

Create South East Programme

Final Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Overview

This report provides a summary of key findings from an evaluation of the Create South East programme. It is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides an overview of the Create Growth Programme, national and regional policy context and programme need.
- Section 3 provides an overview of Create South East, outlining its structure, objectives and the Theory of Change underpinning the programme.
- Section 4 provides a summary analysis of programme activities and applicants, including the demography of participating businesses and individuals.
- Section 5 presents key findings in relation to our evaluation of programme outcomes and impacts.
- Sections 6 and 7 present key findings in relation to our evaluation of programme design and delivery, including key successes, achievements, gaps and challenges.
- Section 8 and 9 present key findings in relation to future support priorities and programme legacy.
- Section 10 provides conclusions and potential recommendations for the South East to support the sector going forward.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A summary of conclusions is set out below. We recommend that these, including points 5-9 in particular, be considered in the design and delivery of any follow-on CCI business support and investment programme(s) in the region:

1. While Create South East was designed to deliver a number of outputs, outcomes and impacts, unlocking inclusive, sustainable economic growth in the region's creative sector was seen by programme partners and stakeholders as its primary long-term objective. Improving the investment readiness of high-growth potential creative businesses was seen as the primary mechanism for delivering this.
2. Understanding investment was the most common reason given by businesses for applying to join the programme, followed by revenue growth, innovation, becoming pitch ready, and networking and partnership development. Understanding investment

and becoming pitch ready were also the outcomes most frequently achieved by participating businesses, with nearly four out of five businesses saying the programme had helped them achieve this.

3. Nearly all the businesses supported expected their income and employment headcount to grow in the three years following their time on the programme.
4. Evidence suggests high levels of satisfaction with the design and delivery of the programme overall (nearly 9/10 on average), and with the different aspects of it – with the CSE team’s management and communications receiving the highest scores among these (4.7/5 on average). 97% of respondents to Create South East’s own survey stated that they would recommend the programme to others. The application process was felt to be straightforward (scoring 4.4 out of 5 on average for ease of application).
5. Mentoring, coaching sessions and workshops were seen as the most beneficial areas of support, with mentors’ skills and knowledge being ranked highly. Support that was tailored, practical, holistic and delivered by industry experts was seen as particularly impactful, compared with more generic support. There was also a desire for more contact time and follow-on support.
6. Participatory, face-to-face delivery was generally seen by participants as more effective than online support – among other things, helping to build confidence, knowledge, networks, business opportunities and a sense of creative community.
7. Businesses highlighted the need for greater clarity of programme structure and expectations from the outset, along with better matching (at least in some cases) between mentors, investors and cohort participants. It was felt that closer alignment of expertise, business size, and experience levels would strengthen networking and learning opportunities and deliver stronger programme outcomes and impact overall. There was also a call for ongoing efforts to improve reach and diversity.
8. Programme partners and stakeholders highlighted the need for more targeted outreach activities, better stakeholder coordination and engagement, longer funding horizons, more streamlined governance and improved accessibility.
9. The top priority for future regional CCI support among participating businesses was specialist mentoring, followed by funding (both direct grants and fundraising/bid-writing support), business development & networking opportunities, and equity investment (all of which were requested by at least 50% of surveyed participants).

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

The Create South East steering group (the partnership) commissioned Counterculture in October 2023 to assess the process, impact and legacy of the Create South East programme.

Create South East is one of the six original regional programmes funded by the Department for Culture Media and Sport's (DCMS) Create Growth Programme (CGP), covering Kent, Essex and Sussex. Create Growth is an investment readiness programme and DCMS set the following objectives:

- **Objective 1:** Support high-growth potential creative businesses to become investment-ready outside of London, by developing businesses' knowledge, skills and access to finance.
- **Objective 2:** Increase the number of investors willing to invest in creative businesses outside of London, by educating and developing investor networks.
- **Objective 3:** Build local capacity for supporting creative businesses in regions to drive local growth outside of London.

Each region ran a three-year initiative with a budget of £1.275 million aimed at growth-orientated creative businesses ready to scale. A package of business support was provided to aid participants to grow their businesses and access growth finance. Alongside this, an investor programme was delivered nationally by Innovate UK KTN, as well as a grants programme managed by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

The Create South East programme ran from November 2023 to March 2025, with six cohorts made up of participants from across the creative subsectors. Over the course of the programme, cohorts were provided with a range of tailored support, including online workshops, business skills development, mentoring and events.

The Create South East partnership is a coalition of local authorities, higher education institutions and sector leaders including: Kent County Council, Angels@Essex / University of Essex Innovation Centre Knowledge Gateway, Basildon Council, Brighton and Hove City Council, Creative Estuary / University of Kent Institute of Cultural and Creative Industries (ICCI), Creative UK, East Sussex County Council, Essex County Council, Medway Council, Screen South, South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) and West Sussex County Council. An additional partner – Wired Sussex – was lost as the business went into liquidation shortly after the programme started. The programme was led by Creative UK.

The Steering Group established four sub-groups to support programme design and delivery: Marketing, Programme Delivery, Budget Monitoring Group, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

1.2 Evaluation Scope

There were three main elements to the evaluation of Create South East:

- **Theory of Change:** defining the overall theory underpinning the programme and testing this with key stakeholders responsible for delivery.
- **Impact Evaluation:** assessing the experiences of participant businesses, delivery team and other stakeholders in relation to the delivery of outcomes and impacts, to inform programme improvements, refine the delivery model, track attrition and offer insights into future design. This was the largest aspect of the evaluation.
- **Process Evaluation:** gathering feedback from the delivery team, partnerships and other stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of programme delivery arrangements and assess its legacy post-funding.

1.3 Methodology

The evaluation comprised the following activities undertaken between December 2023 and February 2025:

- **Desk-based review:** a review of Create South East documentation including engagement and output data, CGP bid and KPI reports. The main purpose of this was to understand the project context, rationale and beneficiaries of support.
- **Desk-based research:** an overview of the national, regional and local strategic context for Create South East.
- **Participant surveys:** a survey issued to each participant at the end of their cohort / time on the programme to capture information about their experiences, outcomes and future prospects. Interviewees were also encouraged to respond to the online survey, which was designed to enable quantitative analysis. An extended subscription to Creative UK (1 month) was offered as an incentive for later cohorts to respond. 55 responses were received in total. *N.B. Create South East also issued a survey at the end of the entire programme and the data has been reviewed as part of this evaluation. 74 responses were received in total.*

- **Online interviews:** 30-minute interviews with up to seven participants in each cohort selected by the Create South East delivery team. Careful attention was given to level of engagement to maximise responses balanced with the need to ensure the samples covered the variety of industry sectors, geographies, protected characteristics (gender, ethnicity, disability) and support interventions (both financial and non-financial). The interviews were carried out at the end of each cohort's time on the programme and followed the same basic structure and format, and the questions built upon and aligned with the online survey. Two participants per cohort were selected to be featured as a written case study and approved the content. 26 interviews were conducted in total.
- **Legacy workshops:** two one-hour workshops were held online - one with the Create South East partnership (11 attendees) and the other with the delivery team (five attendees). Both followed the same format and with the same discussion prompts around development and delivery of Create South East. A final in-person workshop was held in-person in London with all participants, led by an external facilitator.
- **Stakeholder survey:** issued at the end of the programme to key stakeholders (e.g. Create South East Partnership members, programme delivery team, mentors, other delivery partners). 17 responses were received in total.

The main evaluation outputs prior to this final report have been:

- An agreed logic model and theory of change as a guide for programme delivery and evaluation (*November 2023*) – see section 3.
- An interim report exploring the legacy for the Create South East programme and partnership. It looked specifically at outputs and actions for the remainder of the programme at the time (10 months) and after the programme's completion beyond March 2025 (*June 2024*).
- A report produced at the end of each cohort, summarising the online participant survey and interview findings (*May 2024 / October 2024 / December 2025 / January 2025 / March 2025*).

NB. The primary audience of this report is assumed to be partner organisations, business support agencies and funders, with the aim of securing future investment. It is not expected to be made available to the general public.

2. Strategic Context

2.1 Key Policy Priorities

i) National

In 2021, the previous UK Government published its Creative Industries Sector Vision. At the time of writing, national cultural policy is in a state of transition with a new Labour government, which has identified the Creative Industries as one of eight growth sectors within its Industrial Strategy. A taskforce has been convened to help DCMS develop a Sector Plan (publication Spring 2025) emphasising increased exports, investment and employment. However, it is also expected to build on the headline actions from Creating Growth: Labour's Plan for Arts, Culture and Creative Industries:

- Find the right balance between fostering innovation in AI while ensuring protection for creators and the ongoing viability of the creative industries. Labour believes both in human-centred creativity and the potential of AI to unlock new creative frontiers.
- Make sure that a freelance career in the arts remains a viable prospect through our New Deal for Working People, as we know how important flexibility is to creative commissioners and many creators.
- Seek arrangements with the EU to facilitate easier touring and cultural exchange.
- Address the gap in availability of growth capital by unlocking institutional capital (including pension capital) and more effectively leveraging existing public and private funds to make the UK the best place to found, grow, scale, and list a creative business.
- Support creative SMEs and prevent the loss of local cultural spaces through "Space to Create", the first national cultural infrastructure map.

In April 2024, Creative UK launched [Our Creative Future: The Manifesto](#) - a call for change, support and protection of the creative sector ahead of the new government and linked with the Sector Vision. The manifesto contains six key goals, to:

- Grow the workforce of tomorrow by prioritising creative skills and education.
- Unleash creative freelancers' potential to build more sustainable careers, by modelling better ways of working.
- Make the UK the best place in the world to build and retain creative talent and their businesses. Return the arts share of National Lottery funds to 25% and create and maintain genuinely competitive fiscal reliefs and incentives.

ii) Regional

Launched in 2017, the **Thames Estuary Production Corridor (TEPC)** is a strategic area from East London to South Essex and North Kent, aiming to become a global hub for production, talent and innovation that generates employment and growth. It has been supported by £4.3 million of funding from the Cultural Development Fund for Creative Estuary (see below) and £350,000 to support the creation of masterplans and feasibility studies of key sites.¹ Since then, policy – from the regional to local level - has prioritised the development of creative facilities as an enabling factor for creative and cultural production and where commercial demand is yet to be met.

Creative Estuary is a consortium of public and cultural organisations including SELEP, GLA, Kent and Essex County Councils. Priority areas include infrastructure, production capacity, talent development and innovation. The programme of work aims to support the development of more than 400 new jobs and delivering new skill and training to the local population. For example:²

- Creative assets: identify and transform buildings for creative and cultural use, in addition to supporting new and existing planned cultural infrastructure projects.
- Re-Generation 2031: work placements and training programmes for young people to access creative careers and skills, whilst growing small businesses and freelancers' creative practice.
- Ideas Labs: bringing together individuals and groups who do not usually interact such as charities, academics and young people.

There have been no renewed plans for TEPC, however Creative Estuary continues to drive growth.

The **South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP)** ceased operations in 2024 following a government mandate to withdraw core funding for Local Enterprise Partnerships and to transfer their functions to local and combined authorities. Prior to this, the organisation continually prioritised the creative and digital industries (and the intersections thereof) in their strategic plans with priorities on physical spaces, infrastructure and education and training with the aim of fostering economic growth and intensifying existing creative clusters and networks across the region. The SELEP Skills Strategy 2018-2023³ further highlighted the need to grow digital skills across all sectors and how this is required in, but also provided by, the IT, digital and creative industries.

¹ MHCLG (2019) [Thames Estuary Commission Response](#) p.8, 14.

² Creative Estuary (2020) [Projects Archive - Creative Estuary](#)

³ SELEP (2018) [South East LEP Skills Strategy 2018 – 2023](#)

SELEP were awarded £17 million for the Create South East programme, providing investment and investor building activities (mentoring, resources).

The South East Creative Economy Network (SECEN) is a working group and partnership that previously sat under SELEP, and is made up of local authorities, creative businesses and education institutions in the region. It has been working to identify and tackle barriers to growth in the digital, creative and cultural sector. The 2021 Statement of Intent focuses on people and places with relevant pledges on:

- **Increasing Workspace:** fit for purpose workspaces that facilitate new / future ways of working. Since 2019, SECEN has been delivering a Creative Workspace programme and in 2023 published a new Creative Workspace Strategic Framework (practical toolkit) aligned with their investment priorities on stimulating growth, enabling place-making and generating social value.
- **Driving innovation:** creating conditions that encourage RandD and collaborations between creative and tech companies including equipment, incubator labs, maker spaces and co-working.
- **Growing creative businesses:** sector-led business support programmes and network development including training, mentoring, events and grants programmes. Hence, SECEN was one of the partners of Create South East.
- **Education and training:** actions to support talent attraction and development including relevant qualifications, and fostering industry-education partnerships.
- **Protection and support for freelancers**

iii) **Local**

The following is a summary of relevant local authority policy priorities taken from the original application to DCMS.

Essex County Council

Economic Plan for Essex (2014) recognises the importance of the creative industries, the existing significant assets in the County and the need to help more local businesses in the sector to start-up and grow. Everyone's Essex, Essex County Council's plan for levelling up the County, which states "we are placing a heavier emphasis on the arts, not only because we believe that a thriving cultural sector is part of a strong economy, but also because we believe the arts can help us achieve outcomes in many areas, from employment to social care".

South Essex

Association of South Essex Local Authorities' (ASELA) Growth and Recovery Prospectus recognises the strong prevalence of creative industries in the Thames Estuary Production Corridor and commits to a programme of work to support and grow the Creative Industries across South Essex. Basildon Council's Economic Development Strategy, plans to develop a creative campus for screen and immersive digital industries (CDF Round 3 application, pending evaluation); Southend-on-Sea City Council's Economic Growth Strategy, Cultural Strategy, plans to create new workspaces within the City Centre (LUF2 application, pending evaluation); Thurrock Council's Economic Development Strategy and their emerging Cultural Strategy.

North Essex

North Essex Economic Strategy commits to developing opportunities for innovative businesses to grow and businesses clusters to emerge, particularly those that are capable of taking advantage of new technologies. The plan also prioritises the development of the 'digital tech' sector and highlights Colchester's award-winning Games Hub for creative start-ups.

