a number of ways:



Grants

The programme awarded grants ranging from £1k to £25k to 35 social impact organisations and businesses, amounting to a total grant pot of £360k.



1:1s

A dedicated enterprise support adviser provided 1-1 support and signposting to eligible organisations. Participants received an initial Information Diagnostic and Brokerage (IDB) delivered in-person (when permitted) or remotely.



Workshops

As part of its remit to deliver support in Leadership and Business Sustainability, the programme created a series of workshops and webinars, delivering more than 80 events covering topics ranging from Becoming a BCorp to Impact Measurement, Prototyping, Good Governance, Trading for Charities, Inclusivity, Crowdfunding and many more. eScalate also ran some special events, including the 'Power of Purpose' (POP) festival (see p.16), a 'Bootcamp' for early-stage social impact businesses (see p.22), as well as 'Marketing with a Mission', a series of marketing masterclasses for socially-focussed businesses.



Peer-to-Peer

The peer-to-peer groups brought together targeted cohorts of 8 - 12 individuals who either shared a similar sector focus, such as 'Food & Drink', 'Health and Wellbeing' or 'Working with young people' or a common subject interest, such as 'Trading for Charities', 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' and 'Impact Measurement'.



Networking

Community-building was a strong focus of the programme, and alongside the more formal workshop programme, it ran a series of 'Socials', networking events targeted at organisations from specific sectors, including the hospitality, health & wellbeing, education, tech and creative sectors.

Much of this support was delivered through a countywide network of Enterprise Hubs:



Aspire is a multi-award-winning employment charity, established in 2001 to tackle some of the most complex social issues in Oxfordshire. It supports vulnerable local people into and towards employment and housing, as the most powerful way to break the complex cycles of homelessness, re-offending and poverty.



TownSq, a certified B Corporation, is committed to helping people to start and run their own businesses. It now runs 11 community-led co-working spaces in England and Wales with an additional 50+ Cowork Local venues to enable people to work closer to home in a community of like-minded entrepreneurs. Its eScalate Hub was based at the Eco Business Centre, based in Bicester.

CAG is based at Makespace, a community-led workspace, which launched in September 2018 in north Oxford. CAG consists of over 70 groups across Oxfordshire who are at the forefront of community led climate change action tackling issues including waste, transport, food, energy, biodiversity and social justice. Started in 2001, the network is the largest of its kind in the UK, running over 2,000 events per year, attended by around 80,000 local residents and contributing over 20,000 volunteer hours to the county.



Flo's is run by People, Place and Participation (PPP Ltd), a charitable community benefit society, which set up Flo's as a social enterprise hub with a community-owned café, nursery, refill shop, community midwives clinic, and more. Based in Florence Park in Oxford, it opened in September 2018 and has become a popular place for people to meet, eat, work, play, create, and learn. In 2022 it won the UK's Place-Based social enterprise of the year at the Social Enterprise Awards.



SOFEA has a dual social mission – educating disadvantaged young people and providing surplus food to other not for profit organisations. In 2021, it supported over 400 young people through its education, employability and wellbeing programmes, and prevented more than 1800 tonnes of food from going to landfill by redistributing it through its network of community larders.



Oxford Hub's vision is one of a cohesive community in which everyone is empowered to give and receive support from the people around them. With Oxford Hub people can create a positive impact through practical volunteering, placements with local charities and by incubating new social action projects and social enterprises.



Tap Social Movement is an award-winning craft brewery, events and hospitality business, which grew out of a passion for great beer and social justice. It provides training and employment to people serving and recently released from prison sentences to assist in effective rehabilitation and seeks to champion the cause of inclusive employment in the hospitality industry.