Kent

Kent's Cultural Strategy recognises that Culture is a key driver for the prosperity of the County and aims to (amongst other priorities) encourage cluster led growth and commits to support and nurture valued creative, cultural and heritage professionals to deliver excellence through production, commissioning and programming; pursue investment opportunities to enable cross-sector collaboration and risk taking; encourage growth of creative clusters; support existing creative leaders and inspire those of the future; work with outstanding education institutions, further develop research and innovation; prioritise the development of the creative industries workforce with a focus on supporting the needs of freelance practitioners; explore new investment opportunities and access to finance, including engagement with public sector commissioning and supporting the creative sector to be investment ready; and encourage the development of new technologies and resilient cultural business models, capitalise on intellectual property rights.

Medway

Medway Council's 2035 Plan; Medway Cultural Strategy (and 2022-2024 Delivery Plan); the Creative Medway Cultural Compact; and the Greater North Kent Partnership Vision, which collectively set out measures to position Medway as a creative and high-tech entrepreneurial hub; increase inward investment; support and grow significant creative business support hubs (such as the Docking Station Digital Hub and the Fitted Rigging House Creative Workspaces). Medway's Levelling Up for Culture and ACE Priority Place designation period through the Creative Medway Strategy Delivery Plan, aims to work in partnership with existing support providers in Medway, including universities, to develop

the quality and specialism of sector-specific support on offer to the creative and cultural industries.

Culture East Sussex

East Sussex Cultural Strategy 2013 – 2023, recognises that East Sussex has significant clusters of creative industry activity and aims to create an environment which enables the cultural and creative economy to expand and enhance the ability to attract and retain other businesses; grow the share of the cultural and creative sector market by providing an environment which will attract and retain cultural and creative industries, create the conditions for growth, develop a suitably skilled workforce; welcome new businesses to relocate here; provide support for those working alone. CDF 3 bid pending to develop the Coastal Cultural Campus. The East Sussex Growth Strategy sets out a vision for a more innovative, productive and faster growing East Sussex economy, unlocking local economic growth and productivity, becoming more attractive places in which to live, work, visit and invest and the East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan which aims to build sustainable prosperity for our businesses, to access new opportunities that drive economic recovery and resilience.

West Sussex

West Sussex County Council Economy Plan to 2024, recognises the strong presence of the cultural and creative industries and prioritises actions to work collaboratively to create the conditions for start-ups, micro entrepreneurs and creative digital businesses and support investment and private sector confidence

Brighton and Hove City Council

Brighton and Hove City Council Cultural Recovery Plan, recognises the strengths of the city as a creative capital and commits to a focused programme to support entrepreneurship, business growth and practice support for creative workers; the development of creative workspace; and maximise investment in capital infrastructure; Brighton and Hove City Council Economic Strategy recognises Brighton and Hove's specialisms in ICT and Digital Services, prioritises the development of a range of workspaces for creative-tech businesses and the delivery of specialist business support, provided by Wired Sussex.

Coast to Capital LEP

Coast to Capital LEP's Strategic Economic Plan (2018-2030) highlights that, home to both Brighton and Sussex Universities, Brighton is a city with entrepreneurial and innovative edge which has led to the emergence of a world-renowned creative and digital tech cluster. It also highlights research undertaken by the University of Chichester which reiterates the importance of the Creative, Digital, and IT sectors to the local economy and

the need to provide 'continued support and advice, with a particular focus on exporting, access to finance and leadership and management' to boost business ambition and productivity.

2.2 The Create Growth Programme

Launched in 2022 by DCMS, the CGP was designed to support the development of high-growth potential creative industry businesses (between the seed and scaling stage) and investors across England, outside of London. The aim was to enable businesses to achieve scale-up ambitions and access growth finance to help drive economic growth in the creative sector and tackling the distinct market and information failures that have prevented this. This includes a lack of business expertise, difficulties in accessing traditional finance due to intangible intellectual property, and private investors' struggle in understanding and assessing risks within the sector.

CGP was a follow-up from the successful Creative Scale Up pilot which ran from 2019 to 2021. The pilot was launched with £4 million of Government funding through the Creative Industries Sector Deal (2018) and supported creative businesses at a scaling stage in three Combined Authorities (Greater Manchester, West of England, and West Midlands). 200 businesses were supported and on average experienced a £91,000 increase in turnover and 23% in employment. 215 investors were also engaged.⁴

CGP had three complementary stands:⁵

- **Business Support:** Bespoke business support that is tailored to the specific needs of high-growth potential creative businesses, with the aim of building businesses' management skills and understanding of different finance routes to support business growth and investment readiness. This was expected to include workshops, one-to-one mentoring and peer-learning, and focus on areas where creative industries specific advice is needed. For example, Intellectual Property (IP), business models and access to new markets.
- **Investor Capacity Building:** to increase the number of private investors willing to invest in creative businesses outside London, through educating investors about investment opportunities in the sector and building investor networks. Building on the Creative Scale Up pilot, it was to include a combination of events, investor outreach and resources. This was led by Innovate UK KTN.

⁴ [20230622_CGP Grant Guidance for Applicants](#)

⁵ [20230622_CGP Grant Guidance for Applicants](#)

- **Finance:** Targeted finance was to be provided to selected businesses that could demonstrate through a diagnostic assessment that it would act as a stimulus for growth and investment, by leveraging in further private investment. Up to £7 million was available and this was led by UKRI.

These strands correspond with the three objectives for the programme set by DCMS (not mutually exclusive):

- **Objective 1:** Support high-growth potential creative businesses to become investment-ready outside of London, by developing businesses' knowledge, skills and access to finance.
- **Objective 2:** Increase the number of investors willing to invest in creative businesses outside of London, by educating and developing investor networks.
- **Objective 3:** Build local capacity for supporting creative businesses in regions to drive local growth outside of London.

Local area partnerships (e.g. Kent, Essex and Sussex as 'Create South East') were invited to submit expression of interests for a three-year initiative, and each successful area was awarded £1.275 million in grant funding for the business support element. This element was delivered directly by the area partnerships to allow flexibility to meet local needs and to help build long-term legacy infrastructure, skills and capacity to support creative businesses beyond the programme (aligning with Objective 3). Area partnerships were also encouraged to engage existing networks and industry expertise to develop and deliver the business support.

In June 2023, the UK Government announced an expansion of CGP with an additional £10.9 million in funding, extending the programme to six new geographical areas from March 2024.

In October 2023, following the recruitment and diagnostic phase of Cohort 1, Create South East put forward a proposal to DCMS to develop a new support stream (referred to as 'Stage 1') targeting earlier stage businesses.

It had become clear that there was a broader interest in this area and many businesses, particularly those led by individuals from underrepresented communities or from sub-sectors not traditionally securing commercial investment, expressed a desire to grow but acknowledged a lack of knowledge about how to do so.

The aim of Stage 1 was to foster a more diverse pipeline of businesses at an earlier stage in their journey toward commercial investment. CSE adjusted the programme structure to have four intensive, nine-month cohorts (Stage 2) and two more introductory six-month cohorts (Stage 1). The first Stage 1 cohort would be strategically time to provide a potential pipeline into a Stage 2 cohort, however none of those who applied were successful.

This approach was later rolled out across other regions.

2.3 Regional Characteristics and Programme Need

The characteristics of the regional area partnership (Kent and Medway, Greater Essex, East Sussex, Brighton and Hove, West Sussex) to which the programme responds are set out in detail in the original application to DCMS. These include:

- Third behind London and the rest of the South East of England for the number of active businesses in the Creative Industries sector, with over 40,000.⁶
- Home to 10 of the 47 recognised Creative Clusters in England (Colchester, Chelmsford, Southend, Medway, Canterbury, Tunbridge Wells, Hastings, Eastbourne, Chichester and Bognor Regis, and Brighton), identified by NESTA in its 2016 analysis.⁷
- Home to 55 of 709 more localised micro-clusters in the UK, identified in the more recent Creative Radar analysis.⁸
- A region of dispersed urban areas, coastal, rural, town and city hubs.
- Poorly serviced by specialist operators in the field of investment and innovation accelerators.
- Home to centres of intense and high value commercial activity, including Crawley, Brighton and Hove, Medway, Basildon and the Thames Estuary; and areas of culture-driven coastal revival including Margate, Southend, Hastings, Eastbourne and Bognor Regis; and a range of medium sized towns, which serve rural clusters such as Lewes, Colchester, Sevenoaks, Faversham and Haywards Heath.
- Established creative industry support activity includes The TEPC and the Digital Catapult programme in Brighton.
- Larger creative industry businesses include Unity Technologies, Creative Assembly, Maidstone Studios, and Warner Bros Games and TV.
- Emerging complementary programmes underpin the sector including the Coastal Cultural Campus in East Sussex and West Sussex's Creative Coast.

⁶ Beauhurst high growth data platform www.beauhurst.com

⁷ The Geography of Creativity in the UK – Nesta 2016 www.nesta.org.uk

⁸ https://pec.ac.uk/research_report_entr/creative-radar-2021-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-uks-creative-industries/

- Arts Council England (ACE) Priority Places include Basildon, Crawley, Medway and Tendring; ACE Levelling up for Culture Places include Adur, Arun, Basildon, Castle Point, Crawley, Dover, Eastbourne, Harlow, Medway, Swale, Tendring and Thurrock.

Creative Radar and the Radar Brighton datasets showed that the region's businesses were 11% more likely to report access to finance as a barrier than respondents from other regions. Additionally, high growth potential companies were more likely to be constrained by access to managerial skills than other regions.

Whilst the region has a high incidence of creative industry businesses, there is evidence of significant market failure in the regional investment market for creative businesses. It is ranked eighth out of thirteen UK regions for the total value of fundraising in the sector, between Q1 2005 and Q3 2022. Research (Beauhurst) has demonstrated that the performance of the creative industries investment market across this region is comparable with less well performing regions of the UK, and lags behind major urban conurbations such as Bristol, Leeds, Cambridge, Oxford and Manchester. The data confirms that the region, whilst having a significant number of creative businesses, has not had the scale of historical investment in Regional Investment Funds or in publicly funded creative industries business support programmes that other regions across the UK have received.

Engagement with over 680 creative businesses through the South-East Creatives ERDF business support programme identified shared challenges, including: challenges accessing mainstream finance and information about available sources of finance; skills development issues; commercial presentation challenges; relatively high development costs in some key subsectors; and a sense that the investment community did not have a good understanding of their businesses.

This strong evidence base was the foundation for the successful award under CGP.

3. Programme Theory

3.1 Theory of Change

Theory of Change (ToC) is a good practice methodology for planning and evaluating interventions (e.g. policies, programmes or projects) - particularly those that are intended to promote or deliver economic or societal changes. The methodology focuses on identifying the change(s) that ultimately need to be delivered (also referred to as impacts), then mapping *backwards* to identify a series of causally-linked preconditions that will be required in order to achieve the desired change(s), as follows:

- **Impacts** – the overall, ultimate changes or benefits to society that an intervention is seeking to achieve. These may often be expressed as, or supported by, a ‘vision’ describing the envisaged state of affairs at a point in future in which the intended changes have taken (or begun to take) effect and the intended benefits are being realised.
- **Outcomes** – the specific changes or benefits (for individuals, organisations or stakeholder groups), which are required to bring about the desired impacts.
- **Outputs** – the specific deliverables that are required to achieve the intended outcomes, which the project activities are intended to deliver.
- **Activities** – the specific activities that are required to achieve the intended outputs, which the inputs are intended to deliver.
- **Inputs** – the resources required to deliver the proposed activities.

The following factors should also be identified and considered within the theory of change:

- **Enabling Factors** – conditions in the external environment that are expected to support the achievement of intended project benefits.
- **Risk Factors** – conditions in the external environment, which may adversely affect the achievement of intended project benefits.
- **Attribution** – the extent to which outcomes and impacts can be causally linked back to activities and outputs, as opposed to other factors.

The main purpose of this methodology is to articulate the logic that underpins the intervention: how the proposed inputs and activities and outputs will lead to the intended stakeholder benefits (outcomes and impacts). This can be presented diagrammatically to help indicate this causality and chronology. This diagram is also sometimes referred to as an ‘Outcomes Pathway’ or ‘Logic Model.’

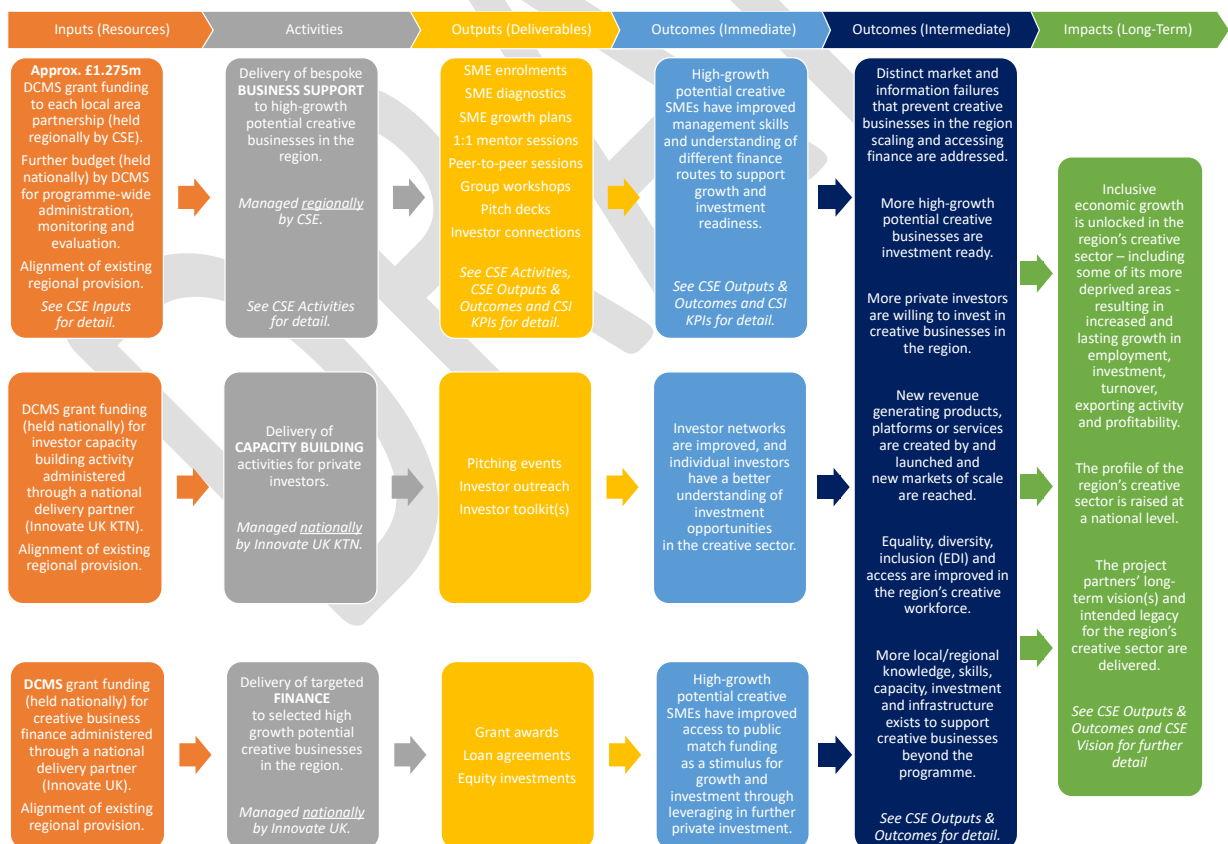
The Logic Model for an intervention is likely to be based, at least in part, on theory and assumptions at the outset. As the intervention is delivered, monitored and evaluated, data and evidence of actual outcomes and impacts - positive and negative, intended and unintended, attributable or unattributable - become available, which may enable the theory to be proven, disproved or modified.

3.2 Project rationale

Overview

Fig. 1 is an inferred logic model for the CSE Programme. This is based on a review of programme documentation (DCMS Guidance, CSE Application) tested and refined through discussion with some members of the Steering Group at an online workshop on 15 November 2023. This is followed by further information relating to specific project inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, impacts and KPIs. To aid legibility and understanding, Figs. 2 and 3 then break this down into its component parts.

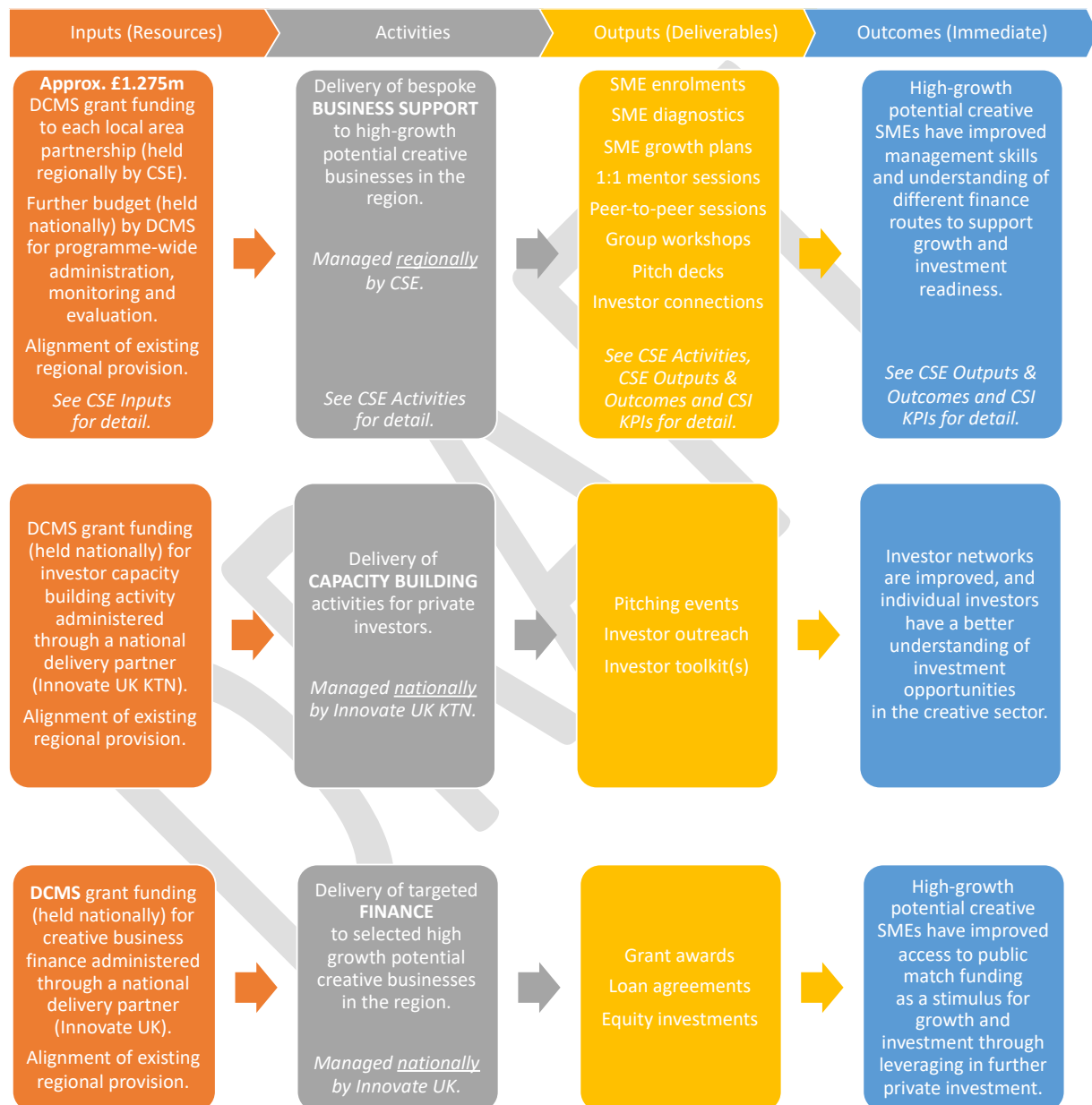
Figure 1: CSE Inferred Theory of Change – overview.



Inputs, Activities, Outputs

Fig. 2 sets out the original plans, in terms of inputs, activities and outputs to be delivered under each of the three programme strands, and the direct outcomes expected to result. See Appendix B for further information.

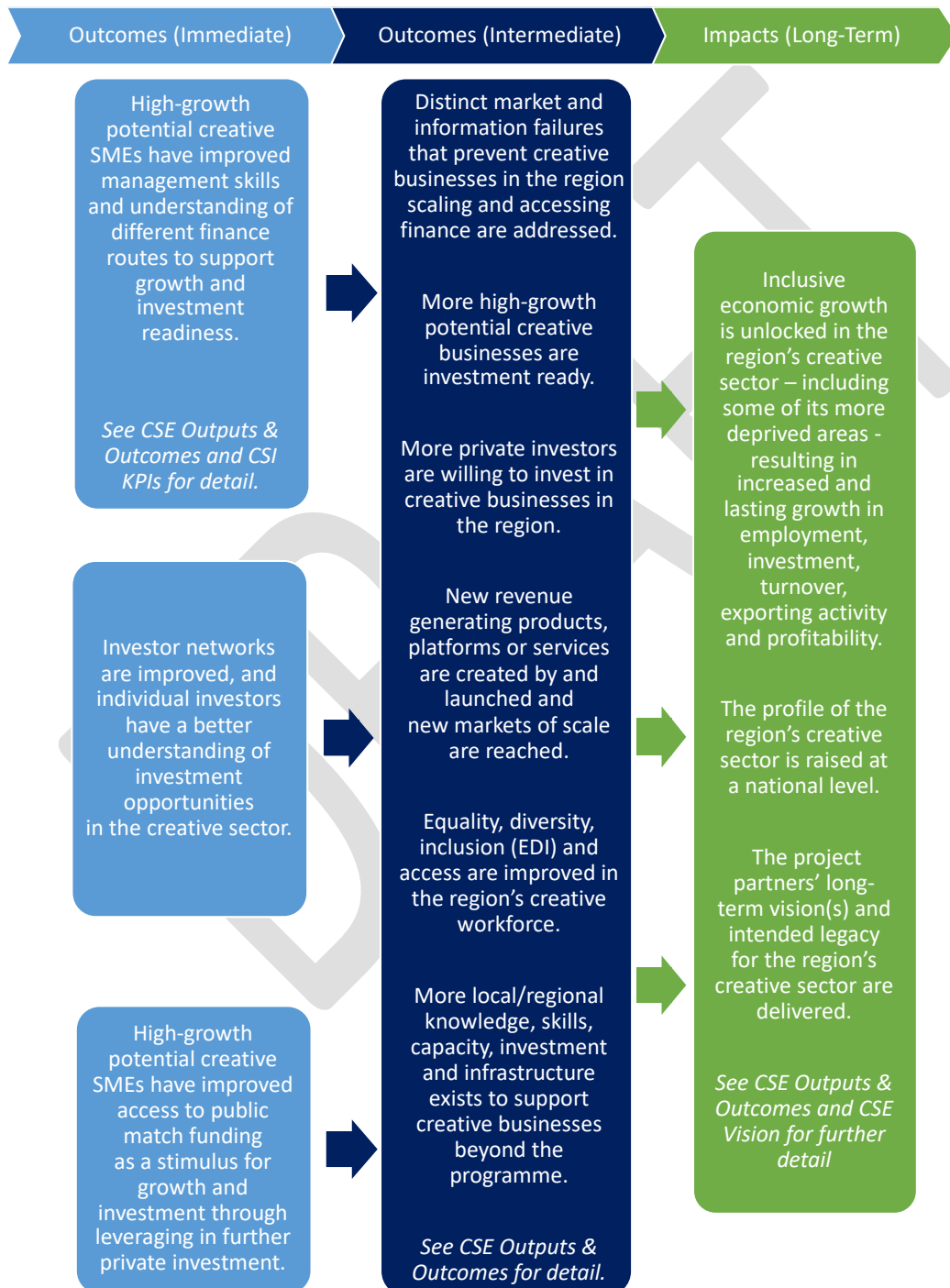
Figure 2: CSE Inferred Theory of Change - Inputs, Activities, Outputs and Outcomes.



Outcomes and Impacts

Fig. 3 indicates how the direct/immediate outcomes for participating businesses and investors were intended to lead to longer-term outcomes and impacts, for the regional creative sector as a whole.

Figure 3: CSE Inferred Theory of Change – Outcomes to Impacts.



3.3 Stakeholder priorities

Respondents to the online stakeholder survey were invited to indicate the relative importance of each of the intended outcomes (immediate and intermediate) and impacts set out in the logic model. A summary of responses is provided in Tables 1 to 3, where ‘average score’ indicates where the outcome or impact was ranked by individual respondents on average (with 1 being the highest position in each case). The data clearly indicates that unlocking inclusive, sustainable economic growth in the region’s creative sector was seen as the primary long-term objective of the programme (i.e. highest priority), at least by those stakeholders surveyed; and that improving the investment readiness of high-growth potential creative businesses was seen as the primary mechanism for delivering this.

Table 1: Immediate outcomes for programme participants - in order of priority (combined average).

Ranking	Outcome	Average score
1	Improved investment readiness (understanding, knowledge, skills)	1.4
2	Improved business management skills	2.7
3	Access to investment (grants, loans, equity)	2.9
4	Access to investors and investor networks	3.0

Table 2: Intermediate outcomes for the South East region - in order of priority (combined average).

Ranking	Outcome	Average score
1	More high-growth potential creative businesses are investment ready	2.6
2	More local/regional knowledge, skills, capacity, investment and infrastructure exists to support creative businesses beyond the programme	3.1
3	More private investors are willing to invest in creative businesses in the region	3.2
4	Distinct market and information failures that prevent creative businesses in the region scaling and accessing finance are addressed	3.6
5	New revenue generating products, platforms or services are created by and launched and new markets of scale are reached.	4.1
6	Equality, diversity, inclusion and access are improved in the region’s creative workforce.	4.4

Table 3: Long-term impacts for the South East region - in order of priority (combined average).

Ranking	Outcome	Average score
1	Inclusive economic growth is unlocked in the region's creative sector resulting in increased and lasting growth in employment, investment, turnover, exporting activity and profitability	1.7
2	The profile of the region's creative sector is raised at a national level	2.0
3	The project partners' long-term vision(s) and intended legacy for the region's creative sector are delivered	2.3

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4. Applicants, Activities and Outputs

Analysis of CSE application data to December 2024 indicates that: 279 expressions of interest were received, of which 239 were found to be eligible. 165 of these eligible applicants went on to submit a full application, with 131 applicants progressing to diagnostic and 123 of these progressing into the programme (see Fig. 4). Hence, CSE went slightly above its stretch target of engaging 120 businesses.

The balancing criteria for CSE at the diagnostic stage was subsector, diversity and region. Where there was a lack of representation, the CSE team undertook targeted recruitment.

Further analysis of the 165 eligible applications received indicates that:

- 34% were from businesses with trading addresses in Kent, 29% Essex, 25% East Sussex and 12% West Sussex (see Fig. 5).
- The leading subsector was Design, followed by Film and TV, Digital Media, Performing Arts and Advertising and Media (see Fig 6).
- Around 90% of applicants were aged 25-54, 8% aged 55 or over, and 2% under 25.
- 52% of applicants identified as Male, 46% as Female.
- 74% of applicants identified as White English/Welsh/Scottish/Irish.
- 15% of applicants identified as disabled.
- 76% of applicants identified as Heterosexual/Straight, 24% as Gay, Bisexual or other.

Figure 4: CSE applications by cohort and stage. Source: CSE Steering Group Data Reporting 16/12/2024.

Programme Stage	Target	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	S1 C1	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	S1 C2	Total
Expression of Interest (excl. Ineligible)	400	112	35	0	45	47		239
Expression of Interest (incl. Ineligible)	400	130	42	0	52	55		279
Application	300	44	28	0	36	57		165
Diagnostic	180	41	19	0	27	44		131
Programme	120	22	16	12	17	30	26	123

Figure 5: CSE Applications by trading county. Source: CSE Steering Group Data Reporting 16/12/2024.