DELIVERY IN NUMBERS



450+

ORGANISATIONS
SUPPORTED

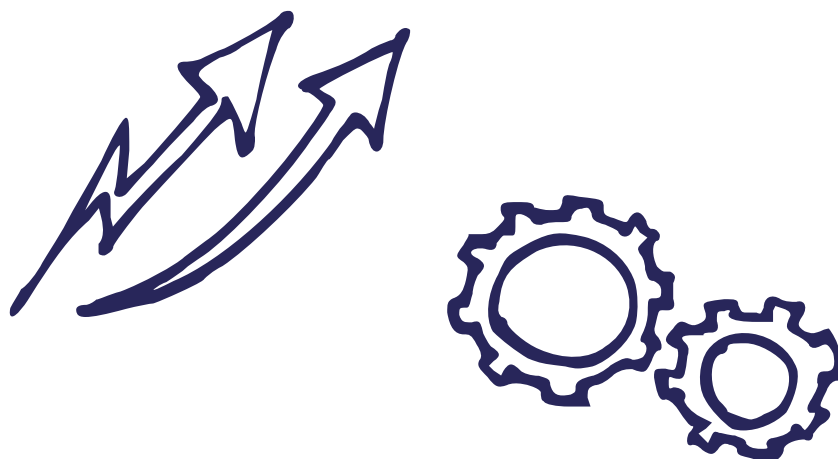


650

HOURS
OF 1-1
SUPPORT
PROVIDED TO

188

ORGANISATIONS



14

**PEER
GROUPS
FACILITATED**

150+

**START-UP
(LESS THAN
ONE YEAR OLD)
BUSINESSES
SUPPORTED**



£363,152

OF GRANT MONEY AWARDED TO

32

ORGANISATIONS



75

**WORKSHOPS
& WEBINARS
DELIVERED**

JUSTICE IN MOTION - INSPIRING

CHANGE THROUGH PERFORMANCE

CASE STUDY



Photo credit: Michael Lynch



Justice in Motion is a professional physical theatre company founded in Oxford by Anja Meinhardt in 2013. It makes theatre about human rights through a compelling mixture of dance, theatre, parkour, aerial acrobatics, film and music. Through its work, it aims to raise awareness about social injustices, informing and inspiring people to take action and instigate change.

Its productions have tackled subjects ranging from modern slavery to loneliness and its latest production, 'ResisDance', highlights the plight of Ukrainian refugees. For each of its projects, it carries out rigorous research, working with other charities, academics and businesses to understand the issues first.

As well as touring productions, Justice in Motion also runs dance classes, workshops and residencies for individuals, schools and businesses.

The charity attended several eScalate workshops and networking events, as well as receiving two rounds of grant funding. This helped it to keep on staff during Covid as well as buy some new technical equipment and software to enable it to take its productions on tour.

www.justiceinmotion.com



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**CHARITIES
IN THE
PROGRAMME**

“

“We’re a charity but quite entrepreneurial so we were a really good fit for the programme, and I’ve really made the most of the support that was available. Coming to networking events has been really beneficial, meeting new people and getting input from different businesses in different sectors has been really inspiring. The peer to peer support was also great as it was a much more intimate group of people and a place to work through ideas and thoughts. I’ve had ongoing 1-1 support from Grant, so he has seen our growth and development and understands exactly what help we have needed.

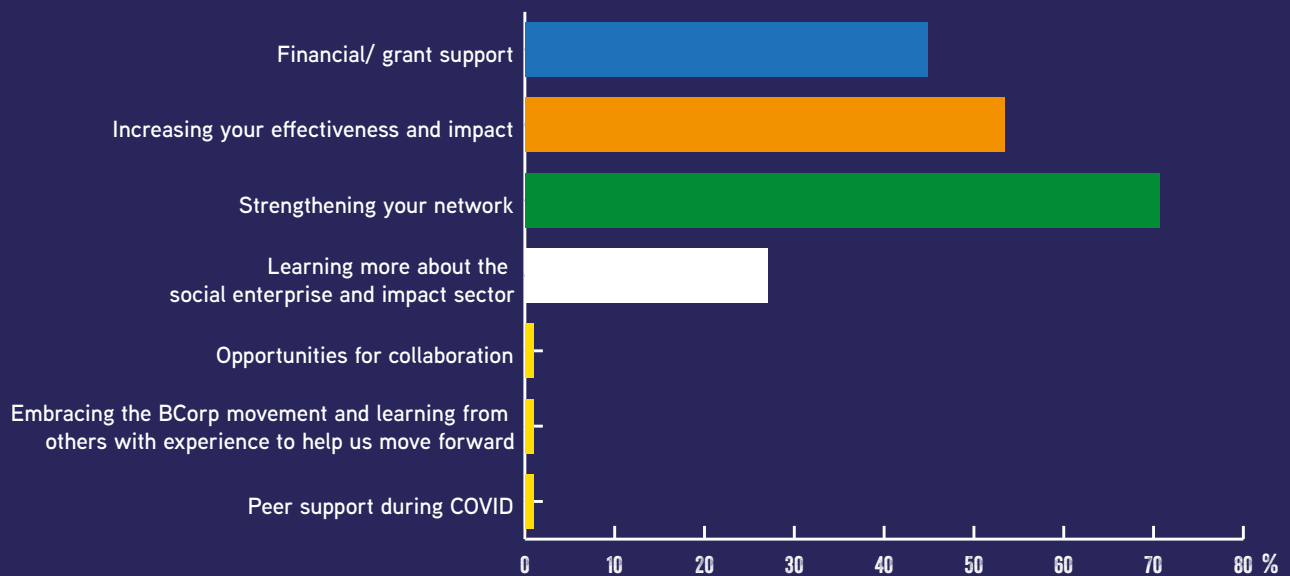
The financial support we received from eScalate gave us some stability during lockdown, but also opened up incredible opportunities. In this difficult period, we moved our dance classes into the virtual world, and were able to live-stream our show BOUND on Anti-Slavery Day. The funding also helped us to do a full re-brand and launch a new website, which has been really important for us.”