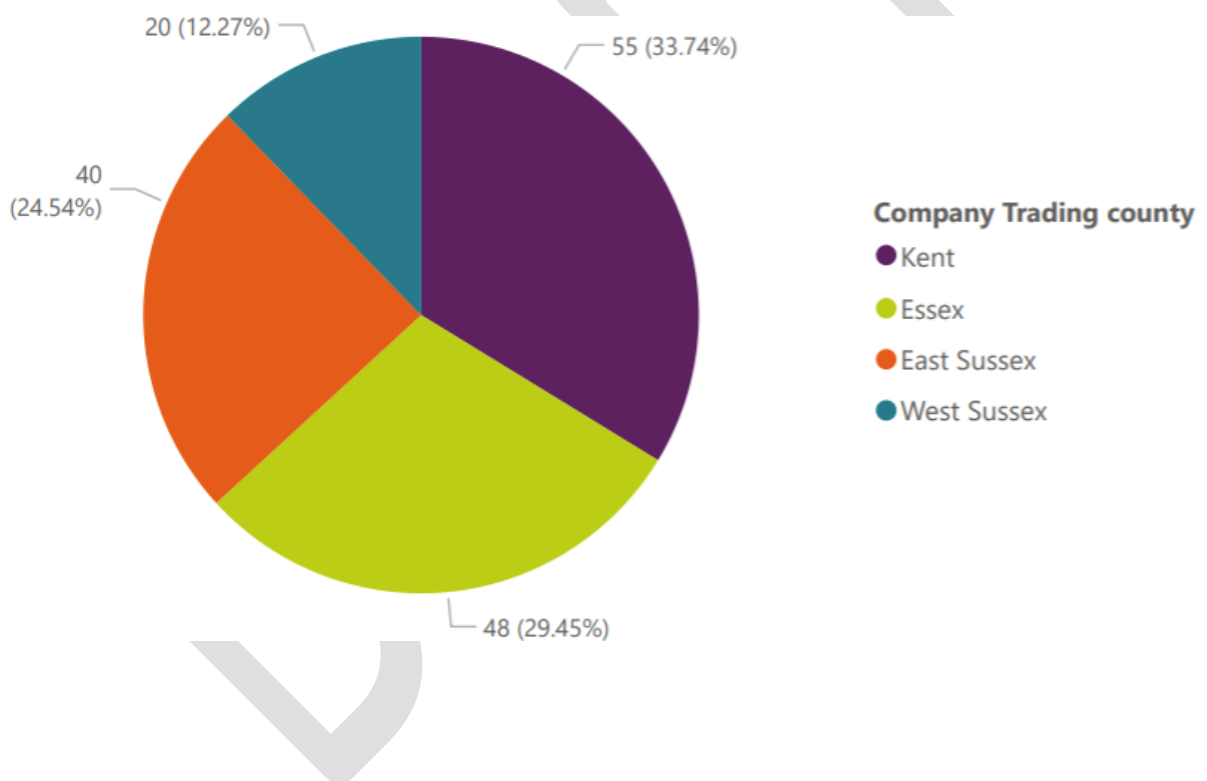


Figure 6: CSE Applications by sector. Source: CSE Steering Group Data Reporting 16/12/2024.

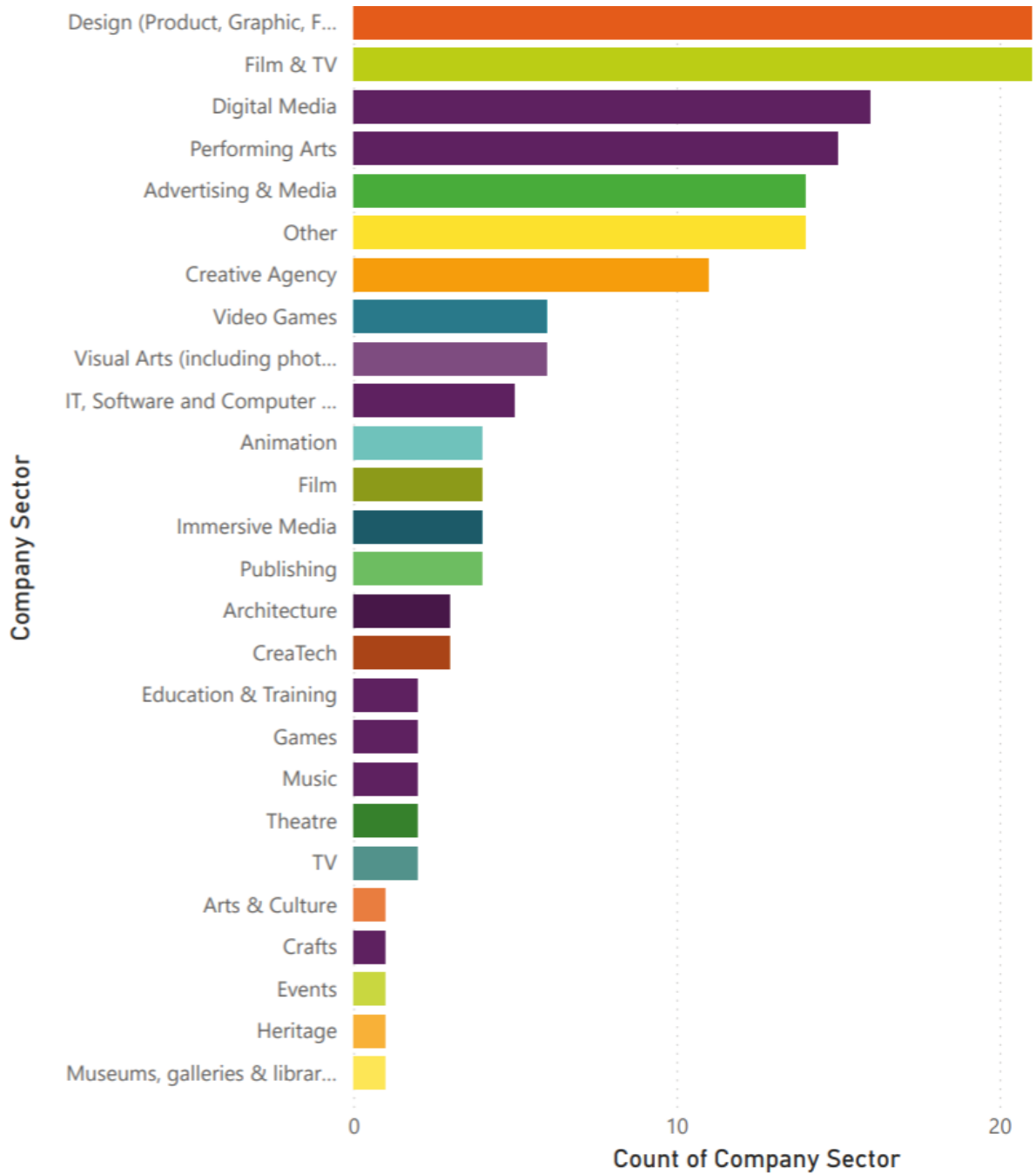


Table 4 provides a breakdown of the 123 businesses enrolled on the programme, to 24 February 2025. 114 of these are understood to have completed the programme, at time of writing and that by the end of March 2025 the stretch target would have been met. Table 5 provides a summary of activities delivered to date.

Table 4: CSE Businesses Enrolled. Source: CGP Regions Activity Dashboard Q4 2024/25.

TOTAL	All businesses enrolled	123	100%
By number of employees	Zero - four	107	87%
	Five - nine	11	9%
	More than ten	5	4%
By turnover	0-1000	24	20%
	1001 - 100,000	60	49%
	100,001 - 500,000	36	29%
	500,001 - 1,000,000	2	2%
	1mill +	1	1%
By subsector	Advertising and marketing	22	18%
	Architecture	2	2%
	Crafts	3	2%
	Design and designer fashion	24	20%
	Film, TV, video, radio and photography	29	24%
	IT, software and computer services	16	13%
	Publishing	6	5%
	Museums, galleries and libraries	1	1%
	Music, performing and visual arts	20	16%

Table 5: CSE Activities Delivered. Source: CGP Regions Activity Dashboard Q4 2024/25.

Number of workshops held	37
Topics covered by workshops	20
Number of 1:1 advice sessions held	1036
Number of mentoring connections established	55
Linkages and referrals to other regional support offers	75

5. Outcomes and Impacts

5.1 Overview

Respondents to the online participant surveys were asked about their main objectives for applying to the programme.⁹ The summary data (Table 6 and Figure 7) indicates that revenue growth, innovation and network development were priorities for most respondents, alongside increased investment readiness. Participants were also asked to what extent they believed the CSE programme has, or will have, helped them to achieve these objectives in practice on a scale of 1 (not achieved) to 5 (fully achieved).

Table 6: Main objectives for applying. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

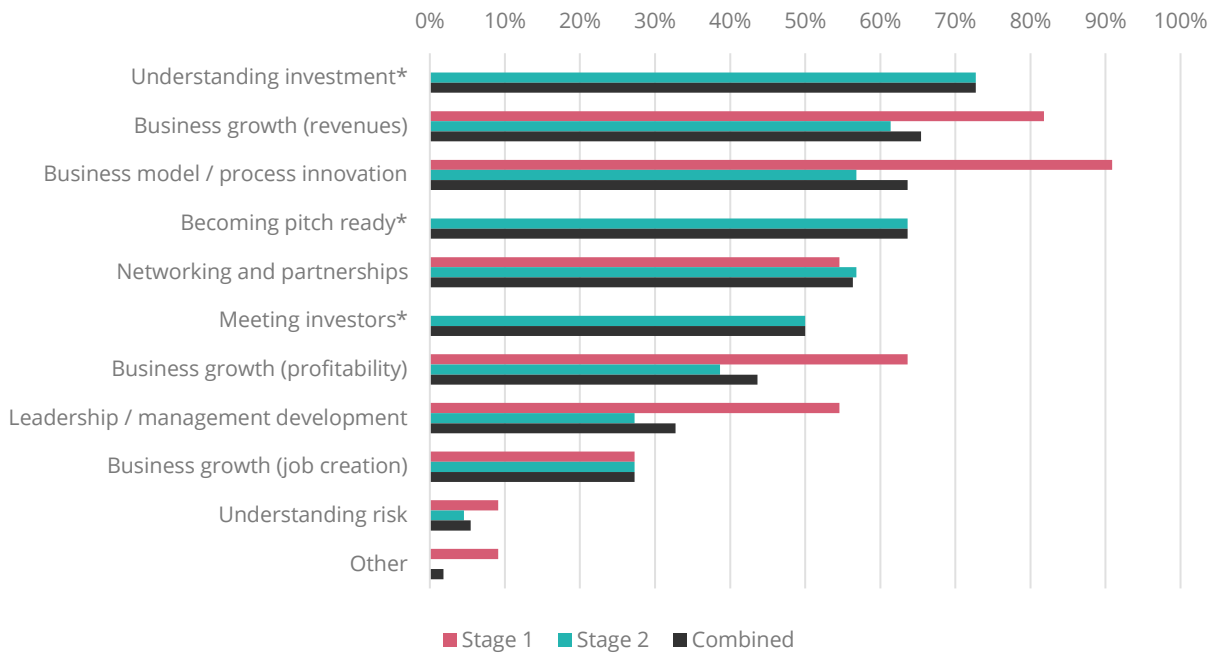
	Stage 1 (n=11)		Stage 2 (n=44)		Combined (n=55)	
Understanding investment*	<i>n/a</i>	n/a	32	73%	32	73%
Business growth (revenues)	9	82%	27	61%	36	65%
Business model/process innovation	10	91%	25	57%	35	64%
Becoming pitch ready*	<i>n/a</i>	n/a	28	64%	28	64%
Networking and partnerships	6	55%	25	57%	31	56%
Meeting investors*	<i>n/a</i>	n/a	22	50%	22	50%
Business growth (profitability)	7	64%	17	39%	24	44%
Leadership / management	6	55%	12	27%	18	33%
Business growth (job creation)	3	27%	12	27%	15	27%
Understanding risk	1	9%	2	5%	3	5%
Other	1	9%	0	0%	1	2%

The data (Table 7 and Figure 8) indicates a proportionately higher contribution to investment readiness and understanding risk, compared with general business growth – although nearly all *did* expect both their income and employment headcount to increase following the programme (Tables 8-9 and Figures 9-10). For example, many expressed in qualitative feedback and interviews that they were committed to expanding their teams by hiring new talent and upskilling existing staff. This focus on employment creation was

⁹ Those options marked with an asterisk (*) were only provided in Stage 2 cohort surveys.

part of broader strategies to contribute to local economic development and business sustainability by building capacity and diverse skills, but for some it was also about improving representation in the sector.

Figure 7: Main objectives for applying. Source: CSE online participant surveys.



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Figure 8: Outcomes achieved in practice. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

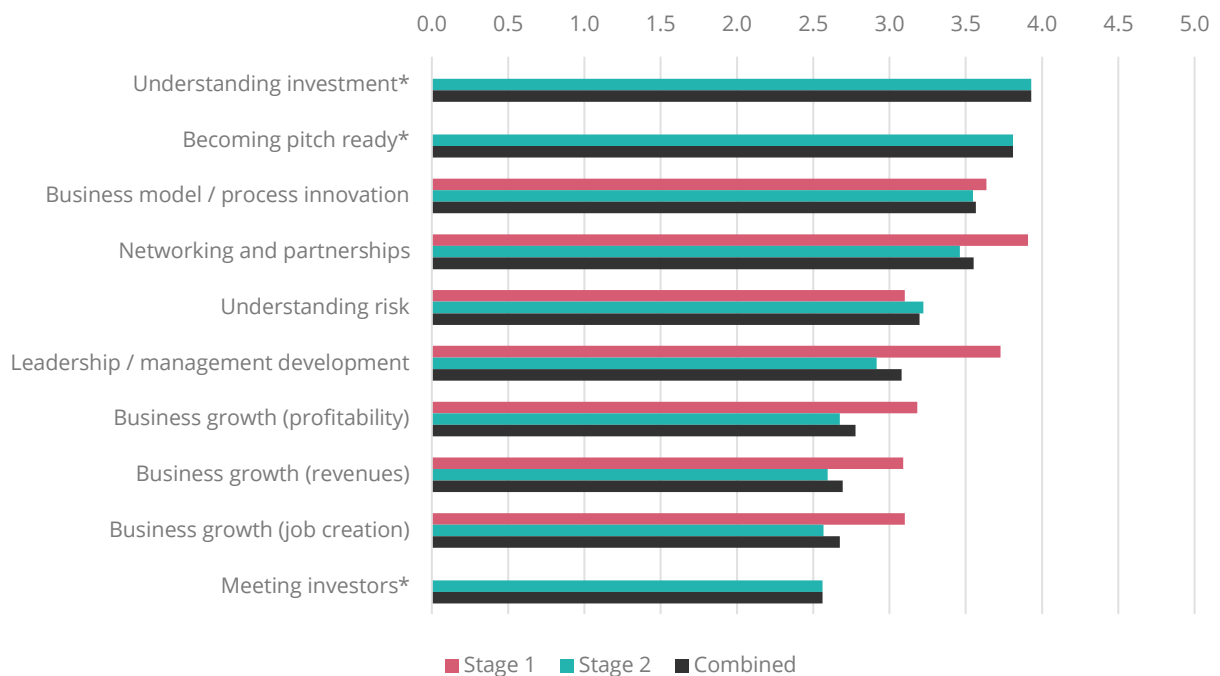


Table 7: Outcomes achieved in practice. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