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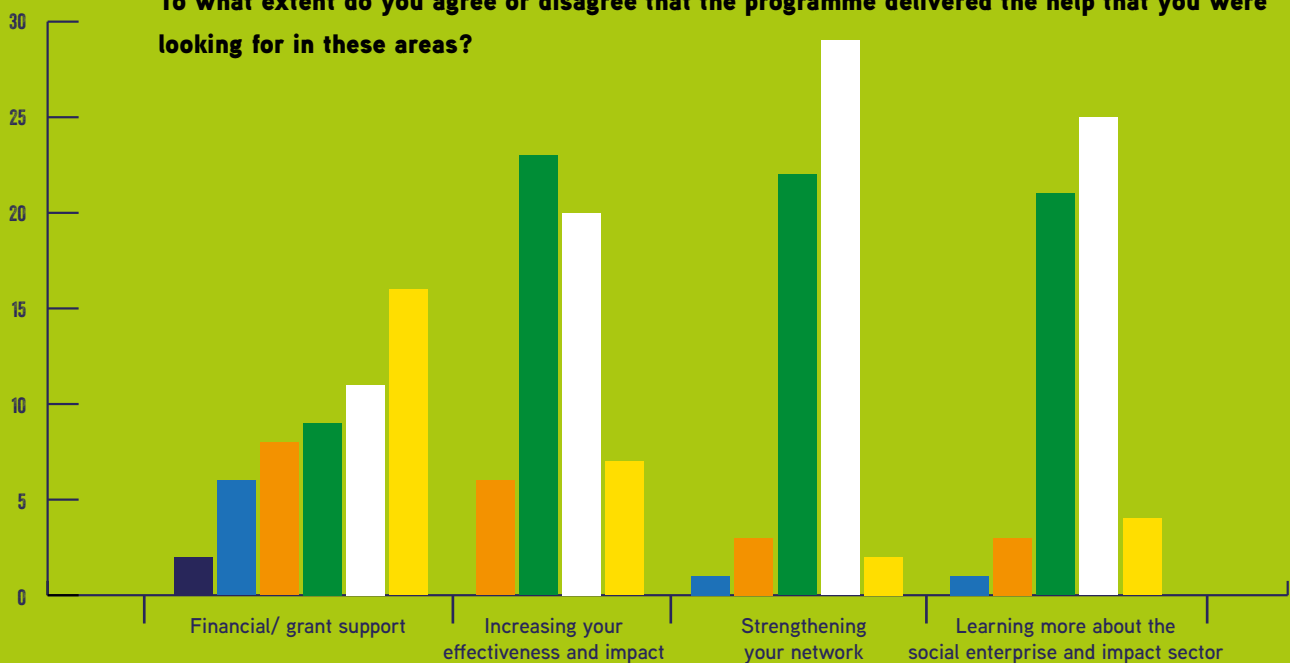
IMPACT RESULTS