	Stage 1 (n=11)	Stage 2 (n=44)	Combined (n=55)
Understanding investment*	n/a	3.9	3.9
Becoming pitch ready*	n/a	3.8	3.8
Business model/process innovation	3.6	3.5	3.6
Networking and partnerships	3.9	3.5	3.6
Understanding risk	3.1	3.2	3.2
Leadership / management	3.7	2.9	3.1
Business growth (profitability)	3.2	2.7	2.8
Business growth (revenues)	3.1	2.6	2.7
Business growth (job creation)	3.1	2.6	2.7
Meeting investors*	n/a	2.6	2.6

Table 8: Expected income change, next 3 years. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

	Stage 1 (n=11)		Stage 2 (n=44)		Combined (n=55)	
Increase by >100%	4	36%	16	36%	20	36%
Increase by 51-100%	2	18%	10	23%	12	22%
Increase by 25-50%	0	0%	5	11%	5	9%
Increase by <25%	4	36%	8	18%	12	22%
No change	1	9%	4	9%	5	9%
Decrease by <25%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Decrease by 25-50%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Decrease by 51-100%	0	0%	1	2%	1	2%

Figure 9: Expected income change, next 3 years. Source: CSE online participant surveys

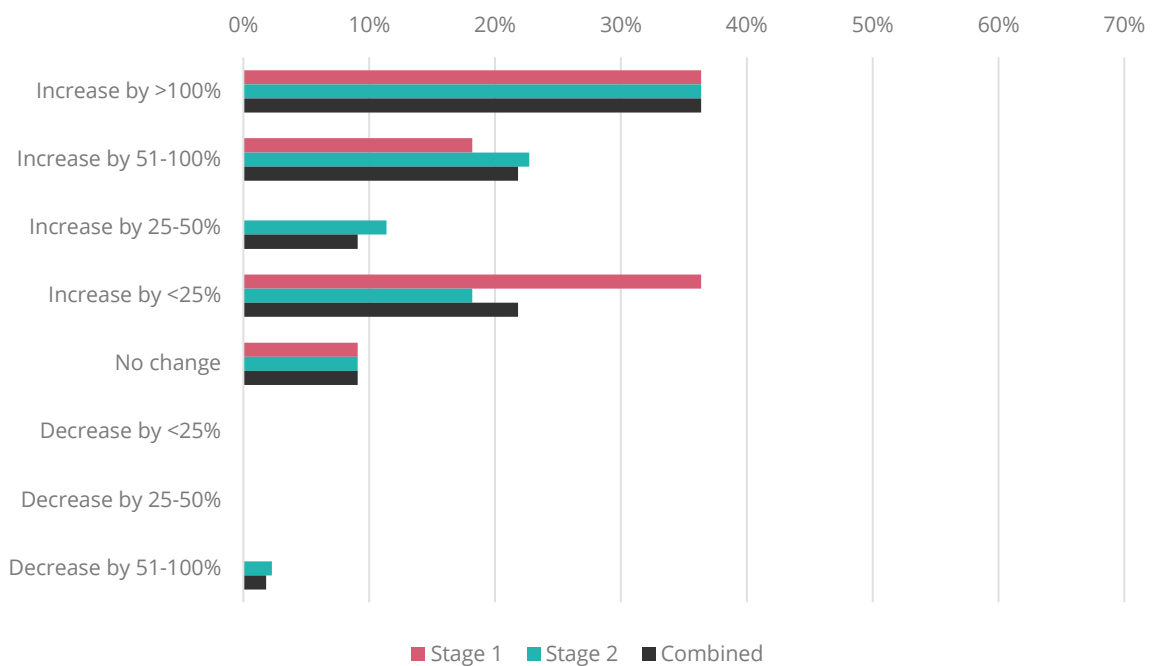


Figure 10: Expected employment change, next 3 years. Source: CSE online participant surveys

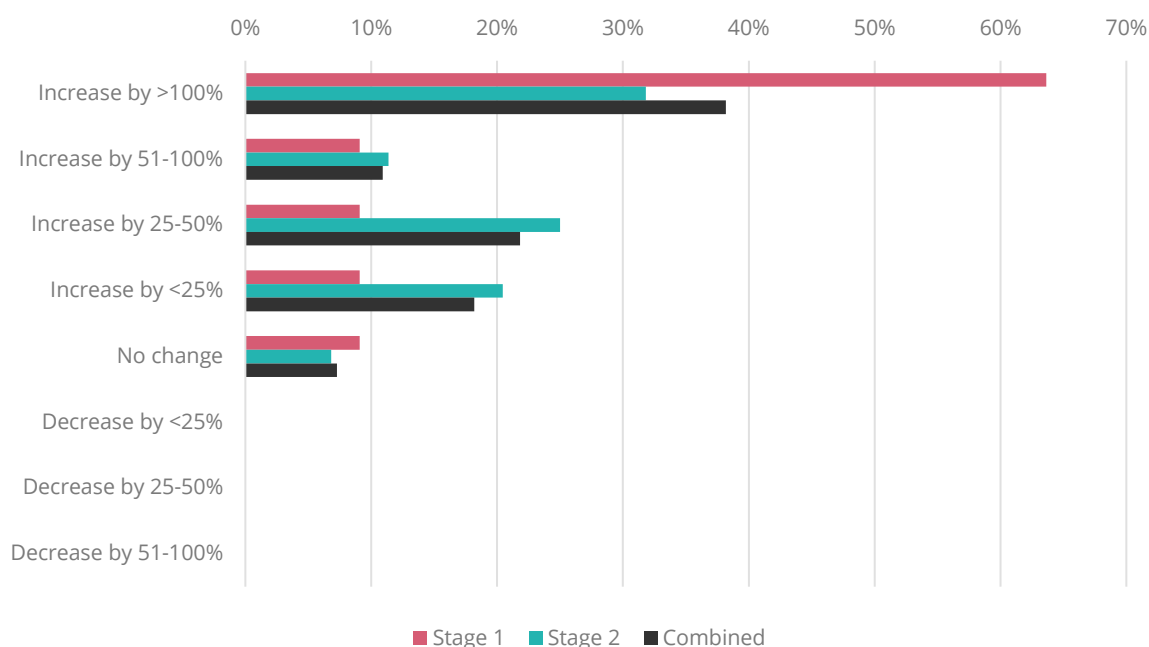


Table 9: Expected employment change, next 3 years. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

	Stage 1 (n=11)		Stage 2 (n=44)		Combined (n=55)	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Increase by >100%	7	64%	14	32%	21	38%
Increase by 51-100%	1	9%	5	11%	6	11%
Increase by 25-50%	1	9%	11	25%	12	22%
Increase by <25%	1	9%	9	20%	10	18%
No change	1	9%	3	7%	4	7%
Decrease by <25%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Decrease by 25-50%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Decrease by 51-100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

Respondents to the online stakeholder survey were also asked to what extent - on a scale of 1 (not achieved) to 5 (fully achieved) - they believed the programme has, or ultimately will have, delivered or contributed to the intended outcomes and impacts, as set out in the theory of change (see Section 3). Summaries of their responses are shown in Tables 10 to 12.

These indicate a belief that the programme had, at least to some extent, achieved all intended outcomes and impacts (with an average score of at least 3 out of 5 in all cases). In particular, it had achieved its primary objectives of improving the investment readiness of participating businesses directly and creating more investment-ready creative businesses overall (with averages scores of 4.1 and 3.9 respectively).

Table 10: Immediate outcomes for participating businesses – extent achieved. Source: CSE online stakeholder survey.

Ranking	Outcome	Average score
1	Improved investment readiness (understanding, knowledge, skills)	4.1
2	Improved business management skills	4.1
3	Access to investors and investor networks	3.2
4	Access to investment (grants, loans, equity)	3.1

Table 11: Intermediate outcomes for the South East region – extent achieved. Source: CSE online stakeholder survey.

Ranking	Outcome	Average score
1	More high-growth potential creative businesses are investment-ready	3.9
2	New revenue generating products, platforms or services are created by and launched and new markets of scale are reached.	3.5
3	Distinct market and information failures that prevent creative businesses in the region scaling and accessing finance are addressed	3.4
4	More local/regional knowledge, skills, capacity, investment and infrastructure exists to support creative businesses beyond the programme	3.3
5	Equality, diversity, inclusion and access are improved in the region’s creative workforce.	3.2
6	More private investors are willing to invest in creative businesses in the region	3.1

Table 12: Long-term impacts for the South East region – extent achieved. Source: CSE online stakeholder survey.

Ranking	Outcome	Average score
1	The profile of the region’s creative sector is raised at a national level	3.7
2	The project partners’ long-term vision(s) and intended legacy for the region’s creative sector are delivered	3.5
3	Inclusive economic growth is unlocked in the region’s creative sector resulting in increased and lasting growth in employment, investment, turnover, exporting activity and profitability	3.4

Further detail on the core outcomes is provided in the next sections.

5.2 Business Investment Readiness

i) Understanding Investment

“The CSE programme has been an incredible opportunity for us; accelerating us from very early-stage ideas to something a lot more tangible and investable.”

“I recommend to anyone who runs a creative business and feels stuck in a grant/funding mindset... it can be investment!”

Across all cohorts, participants felt the programme had significantly enhanced their understanding of investment. This was primarily attributed to the online workshops and mentoring which had provided a rounded education, covering both theoretical and practical aspects, but also the degree to which participants felt ‘investment ready’ (see Investment Readiness). One participant commented on the CSE’s ability to provide both a macro (big picture strategy) and micro (specific skills) perspective:

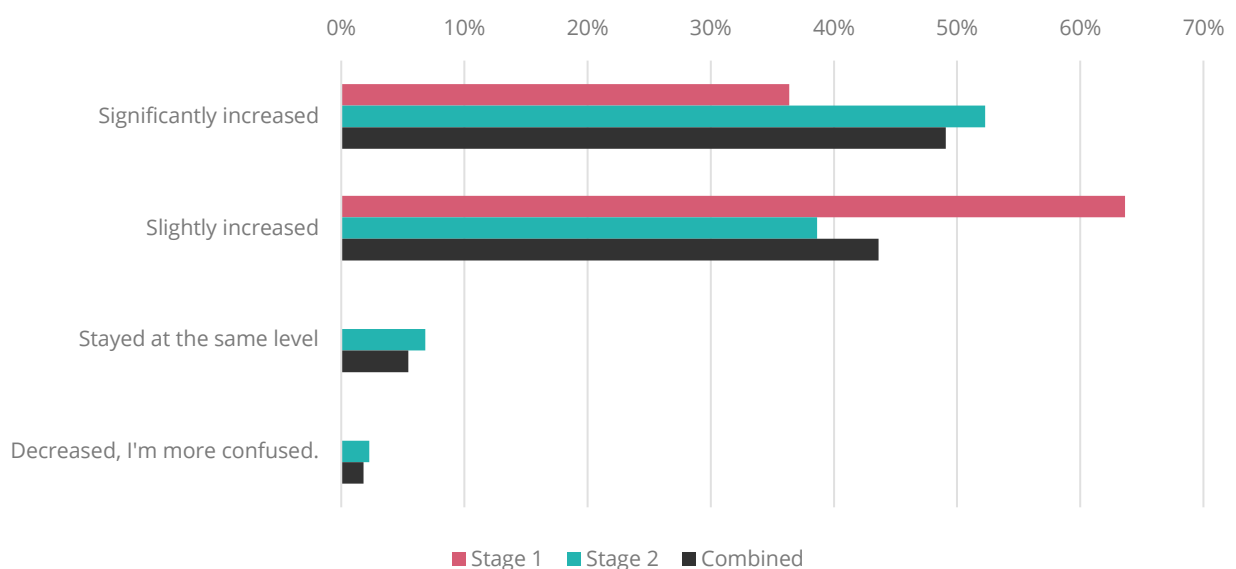
“Providing us the opportunity to both take a bird’s eye view on the business – and to focus on its separate elements (i.e. financial, promotion) in isolation.”

More than 90% of survey respondents believed that their knowledge and confidence around securing investment had increased since starting the programme (see Figure 11 and Table 13). “Understanding investment” was the top reason for applying, with 73% of survey respondents citing it as an objective (see Table 6). It was also the outcome most achieved, with an average score of 3.9 out of 5 from survey respondents when asked the extent to which the programme had supported it (see Table 7).

Table 13: Knowledge and confidence in securing investment. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

	Stage 1 (n=11)		Stage 2 (n=44)		Combined (n=55)	
Significantly increased	4	36%	23	52%	27	49%
Slightly increased	7	64%	17	39%	24	44%
Stayed at the same level	0	0%	3	7%	3	5%
Decreased, I'm more confused	0	0%	1	2%	1	2%

Figure 11: Knowledge and confidence in securing investment. Source: CSE online participant surveys.



The survey and interviews revealed the following core outcomes:

- Investment Routes:** Participants learned about the different investment routes available beyond public grants. For some, this included developing investment infrastructure such as EIS, how to balance investment with public grants, and revising business models to become more attractive to certain forms of investment:

"My confidence in understanding the mechanisms to receive investment and feeling confident that I can personally deliver what's required to pitch and perform due diligence has massively increased."

- Clarity on Investment Needs:** Almost always with the help of their mentor or coach, participants gained insights into whether investment was suitable for their business and what steps were required to gain it. This was particularly true for Stage

1 participants who felt more informed on whether to apply for Stage 2, with not all participants choosing to progress at the time.

"I have discovered that certain types of investment are not right for my business, and I realised a lot of what I am doing is already pushing me in the right direction."

"My mentor helped me pivot towards a high growth opportunity which would have more direct and immediate impact across my business and put me in a better position for investment."

- **Perception Shift:** Many participants changed their view on raising investment, recognising it as a common step in business growth rather than a sign of failure:

"It has completely transformed my understanding of the investor landscape. All of my preconceived notions have been upended, and I feel like I am now able to talk to people from those circles with confidence and clarity."

- **Long-Term Vision:** Participants reported a shift towards more strategic, long-term thinking about their businesses, while still retaining short-term goals. This was particularly for those who had created structured business plans to guide their actions after the programme.