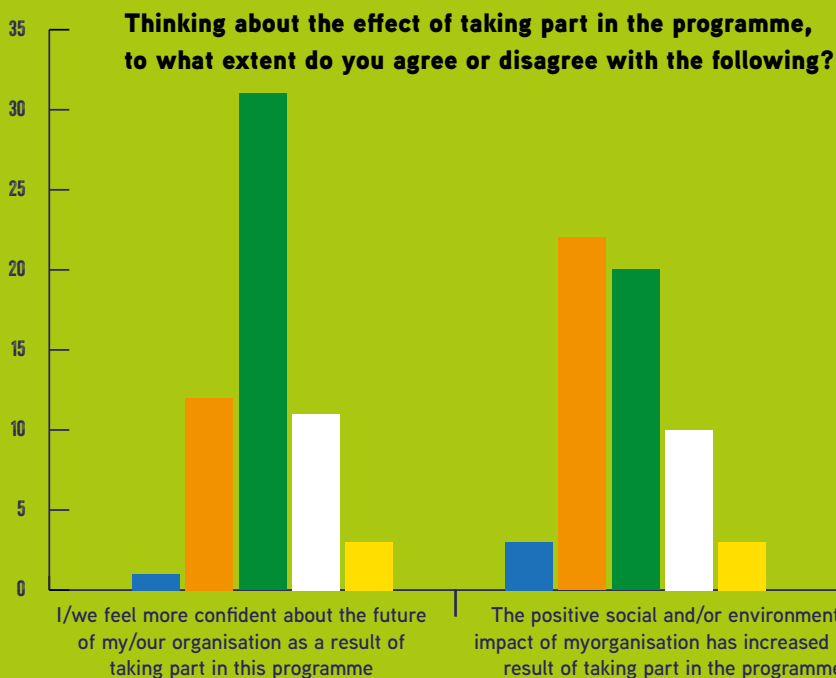
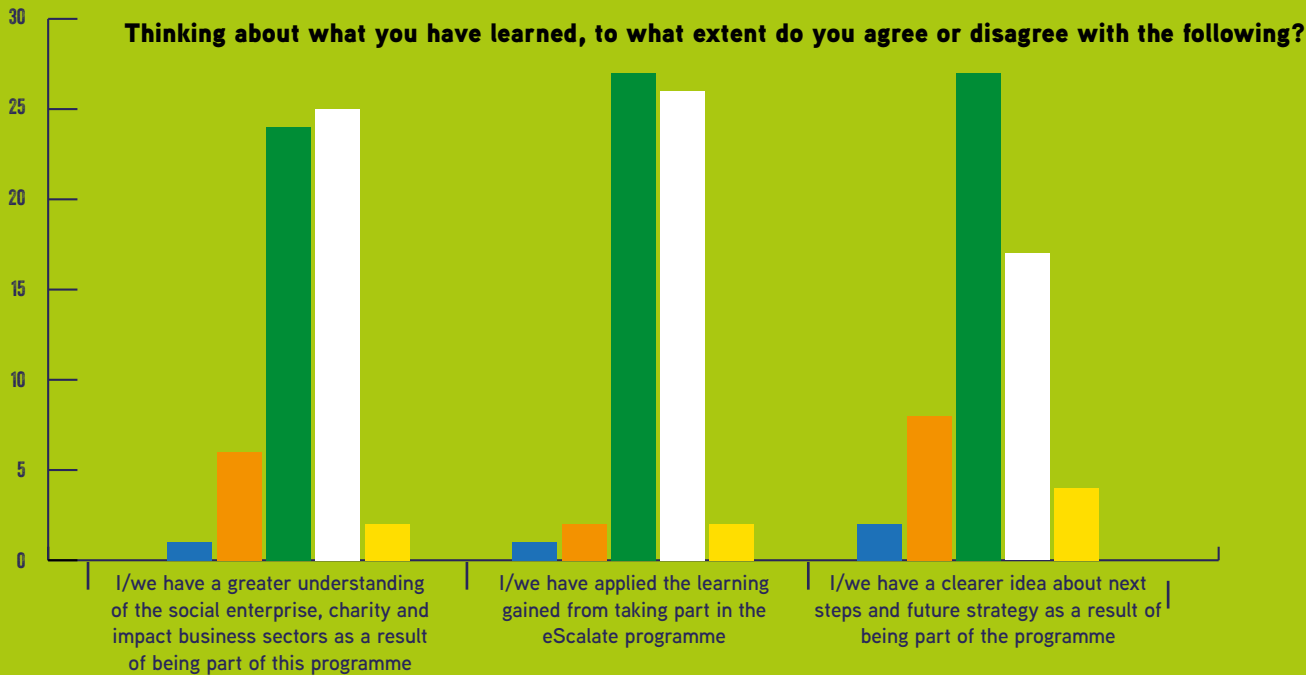
IMPACT FOR YOUR ORGANISATION

What help were you/ your organisation looking for when you started the programme?



To what extent do you agree or disagree that the programme delivered the help that you were looking for in these areas?





74%

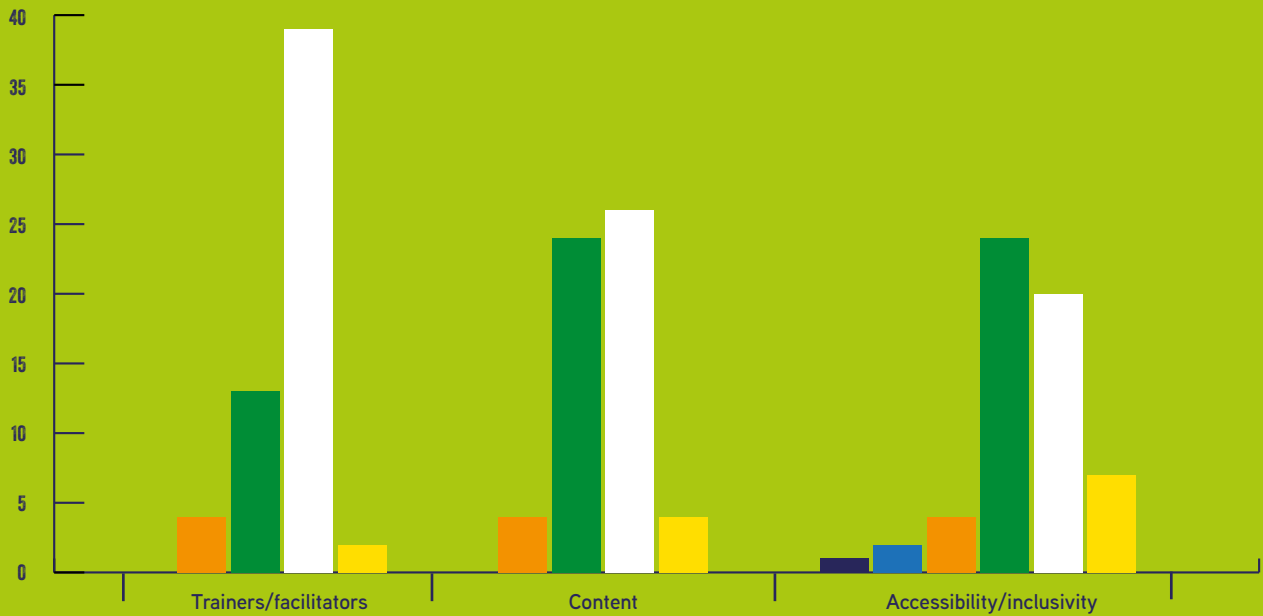
agreed / agreed strongly that the programme has helped them to form connections among the social enterprise, charity & impact sectors in Oxford



72%

believed their beneficiaries had benefitted from improvements made since engaging with the programme

Thinking about the programme overall, how would you rate the following aspects?



Demographic detail of respondents:

- 14% of respondents have organisations less than 2 years old
- 56% of respondents have organisations with turnover of over £100k
- More than half (51%) of respondents are aged 45+
- 58% of respondents are female
- 86% of respondents are white
- 44% of respondents were from private limited companies, 32% were charities or CICs
- There is a relatively even split between organisations that describe themselves as based in an urban location (51%) and rural location (44%). 28% are based in Oxford City.



Notes on results:

These results are drawn from an evaluation survey that was circulated to participants at the end of the programme. The survey was designed with external support from an independent research and impact expert.

The survey received 57 responses from a total pool of 459 participants, which gave a 12% sample size.





COVID

DELIVERY DURING LOCKDOWN

The programme faced a significant challenge very early on, when, just days after announcing it's first event schedule, the country found itself in an unprecedented lockdown due to the outbreak of Covid-19.

The content delivery model was based on using a countywide network of 6 enterprise 'Hubs' to host in-person workshops, peer support groups and networking events to deliver the Leadership & Business Support strand of the programme. This was clearly impossible due to the restrictions of lockdown, so the delivery team had to make a quick decision about whether to mothball the programme until normal conditions resumed, or to continue.

The decision was clear. Given the beneficiaries of the programme included charities who had suddenly lost core income streams from public fundraising

activities, as well as social enterprises and grass roots organisations who found themselves on the front line of tackling the social, economic and environmental fallout of the pandemic, the programme team quickly realised that a programme such as eScalate was needed more than ever before.

Workshops that were due to be delivered in-person were rapidly adapted to be delivered online via Zoom, and content was adapted to meet the immediate needs of the community. For instance, advising businesses on how to manage Communications in a Crisis or discussing the value of Prototyping with a real life example from one of the programme Hubs who had adapted its business model in order to lead on a community support programme.