"The programme allowed us to take time out of our normal day to focus on building our business and create an environment to learn and fail. It provided the inspiration and encouragement to grow. Now we know what we want to do. Now we have a destination. Before we didn't. The course has made me want to do better." "We are thinking more long term. We learnt how to be more proactive than reactive."

ii) Business Confidence

Regardless of tangible outcomes, all participants felt Create South East had increased their confidence in their business offer. For many, this was linked to public speaking and consolidated by pitching which not only enhanced their techniques but also instilled a newfound sense of confidence in describing themselves and their business.

"Working in a bubble like I have been doing for the last few years, it was hard to be sure if I was just kidding myself. Having someone to say 'yes, your idea does have merit' was worth everything to me."

"Hearing someone with experience and credibility saying that I should be confident in my business was boost."

The survey and interviews revealed the following core outcomes:

- **Renewed Confidence:** Many participants left the programme with increased confidence in the viability and potential of their businesses. They were willing and

capable to take their business “more seriously” to achieve their aims and how to effectively tackle future business challenges.

- **Validation and Autonomy:** participants expressed that their mentors had not only reassured them but boosted their confidence and autonomy around their ‘own’ work and ideas.
- **Business Repositioning:** Participants experienced significant shifts in how they viewed and positioned their businesses, understanding their social and/or commercial potential. Some participants, particularly in sectors that rely on audiences and public subsidy such as visual and performing arts, also experience a transition from viewing themselves as artists to embracing identities as businesspeople and entrepreneurs/

“How I see my business has changed. I previously introduced myself as a t-shirt brand, which was a way of dismissing myself, and now I market myself as a fashion brand.”

“I felt seen as a business and a creative for perhaps the first time.”

- **Experimentation:** The programme created a supportive environment for participants to experiment and refine their business ideas. This was linked to the short and long-term goal setting as well as an increased understanding and openness to taking risks.

“It’s like a sandbox, where experimentation and failure along the way have been acceptable.”

“The programme allowed us to take time out of our normal day to focus on building our business and create an environment to learn and fail. It provided the inspiration and encouragement to grow.”

- **Skills and Experiences:** Even if their objectives weren’t fulfilled, participants valued the skills and experiences gained from the programme which they would take forward.

“Whilst I didn’t get what I wanted from the programme, I nevertheless did get very useful skills, business development, networking, and mentoring...the programme was a real eye opener and stimulated a lot of thinking, which I hope will translate into business growth and success in the near future”.

iii) Investment Readiness

The degree to which participants felt investment ready was an outcome of three factors: understanding of investment (i.e. identifying the right investment mechanisms), business confidence (of themselves, their business and their ability to interact with investors) and the realised or expected future growth. This tripartite lay a strong foundation for them to pursue investment during or after the programme.

"I honestly didn't realise how much capital I would need to get the business into a growth position, and I had no idea who or how to approach to get it. That's totally changed thanks to Create Southeast."

For many, the true measure came with pitching and pitch development. This was an integral part of the programme. Pitching helped participants refine their delivery and gave them a framework for describing their businesses confidently and clearly.

"We now feel confident stepping into a room with investors and showcasing our company in the best way possible. CSE has offered the opportunity for growth that was previously out of reach!"

"It has completely transformed my understanding of the investor landscape. All of my pre-conceived notions have been upended, and I feel like I am now able to talk to people from those circles with confidence and clarity."

"Becoming pitch ready" was the fourth highest reason for applying to the programme, with 64% of applicants citing it as an objective (see Table 6). It was the second highest outcome achieved, with an average score of 3.8 out of 5 from survey respondents when asked the extent to which the programme had supported it (see Table 7).

However, pitching events also revealed whether participants were ready for investment. For those who pitched fewer times than expected, this was often due to realising they needed to refine their plans further or seek alternative funding routes. Nevertheless, even among those who did not feel fully prepared to seek investment by the end of the programme, there was a recognition of the knowledge gained and some clarity on the steps required which ultimately fostered a sense of "investment readiness".

For many, the real work was expected to begin after the programme such as by refining their pitch decks and investment propositions. As a result, Create South East was seen more as a stepping stone rather than a complete solution, with participants leaving with knowledge and skills to pursue investment opportunities independently.

"My confidence in understanding the mechanisms to receive investment and feeling confident that I can personally deliver what's required to pitch and perform due diligence has massively increased. However, I didn't conclude the programme having a clear business plan for investment, so I can't say that I'm prepared for investment. That's down to me...many unknowns are now simply unknowns which can be tackled in a pragmatic way and as a result, whatever I end up creating for a scalable business is going to be 300% more kick ass than when I started this programme."

"I didn't conclude the programme having a clear business plan for investment, so I can't say that I'm prepared for investment. That's down to me..."

iv) Investment Received and Future Plans

As previously detailed, Create South East improved participants' understanding, confidence and ability to seek investment. While direct investment during or immediately after the programme was not widely reported, many participants felt more prepared to pursue opportunities by applying their learnings from the programme in the near future.

Participants were now exploring various funding options, including grants and strategic partnerships to support growth strategies, product development, or market entry initiatives. Partners being sought were not only investors, but other creative businesses and technology specialists (given the shift to AI / digital processes) whom participants felt could provide access to new markets, technologies, and resources. Overall, there was more clarity on actions and resourcing requirements.

"A huge thank you to the CSE team and their partners. There is still a lot of work to do, but this course has provided such a solid foundation of understanding, confidence and introductions to an extremely useful network."

"The next phase for the business is focused on securing investment to support our official launch and accelerate growth."

For those who were 'investment ready', there was however a strong desire for more assistance in making connections and achieving direct investment within and beyond the programme (see Challenges). This was particularly true for participants who had sufficiently developed plans to launch a new business, product or service in the immediate future.

Just over a quarter of survey respondents had either applied for or received support from a source other than the CSE programme since starting the programme (see Table 14). This included grant funding from sector bodies, an allocation from Shared Prosperity Fund and Innovate UK.

Table 14: Other support applied for or received. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

	Stage 1 (n=11)	Stage 2 (n=44)	Combined (n=55)
Yes	64%	18%	27%
No	36%	82%	73%

5.3 Business Growth

i) Business Model / Process Innovation

Across all cohorts, business model / process innovation was a key outcome, with 64% of survey respondents citing this as an objective for applying to the programme and an average score of 3.6 out of 5 given for the extent to which the programme had supported it in practice. For many, the achievement of this outcome and that of becoming pitch ready and understanding investment, was directly linked with structural business changes and the development of new growth strategies.

Participants cited creating new businesses, developing investment infrastructure (e.g. EIS compliance, approaches to investor communication), revising business models and plans, creating sales and pitch decks, and developing new or enhancing products and services (e.g. tools, apps, platforms and product lines) as well as commercialising IP.

They commonly reported that mentoring was instrumental in achieving this – guiding them through the what, why and how - but that the workshops had also provided a complete and rounded education, so they were better informed when discussing with their mentors. Some described this as an opportunity to refocus and regain momentum after the challenges from the pandemic and cost of living issues, whilst others contextualised this with the concern about achieving sustainable income given the challenges of securing non-project-based (grant) funding in the creative industries.

"My Business Plan developed greatly during this time and the lessons helped me win the Innovate UK Creative Catalyst grant, which I probably wouldn't have won without the Create South East training."

"I've got a new strategy in place and adjusted my objectives. A year ago I was aiming for the moon, now I know to focus on more modest, near-term objectives. Now I'm looking towards stability and sustainability. The programme influenced that."

"It's very difficult to get funding for the company itself in the arts sector (rather than project-specific), so we were worried about things finance-wise long term."

Some participants also learnt the importance of disrupting traditional ways of doing business and how these changes, and a willingness to take risks, could be more attractive to investors and support their future development and scaling, not just immediate growth. Digital expansion was a significant part of this with some participants, for example, seeking to optimise e-commerce platforms, developing online courses, and creating subscription models. Others had started leveraging cutting-edge technologies such as AI, AR, VR, and automation to enhance their products and services and remain competitive.

"We are committed to staying at the forefront by exploring the latest tools and technologies."

The impact of these changes was particularly felt for Stage 1 participants. Many said that prior to the programme, their businesses had been in transitional phase and that they were unsure how to progress. Create South East had provided the knowledge, and motivation they needed to move forward. They were given the structure and space to explore various aspects of running a business, learning from experts, acquiring new tools, and assessing their own practices. Most of this was down to the online workshops.

"We were at a period of uncertainty as a new company [...] and we needed support and guidance to start thinking more as a creative company. The programme undoubtedly helped us unlock a new perspective and give us necessary tools and approaches to refocus our company and goals for the immediate future. We still have a way to go [...], but we could very much still be in a period of uncertainty if we hadn't been accepted on the emerging creative business strand."

ii) Business Growth and Scaling

Revenue growth was another high-ranking objective, reported by 65% of survey respondents. Increased profitability and job creation were lower priorities for respondents, with only 44% and 27% citing these as among their priorities. In general, business growth scored less highly than other outcomes in terms of the extent to which the programme had supported it (2.8 out of 5 for profitability and 2.7 for revenue and employment growth).

Scaling operations is a significant goal for many participants going forward. This involves building strategic partnerships, securing investments and transitioning from client-based work to creating their own IP. Some participants also aim to franchise their models or become market leaders in their respective industries. For some, the focus is expanding into new locations and markets like the US and through nationwide hubs, including by developing globally scalable products, and to transition from generalist to specialist services whilst maintaining a broad offer.

However, while future projections were optimistic, realised business growth varied among cohorts. Where growth did occur, it was linked to business model / process innovation which led to new contracts, for example. These instances were often facilitated by mentors.

"Sarah gave me great insight into how my business might be viewed by others and Erica gave me a short cut to new revenues streams, helping me to connect up the dots in a new way. Both were instrumental in me winning two large contracts."

Others had used the programme insights to secure additional support outside of Create South East including additional mentoring and grant funding (Table 14).

iii) Sustainability and Social Impact

While many participants emphasised sustainable business operations, a small proportion said this was about creative positive social impacts and not just financial return. There were a few instances where the programme had supported embedding environmental processes, empowering underrepresented groups and supporting local communities either through employment (including leadership opportunities) or activities. The latter included creative workshops and education platforms aimed at both wellbeing and skills development. In all cases, this was already an ambition or a small aspect of a business model.

"The future vision for the business is to evolve into a community-driven sewing workshop offering people of all ages the opportunity to learn sewing."

iv) Leadership and Management

Developing leadership and management skills was an objective for 33% of programme participants who responded to the survey. The programme received an average score of 3.1 out of 5 for the extent to which it had supported this outcome in practice.

Overall, many regarded the programme as a significant milestone in their entrepreneurial journey. The programme supported participants' personal growth, including increased confidence, improved communication (including of their value proposition) and enhanced workplace wellbeing. Pitching activities, in particular, played a pivotal role in building confidence.

5.4 Local Capacity-Building

i) Networking and Partnerships

Create South East had some success in fostering networking opportunities among cohorts but participants felt this was a major area of improvement (see Challenges).

Networking, partnerships and peer connections were consistently ranked among participant's top objectives across all cohorts. 56% of survey respondents overall cited this as one of their main reasons for applying and the programme received an average score of 3.6 out of 5 for the extent to which it had supported this outcome in practice.

Participants valued how the programme had facilitated peer-to-peer support, knowledge exchange and collaboration opportunities, which was described by some as a 'mini business community'. The practical benefits mentioned included peer feedback on pitches and the opportunity to hear feedback on others, as well as gaining valuable insights into RandD, relevant skills and the common challenges and solutions. Participants

emphasised that the connections made through the programme continued to offer collaborative opportunities and support beyond its completion.

"It helped deal with isolation and imposter syndrome to a great extent. Hearing other participants express the same pain points was a huge help."

ii) Engagement with the Creative Industries

The programme significantly increased participant’s engagement with the creative industries in the South East with 64% of survey respondents reporting at least some increase in interaction as a result of the programme.

A few participants (including 16% of survey respondents) also joined relevant industry organisations such as Creative UK (Table 15). These participants became aware of these organisations and/or felt they were now in a suitable position to join having gained confidence, reached an appropriate business stage, or because they were now clear on their business needs and progression, such as networking.

Figure 12: Changes to interaction with the regional CCI sector. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

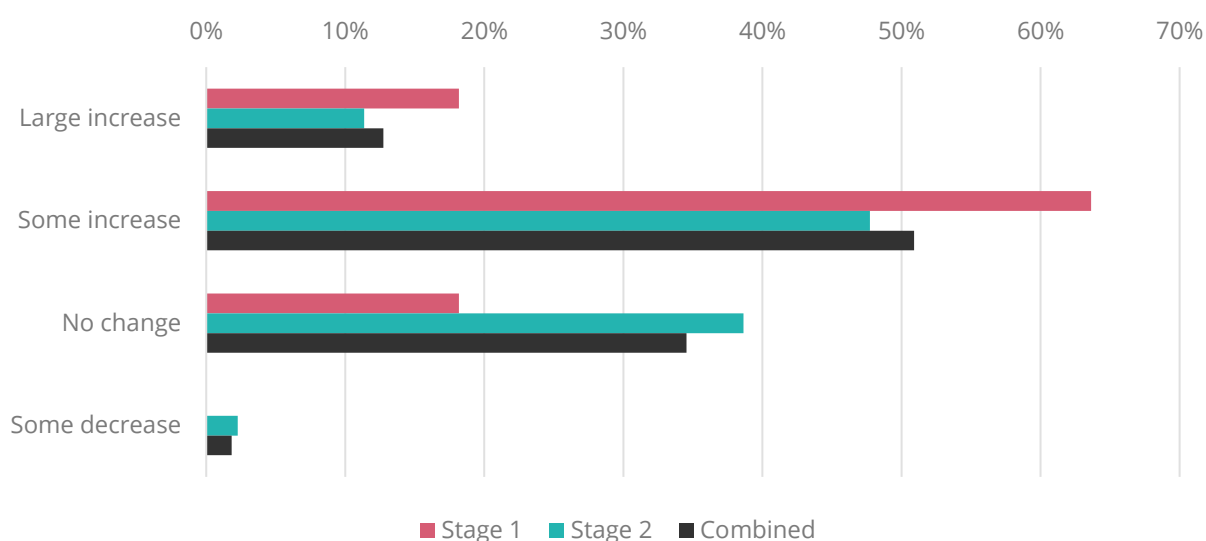


Table 15: New membership of sector bodies or trade networks. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

	Stage 1 (n=11)	Stage 2 (n=44)	Combined (n=55)
Yes	18%	16%	16%
No	82%	84%	84%

6. Process Evaluation: Successes and Achievements

6.1 Design and delivery of business support

i) Satisfaction levels

Evidence suggests high levels of satisfaction with the programme overall, and the different aspects of it (see Tables 16 and 17, and Figures 13-15). This extended to after the programme with 76 out of 78 (97.4%) of respondents to Create South East's survey (brochure development) stating that they would recommend the programme to others.