While there were clear limitations to this mode of delivery, not least of which were the challenges around collecting paperwork to meet the reporting requirements of the programme, there was no doubt that the decision to continue supporting Oxfordshire businesses during this very difficult time was the right one.



CHALLENGES



While Covid was clearly a challenge that no-one could have anticipated, there were other issues that the programme faced, some of which were foreseen and which the programme organisers tried to mitigate against:

Reaching new audiences

An early concern was that the programme would only attract those already committed to business as a positive force of change. Eligibility criteria which required businesses to identify as social enterprises or purposeful businesses from the outset also meant that it was a challenge to sign up 'new' businesses which may not have immediately identified as having a social or environmental purpose. However, the broad brief of the programme meant it was able to welcome businesses of all stripes, and efforts were consistently made to target new business communities. For instance, 'Bootcamp', which targeted a more grass-roots sector of the community, embracing very early stage businesses. (See p. 22)

Town versus Country

With four of the six enterprise Hubs based in Oxford, it was accepted that more events would be held in the city to take advantage of population density, transport links and venue choices. This was a concern as the programme did not want to exclude businesses based in the more rural districts of the county. One of the few benefits of lockdown was the democratisation of access with the shift to online delivery. As lockdown eased and a return to in-person events resumed, the programme organisers made the decision to maintain a balance between in-person and online delivery to extend access to as many businesses as possible. However, a lack of activity outside of the city centre was an acknowledged (if largely unavoidable) limitation of the programme.

The problem with 'Free'

As a fully-funded enterprise support programme, no businesses had to pay to access content. A widely recognised downside to funded programmes, however, is that businesses often don't value the content as much as they would if they had to finance it themselves, and this sometimes led to high sign-ups but low attendance rates. The programme organisers tried to mitigate this by changing messaging to 'fully funded' rather than 'free'. However, while this was a recognised challenge, the value of offering free access during critical events such as Covid and the cost-of-living crisis should not be underestimated.

Eligibility

Strict eligibility criteria meant that pre-start businesses (those not incorporated or registered self-employed) were not able to be supported, even though the programme attracted an unexpectedly large pipeline of very early-stage businesses. The programme instead had to signpost these businesses to other eligible support, but also adapted some of the content delivery, with topics such as '*Legal Structures for your Purposeful Enterprise*' to help fast track fledgling enterprises on to the programme.

Paperwork

As a publicly funded programme, the paperwork requirements were significant and proved onerous to both the programme participants and organisers. In particular, the grant application paperwork was deemed to be disproportionate to the sums being asked for, and was a deterrent to some smaller organisations looking for funding. Covid also caused inevitable challenges around the collection of paperwork, but the programme organisers ultimately succeeded in recovering all the paperwork required to meet the programme deliverables.

Power of Purpose Week

Celebrating business as a force for good 16th to 20th November 2020

#POP20

eScalate Hub

Scaling your Purpose Project

SOFEA Didcot

How to turn your project into one that can generate revenue and operate at scale.

16

NOV

2020

16:00 - 17:30

16

NOV

2020

18:00 - 19:00

In conversation with Yancey Strickler

Part of the Trailblazer Chronicles: Collective Power

Yancey Strickler is the co-founder and former CEO of Kickstarter. This event is a collaboration between the Entrepreneurship Centre at Saïd Business School, the Oxford Foundry and the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship.

17

NOV

2020

10:00 - 11:30

Find out how OxLEP Business can help your purposeful business

OxLEP Business

A chance to learn more about this fully-funded programme supporting social enterprises, charities and purposeful businesses in Oxfordshire.

18

NOV

2020

10:00 - 12:00

eScalate Hub

Virtual Social Enterprise & Buyer Meet-up

Aspire @ Flo's

Join Oxfordshire's first ever virtual gathering for social enterprises and buyers.

18

NOV

2020

15:00

Meet the OSEP team

In partnership with Enterprising Oxford #StartedinOxford Demo Day

#StartedinOxford Demo Day is a celebration and showcase of the Oxford-linked entrepreneurship community. Join the team from OSEP CIC to hear more about their work supporting the social impact sector in Oxfordshire.

B Corps: Business as a Force for Good

B Local Oxfordshire+

Join B Corps and B Leaders to hear more about a new B Corp business group for Oxfordshire & the Thames Valley, and how you can get involved.

Business for Good

In partnership with Oxford Brookes' Thrive Festival

Meet a panel of social entrepreneurs on a mission to improve the world through business.

eScalate Hub

Social Enterprise 'Taster'

Tap Social

Inspiring start-up stories, a social-enterprise quiz and a chance to sample some craft beer from the comfort of your living room.

eScalate Hub

Time for Climate Action

Community Action Group Oxfordshire

Ashoka shares the results of interviews with global climate entrepreneurs and asks what we can do locally.

eScalate Hub

The Future of Work

Town Square (Eco Business Centre Bicester)

How can we create a productive, sustainable environment for our teams to work from?



Visit [OSEP.ORG.UK](https://www.osep.org.uk) for the full line up & to book



POWER OF PURPOSE

The Power of Purpose was first imagined in the summer of 2020, with the country having newly emerged from lockdown and with an air of positivity about new beginnings and a return to 'normal'.

The vision was to stage an autumn festival as part of eScalate to celebrate the thriving impact business community in Oxfordshire as well as to embrace the growing number of mainstream enterprises prompted by the pandemic into exploring a more responsible way of doing business.

Planned for November 2020 as a fully in-person series of workshops and networking events, it soon became apparent that expectations of a return to business as usual were premature, and with a second national lockdown imposed, the programme yet again had to pivot to online delivery. The positive response to POP2020 meant that a second festival took place in 2021 with a hybrid programme of in-person and online events.

Scaling your Purpose Project

In response to the pandemic, SOFEA scaled its Community Larder project from one location to 22 in a matter of weeks.

In this webinar Richard Kennell, CEO of SOFEA, shared how the organisation managed such a feat, and how the lessons learned can help inform and inspire others to scale their own purposeful projects, generate revenue and create more impact.

The key points to be covered were:

- Identifying the community need
- Creating a revenue generating, sustainable model
- Scaling (locally and nationally)

The Future of Work

The global pandemic accelerated new thinking about the future of our working behaviour and habits. This session explored the benefits - and the costs - of an increasingly remote workforce, and how local town centres can be reinvigorated to create a productive, sustainable environment for businesses to work from.

Centering around data from their recent 'What If' paper and 'Boot the Commute' survey, the team at Town Square led stimulating conversations around the future of the workplace and helped attendees to develop a strategy for the future of their own workforce.

Time for Climate Action

With only a decade ahead of us to halve emissions, climate action can feel daunting. Pip Wheaton, the co-lead for Ashoka's Planet & Climate work, has spent months talking to social entrepreneurs around the world who are working on climate issues. One strong theme has emerged: everyone has a role to play, and everyone is necessary. Pip shared the emerging results of their on-going research, and discussed how they are relevant here in Oxfordshire.

The webinar covered:

- Quantitative data on global trends
- The emerging themes from the interviews
- Stories and examples of local movements and the collective impact they have, linking this to a global movement that is gaining momentum

HOUSE OF FUN - BUILDING

CONFIDENCE THROUGH PLAY

CASE STUDY



“

“Every child deserves the chance to relax and just have fun. Having fun builds self-esteem and confidence in children and helps them become more well-adjusted throughout their childhood and adolescence, which benefits society as a whole”

“I’ve participated in three peer groups as part of the eScalate programme. These have helped to shape our marketing and growth plans, and have also supported me to develop my leadership skills. In addition, I have attended a range of workshops targeted around specific business issues such as effective networking, innovation collaboration and thinking like your customer.”

”



House of Fun runs children’s activity camps with a strong social purpose. Founded by Jake Motion, the business provides extra-curricular and holiday clubs that help children to increase their self-esteem and confidence through fun, diverse activities. In summer 2022, the business offered the equivalent of 300 days of free or subsidised activity camps to disadvantaged families in Oxfordshire.

The business has met or exceeded its growth goals and has seen a 123% growth in revenue year-on-year. This is partly due to expanding its offering to include STEM workshops that teach core engineering skills and theories through building mechanised Lego models. These workshops, alongside its existing multi-activity camps and Sports Leader qualification programme, mean that it is now able to offer activities for 2-15 year olds all year round, plus employment opportunities for 16+ year olds.