Table 16: Overall satisfaction levels, average score out of 10. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

	Stage 1 (n=11)	Stage 2 (n=44)	Combined (n=55)
Overall satisfaction (out of 10)	9.00	8.68	8.74

Table 17: Participant satisfaction level by aspect, average score out of 5. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

	Stage 1 (n=11)	Stage 2 (n=44)	Combined (n=55)
Programme management by CSE	5.00	4.66	4.73
Communications from CSE	4.82	4.64	4.67
Skills and knowledge of mentor*	n/a	4.61	4.61
Variety of components	4.73	4.39	4.45
Contact time with mentor*	n/a	4.36	4.36
Sequencing/order of components	4.45	4.25	4.29
Length of programme	4.45	4.23	4.27
Level of time and work commitment	4.73	4.23	4.33
In-person activity provision	4.55	4.11	4.20
Workshop design and delivery	4.55	4.05	4.15
Workshop topics	4.36	3.84	3.95
Online activity provision*	n/a	3.80	3.80
Contact time with other participants	4.36	3.66	3.80

Figure 13: Participant satisfaction level by aspect, average score out of 5. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

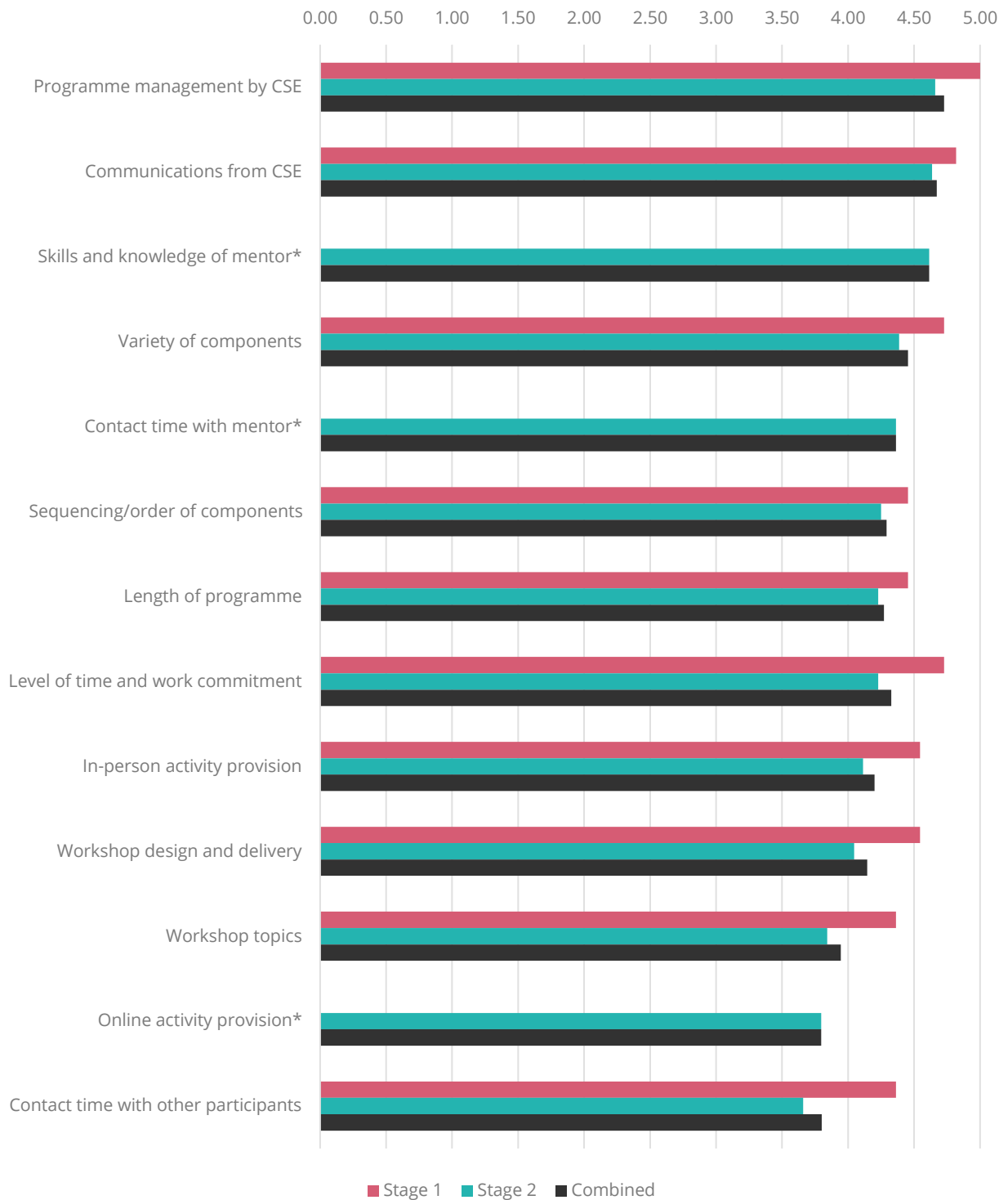


Figure 14: Programme components considered most beneficial (Stage 1). Source: CSE online participant surveys.

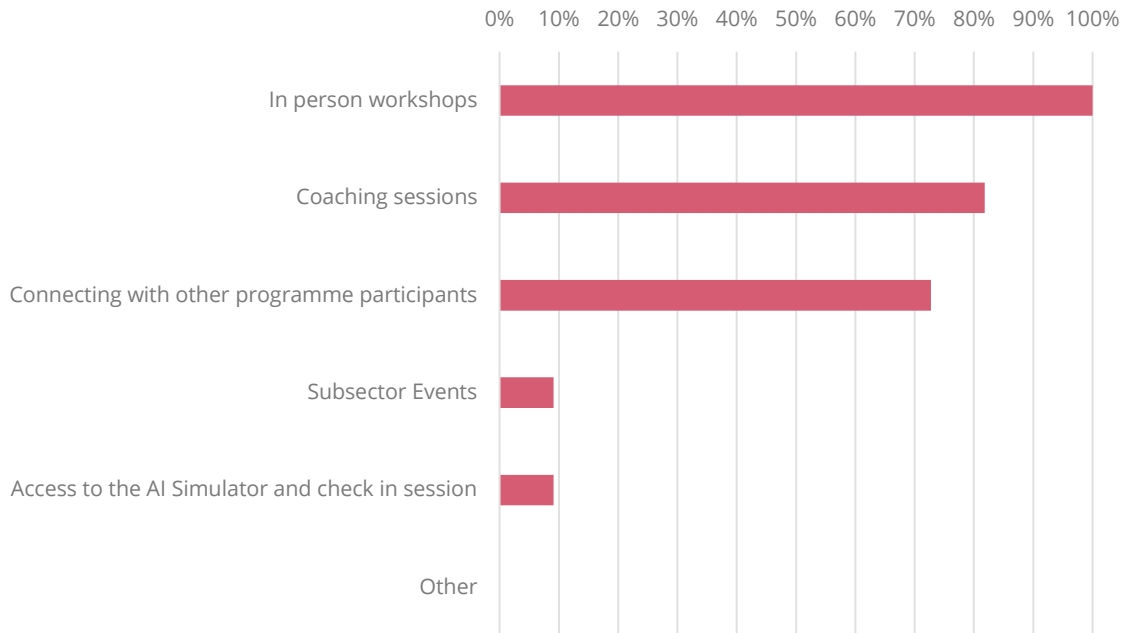
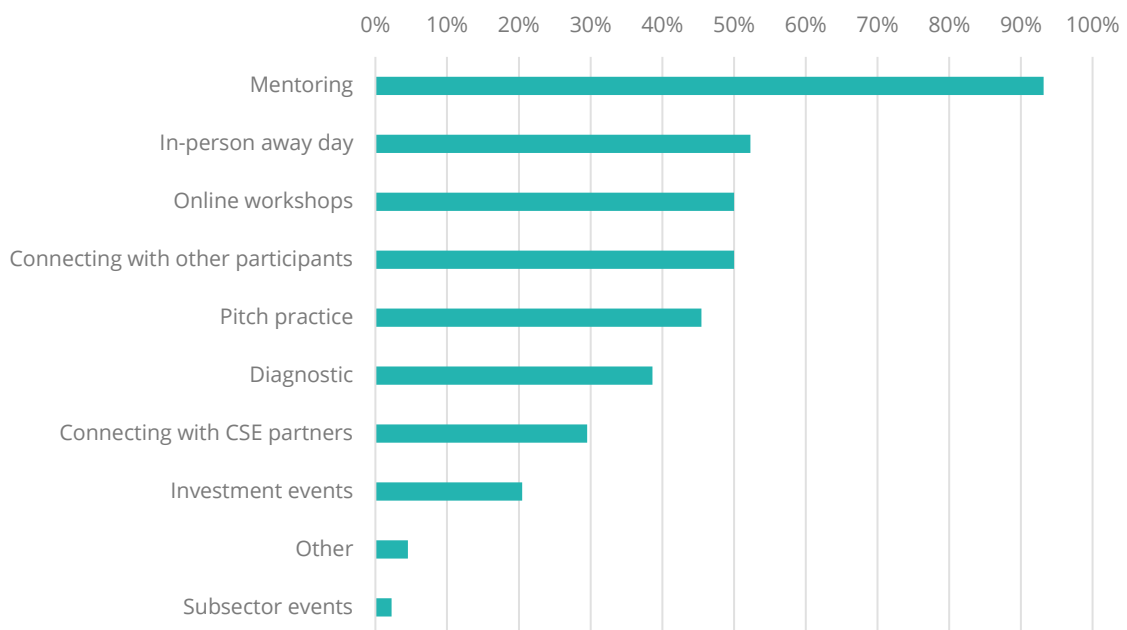


Figure 15: Programme components considered most beneficial (Stage 2). Source: CSE online participant surveys.



ii) Overall Programme Design

Respondents expressed high levels of satisfaction with the programme's design including its structure, sequencing and workshop topics. In particular, they praised the:

- **Complementary Sessions:** Respondents appreciated how different programme elements built upon each other, creating a cohesive learning experience.
- **Practical Application:** The design emphasised actionable strategies, allowing participants to immediately apply learnings to their businesses.
- **Flexibility:** The programme's structure accommodated different learning preferences and business needs, offering a mix of online and in-person elements.
- **Expert-Led Content:** High-quality speakers and workshop leaders were consistently mentioned as a strength of the programme.

iii) Mentoring

Across all cohorts, mentoring/coaching consistently emerged as a cornerstone of success and the most beneficial aspect of the Create South East programme, with positive impacts on business development and personal growth. This directly influenced the overall positive perceptions of the programme.

In response to the question, 'which components of the Create South East programme did you find the most beneficial', 93% of Stage 2 survey respondents identified mentoring (the top answer by some margin) while 82% of Stage 1 survey respondents identified 'coaching sessions' as among the most beneficial components (second only to in-person workshops).

Satisfaction levels with mentors' skills and knowledge was also consistently high, with many survey respondents rating it 5 out of 5, and with an average satisfaction rating of 4.6. Contact time with mentors received an average score of 4.4.

The key benefits identified were (n.b. these primarily refer to Stage 2 participants but for the purpose of analysis, mentors include coaches as well here):

- **Tailored Guidance:** Participants appreciated the personalised nature of mentoring, which was flexible and responsive to their specific needs. This included regular contact and a frequency that was well-suited to the demands of their business.

"Regularity, tempo, and length of time spent with a dedicated mentor who knows the creative industries and is well matched to my business AND to me personally."

- **Industry Expertise:** Mentors with relevant sector knowledge provided invaluable insights, particularly for idea generation and networking. This expertise was crucial in helping businesses navigate their specific industry challenges.
- **Holistic Approach:** Mentors offered comprehensive guidance that went beyond pitch development. They provided actionable advice on business model refinement, strategic planning and overall industry strategies.
- **Practical Outcomes:** Many participants reported tangible improvements in their businesses as a direct result of mentoring such as significant changes to their business strategy which led to new opportunities.

"My mentor helped me pivot towards a high growth opportunity which would have more direct and immediate impact across my business and put me in a better position for investment."

- **Step-Change:** Some participants described their mentoring experience as fundamentally changing their approach to business. Their mentors provided fresh perspectives and insights that were highly valued.

"CSE provided probably the most amazingly suitable mentor for our sector, they were transformative for us: how we do and think about our business going forwards."

- **Long-term Engagement:** participants highlighted that the mentoring continued beyond the programme, with mentors acting as ongoing advisors and for some, collaborating on opportunities.

Even in cases where the mentor-mentee match was not perfect, participants still found value in the transferable expertise offered by the mentors, which speaks to the adaptability and versatility of the mentoring approach. In addition, while mentoring was the standout feature, other components like workshops complemented the experience and helped provide a well-rounded education in investment readiness.

iv) Pitching

Pitch development and practice were a key component of the Stage 2 programme. It was a beneficial aspect for both survey respondents (45%) and interviewees and generally received positive feedback. All respondents understood it to be a key component of investment readiness support and it was variously described as a safe, welcoming and a constructive environment, with frequent references to improved business skills and confidence as previously mentioned. However, there were divergent opinions – around effectiveness and investor expectations - which highlighted the need for some adaptability in programme design (see Challenges).

v) Workshops

Despite a noticeable difference in opinion between content and delivery (see Challenges), the workshops were overall positively received.

100% of Stage 1 survey respondents identified 'in person workshops' as a component of the programme that they found most beneficial (the highest scoring component) and at least half of Stage 2 respondents identified the 'in person away day' and 'online workshops' as most beneficial (52% and 50% respectively) – placing these second only to mentoring in terms of their perceived benefit. It is important to note, that these responses could be a result of the different levels of business acumen between and within the cohorts as explained in the individual cohort reports.

Strengths focused on the diversity of topics which catered to various business needs and stages of development (also a negative) and the flexibility and inclusion of online delivery which allowed participants to manage other commitments and overcome geographical barriers.

"Workshops online made it feasible to attend alongside running my business. It was easy to integrate into my schedule."

However, in-person workshops were considered one of the most impactful aspects of the programme. Like online workshops, they covered a variety of critical topics, but their design reportedly enabled participants to focus on areas most relevant to their business. Feedback also highlighted the immersive nature of these sessions, which fostered deeper understanding into crucial business topics and more tangible skills development.