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ARTS AND EDUCATION ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTED

PROGRAMME TARGETS

Deliverable	Original targets	Revised targets	Stretch targets	Final totals
Number of enterprises receiving support	100	119	125	134
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	75	113	120	123
Number of new enterprises supported	18	19	21	20
Employment increase in supported enterprises	15	25	28	28
Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products or services	18	20	25	24
Number of enterprises receiving 1-1s	25	70	75	95



BOOTCAMP CASE STUDY



SUPPORTING EARLY STAGE

SOCIAL START-UPS

The first Bootcamp launched in October 2021 after it became apparent that a large number of businesses signing up for the eScalate programme were very early-stage enterprises and organisations looking for support in the basics of starting a business as well as seeking some of the connectivity and networking opportunities that had been lacking due to the pandemic.

The two-day event was held at the Ark T centre in Temple Cowley, Oxford. Part of the intention behind Bootcamp was to target communities in Oxford where business support was less obvious and accessible, addressing one of the identified challenges of the programme which was to reach new audiences and avoid the risk of simply 'preaching to the converted'.

The mission behind Bootcamp was to:

- Address existing gaps in support and knowledge
- Support enterprises to refine their mission and increase their impact
- Facilitate new connections, partnerships and collaborations
- Signpost people to wider support available

Topics covered included:

- Understanding your value proposition
- Marketing on a shoestring
- Money matters
- The opportunities for purposeful business
- Managing growth

Bootcamp was intended as a one-off event, but the feedback was so positive, and demand deemed sufficient, that two further Bootcamps were held in 2022.



40

BUSINESSES SUPPORTED



500

HOURS OF SUPPORT DELIVERED

LOOK GOOD, FEEL GOOD,

AND DO GOOD

CASE STUDY





Y.O.U underwear is a social impact business that makes sustainably sourced underwear. Founded by Sarah Jordan, the business uses only organic cotton to avoid the pollution and water depletion in conventional production, and works with one of India's leading ethical manufacturers. Through its shop in The Covered Market in Oxford, Y.O.U offers a take-back scheme to help support a circular economy, and it focuses on ethical marketing, using real models and unedited images to champion body positivity.

Most importantly, for every pair of underwear sold, Y.O.U donates two pairs to Smalls for All, a charity which provides underwear to women and girls in the UK and across Africa.

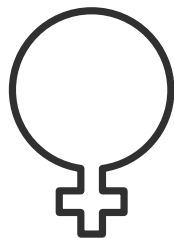
The business took part in an eScalate Peer-to-Peer mentoring programme, as well as workshops and networking events. While part of eScalate, it received accreditation as the highest scoring B Corp in the UK, and the top scoring fashion brand in the world.

“

Particularly when you're working alone, and you don't have anybody that you can bounce ideas off, it's invaluable to have a group that can help provide other opinions and perspectives to help you. We've kept in touch and continue to share ideas and support each other.

When you're running a business you often get caught up in the detail of the everyday and you rarely get the time to step back and think about the bigger decisions and the impact you want to be making. The Peer-to-Peer sessions helped me step back and work on, and not just in, my business, which was really helpful.

”



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**FEMALE OWNED
BUSINESSES IN
THE PROGRAMME**

LEGACY OF ESCALATE



When eScalate was first conceived in 2019, the aim was to bolster a growing, but under-supported sector of UK enterprises (from charities to private limited companies) who were committed to driving positive social and environmental change. No-one could have foreseen the upheaval that Covid was about to unleash on individuals, communities and businesses, but in the midst of a global pandemic, the programme's goals of promoting sustainability and resilience took on an unexpected relevance and resonance.

Three years on, the eScalate programme has played a role in helping organisations to navigate an extremely challenging period, from supporting charities to diversify their income streams to helping mainstream businesses evolve their business models to have a more positive impact on society and the environment. It has

also supported early stage businesses to identify their purpose, become established and start trading.

The challenge now is how to best support these fledgling businesses as they progress to the next stage of growth. Starting a new enterprise is one thing but being able to move past proof of concept and scale an impact business to create greater impact is the next challenge that needs to be addressed.

Another important legacy of eScalate is the community it has fostered across organisations of different shapes, sizes and sectors, all united in their belief that business can be a powerful force for good. As eScalate closes, organisations such as OxLEP and OSEP will focus on ways it can continue to support this community to flourish and grow.

**“WE NOW HAVE A CLEARER LINK
BETWEEN OUR TRADING AND OUR
SOCIAL PURPOSE”**

**“AN EXCELLENT PROGRAMME,
BRINGING TOGETHER A WIDE RANGE
OF LIKE-MINDED BUSINESSES AND
PEOPLE, AND CREATING SOME
POWERFUL INTRODUCTIONS AND
COLLABORATIONS”**





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