"The 1-2-day workshops were amazing, eye-opening and very helpful for business development. I learned so much even though it was time away from fee-earning work it was really worthwhile. The lessons learnt will keep helping my business for many years to come."

Specific workshops, such as those on IP, licensing and creative business strategies, were repeatedly praised for their practical application and thought-provoking insights. Some subsequently reported paradigm shifts in their approach to business. These responses were linked to praise for the high quality of speakers.

"The IP session was massive for me. I'd been looking at it wrong. The session changed my mentality, and everyone else's. It showed us how to use assets in different ways."

"In particular, the session with Erica about IP and utilising assets, and also building your business around creativity was a much-needed boost and wakeup call and I can see us using her methods indefinitely. All of the sessions were complementary to the others [...]. I can see how we may utilise some of our existing assets in a possible crowdfunding campaign using strategy from Bertie's session."

vi) In-Person Activity

As demonstrated above with the in-person workshops, in-person activities were a standout feature of the programme. This included away days, workshops, practice pitches and industry-specific events. Survey respondents gave 'in person activity provision' an average score of 4.2 out of 5, compared with an average score of 3.8 out of 5 for 'online activity provision'.

Participants across all cohorts valued these occasions as key opportunities for personal growth, connection and collaboration, with many stating they were turning points in the programme experience. They not only complemented the online components but also created a supportive ecosystem that enhanced the overall learning experience.

The key findings from interviews and surveys were:

- **Community Building:** in a few cases, they served as catalysts for building a supportive "mini business community" which provided vital peer support within and beyond the official programme.

"Sometimes small creative businesses (CCIs) can be lonely, and camaraderie was great."

- **Structural Milestones:** they often had clear goals and provided moments of reflection, helping to structure the programme's learning journey. For example, a Cohort 1 participant described the first in-person event in Eastbourne as when the programme truly "clicked" for them, whilst others commented on the pitching sessions as progress markers.
- **Personal Development:** pitching sessions served as milestones for personal growth, particularly in areas like confidence and public speaking.

"I entered the programme hoping to avoid pitching in my business but had now understood the need and had the confidence to do so."

- **Participatory:** many valued the hands-on, participatory aspects of the in-person sessions, which complemented the more theoretical online components. They also considered workshop formats which had presentations followed by brainstorming and discussion, as the most effective.
- **Knowledge Exchange:** respondents valued the opportunity to share knowledge and insights on various aspects of business.

"The away days not only helped with business insights but also fostered connections. The peer learning and knowledge exchange—from RandD to business skills—was invaluable."

- **Business Opportunities:** networking during these events often led to potential collaborations and new business prospects, supporting longer-term outcomes.

vii) Programme Management and Application

Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the delivery team's approach and support. Survey respondents gave a satisfaction rating for 4.7 out of 5 for 'programme management by CSE' and 'communications from CSE' – the highest of any aspects of the programme.

Many described the team as supportive, personable and highly effective, instilling a genuine interest in their individual success. The team's responsiveness was frequently mentioned, as participants received quick and helpful answers to their requests for information and guidance. The team also facilitated valuable promotional opportunities such as blogs and newsletters which enhanced their visibility and reach, and introductions to key stakeholders and networks.

The overall management style also allowed participants to focus on the aspects of the programme that felt most relevant to them without feeling pressured to attend every component. Some described this as 'respect' for their time and work commitment, whilst managing a business which was rated on average 4.33 in the survey.

There were generally positive perceptions around the application process:

- **Ease of Application:** Participants across cohorts reported high levels of satisfaction, with an average score given of 4.36 out of 5 (see Table 18). Many felt it was straightforward, although some suggested improvements.
- **Support Services:** The helpline service was underutilised, with only 11% of survey respondents reporting that they had used it (see Table 19). This suggests either a lack of awareness or a perception that it was unnecessary.
- **Communication Channels:** Participants learned about the programme through diverse sources, including Creative UK, Create South East, Innovate UK, LinkedIn and word of mouth (see Figure 16). A small proportion received direct introductions (i.e. to improve representation, see Section 4).

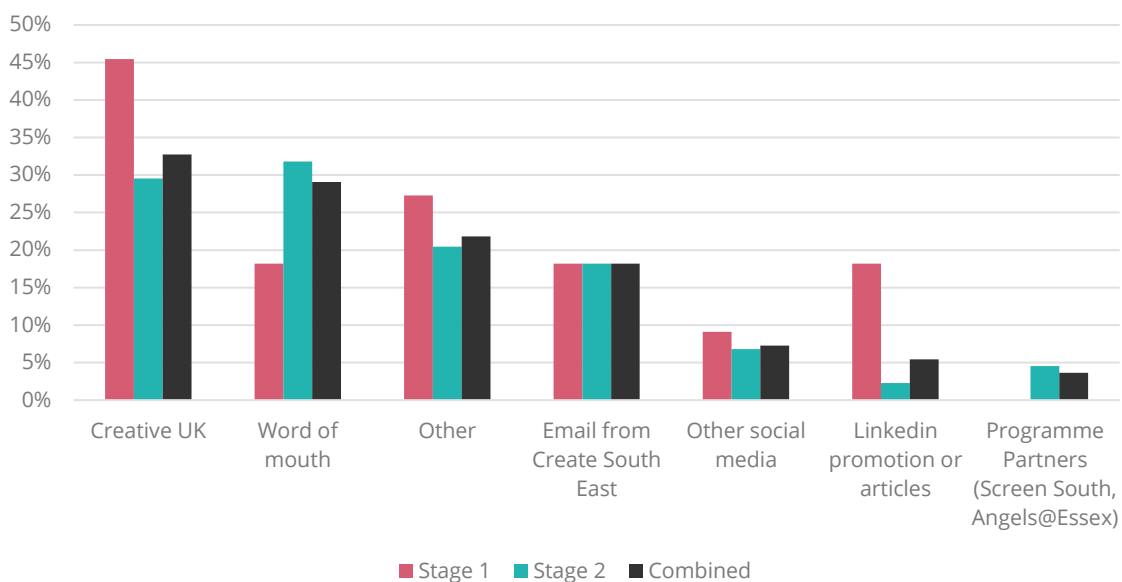
Table 18: Ease of application, average score out of 5. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

	Stage 1 (n=11)	Stage 2 (n=44)	Combined (n=55)
Ease of application (from 1 to 5)	4.09	4.43	4.36

Table 19: Use of helpline services. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

	Stage 1 (n=11)	Stage 2 (n=44)	Combined (n=55)
Yes	18%	9%	11%
No	82%	91%	89%

Figure 16: Where participants heard about the programme. Source: CSE online participant surveys.



6.2 Stakeholder insights

Respondents to the online stakeholder survey were also asked what *they* thought had worked well and what had been the key successes and achievements of the programme from their perspective. In summary, their responses indicated that it had succeeded in providing valuable mentorship support, fostering collaboration, enhancing investment readiness, and building a strong, supportive network. Key themes included:

- Mentorship and Support:** This was seen by stakeholders to be a highly valuable aspect of the programme, helping businesses with key aspects like P&Ls, cash flow, growth plans and pitch preparation. The mentoring element had provided significant confidence and support to founders, boosting their readiness for investment.

- **Networking and Partnerships:** The networking opportunities and Steering Group discussions were praised for fostering collaboration across the region, with local businesses connecting with mentors and peers. This helped create a more aligned and engaged creative industries community, raise awareness of creative businesses within local economies and build strong, regional networks. There was positive feedback on the alignment between local authorities, businesses, and partners working toward a shared vision for investment in creative industries.
- **Event Quality:** Events, both individual and group sessions, were described as well-organised and well-received, offering valuable learning experiences and networking opportunities. The energy and engagement shown from partners was appreciated.
- **Business Development and Investment Readiness:** The programme was seen as having a significant impact on participants' business skills, investment readiness and overall confidence. The knowledge and advice provided on IP, trademarks, and business management were especially valued.
- **Increased Knowledge and Ecosystem Growth:** There was a noted increase in understanding of the investment landscape, both within the creative industries and the broader investment ecosystem. The programme was seen to have helped raise awareness of creative sector investment opportunities and the challenges faced by businesses in this space.
- **Future Growth:** There is a sense that the groundwork laid by this programme, such as the development of a network and relationships with key partners like Creative UK and DCMS, will pave the way for even more growth and investment opportunities in the future.

7. Process Evaluation: Gaps and Challenges

7.1 Design and delivery of business support

i) Mentor Pairing and Contact Time

While most participants were happy with their mentor (with an average rating of 4.6 for skills and knowledge and 4.4 for contact time), a recurring theme across cohorts was the perception and experiences of mismatches between some mentors and mentees. A small proportion of participants said they would have benefitted more from a mentor with stronger practical or strategic experience in their field in order to address their business challenges effectively. Some respondents also called for more frequent (e.g. weekly) and extended mentoring sessions, particularly in Cohort 1. This was linked to desires for a more intensive programme.

ii) Participant Mix

While the programme was praised for its inclusivity of diverse sectors (see Section 4 for analysis), including those beyond traditional creative industries (e.g. CreaTech) and those working outside the sector (e.g. marketing and PR firms working in construction), several consistent challenges emerged which overall underscore the importance of careful cohort curation.

A primary concern across cohorts was the need for better alignment in the size and readiness of participating businesses. Respondents felt that improved alignment could foster more effective peer-to-peer learning, ensure more equitable participation, and address challenges related to the relevance and difficulty of workshop content. This alignment was seen as crucial for maximising the benefits of the programme for all participants.

This was also linked to challenges around final pitching. For example, in one cohort only a small number of respondents felt ready to pitch, which was disappointing for some. The diversity of sectors represented also highlighted a mismatch with the investors present at these events, suggesting a need for better alignment with investor interests.

Diversity was another key theme. Some participants noted a lack of demographic diversity within the cohorts, while others felt that the programme content and resources were skewed towards technology-based companies as 'more investable sectors', potentially underserving the broader creative industries. This was felt most strongly in sectors that rely on audiences and public subsidy such as visual and performing arts, linking to the challenge around intangible IP.

Respondents offered several suggested improvements including the incorporation of more tailored content like relevant case studies, structuring cohorts based on business size or stage of development, and improving the diversity of investors at pitch events.

iii) Overall Programme Design

The findings revealed five key challenges / areas for improvement for the overall programme design, with the emphasis being on expectations and outcomes, post-programme and tailored support (overlapping with feedback on workshops, see next section).

Clarity of Expectations and Outcomes

Respondents across cohorts expressed a need for clearer communication about the programme's intended outcomes and expectations from the outset. Many felt unsure about what they were working towards or what the final outputs would be. For example, some expected tangible deliverables like a polished pitch deck or business plan but found the outcomes to be less concrete, albeit valuable.

There were also repeated calls for milestones and a structured framework to track progression, which would help them feel more prepared to capitalise on opportunities after the programme. A few suggested created a centralised platform (e.g. learning management system) where they could access programme materials, find resources and track progress all in one place.

Programme Structure and Cohesion

Feedback highlighted inconsistencies in the programme structure, with some activities feeling uneven or end loaded. Respondents noted unclear progression pathways and milestone tracking, which hindered their ability to fully prepare for pitching or next steps. For example, some Stage 1 respondents said they were only aware of the Stage 2 programme components, criteria and expectations at the end, leaving them little time to prepare. In addition, some Stage 2 respondents felt pitching was overemphasised as milestones when it turned out to be unsuitable for their business.

In addition, some respondents preferred having time between sessions to reflect and apply learnings, while others suggested an intensive course at the start to introduce all key concepts early on. This was particularly the case for Stage 1 participants, who wanted a longer and more intense programme overall, and particularly increased coaching.

Communication and Planning

Participants called for better communication regarding programme schedules and activities to allow for better time management. Late notice of session dates caused inconvenience, especially for those traveling long distances or unable to attend in person.

Post-Programme Support

A recurring theme was the lack of a structured follow-up framework after the programme ended. Participants wanted ongoing support to maintain connections, monitor progress and explore further opportunities (e.g., alumni networks or additional funding opportunities). One beneficiary called for a 'graduate cohort' for successful businesses (i.e. Stage 3).

Tailored Content and Support

Participants emphasised the importance of tailoring content to their specific business needs, industry subsectors or stages of development. Some felt that certain topics were irrelevant or too generic, particularly for more established businesses. This was most attributed to workshops.

iv) Workshops

Participants expressed mixed views on the content, design and delivery of the workshops, particularly the online ones.

While the survey results generally showed high levels of satisfaction in some cohorts, qualitative feedback revealed areas for improvement such as a need for more in-depth and relevant information linked to business stage and needs, as well as industry-specific content. The latter included a strong desire for industry case studies to aid understanding and application.

For example, across all Stage 2 cohorts, respondents commented on the value of specialist knowledge and expert insights but sometimes felt it was underserved. This was most clear for investment advice including detailed information on SEIS and EIS investment. Meanwhile for Stage 1 participants, the AI simulator and check-in session did not have significant impact and was noted as an area of improvement.

Feedback on the structure and timing of workshops varied. Most respondents were satisfied but a common issue was the length of some workshops that covered critical topics such as investment, which were considered too short to cover the material adequately. Only a few raised concerns around the pace and scheduling including overlaps with the Christmas holiday period which was an issue for retail-orientated businesses.

As noted elsewhere, the delivery format of workshop and the balance between online and in-person sessions received mixed reviews.

Stage 1 participants also expressed a need for better support in applying workshop learnings to their businesses.

v) In-Person Activity, Networks and Partnerships

These concerns revolved around desires for a more bespoke programme with increased opportunities for in-person activities.

Networking and Partnerships

- **Limited Networking Success:** 50% reported in the survey that they had only *somewhat* achieved their networking and partnership objectives, with many emphasising how stronger networking opportunities would significantly improve programme outcomes.
- **Access to Industry and Investors:** Participants expressed a need for more curated opportunities to connect with industry representatives and creative industry investors, particularly in sectors perceived as hard to access, such as fashion. Comments also pointed to concerns about the limited diversity of investors available to support a range of industries.

Peer Connections and Contact Time

- **Desire for More Contact Time:** Respondents consistently wanted more contact time with their peers. Many suggested that an additional in-person session earlier in the programme—such as an away day—would help foster stronger relationships, peer-to-peer support networks and overall engagement.

"It's always a challenge on schemes of this type to fully integrate all participants. I'd suggest that as part of the initial online sessions small breakout rooms are created to help create those relationships/meetings/icebreakers."

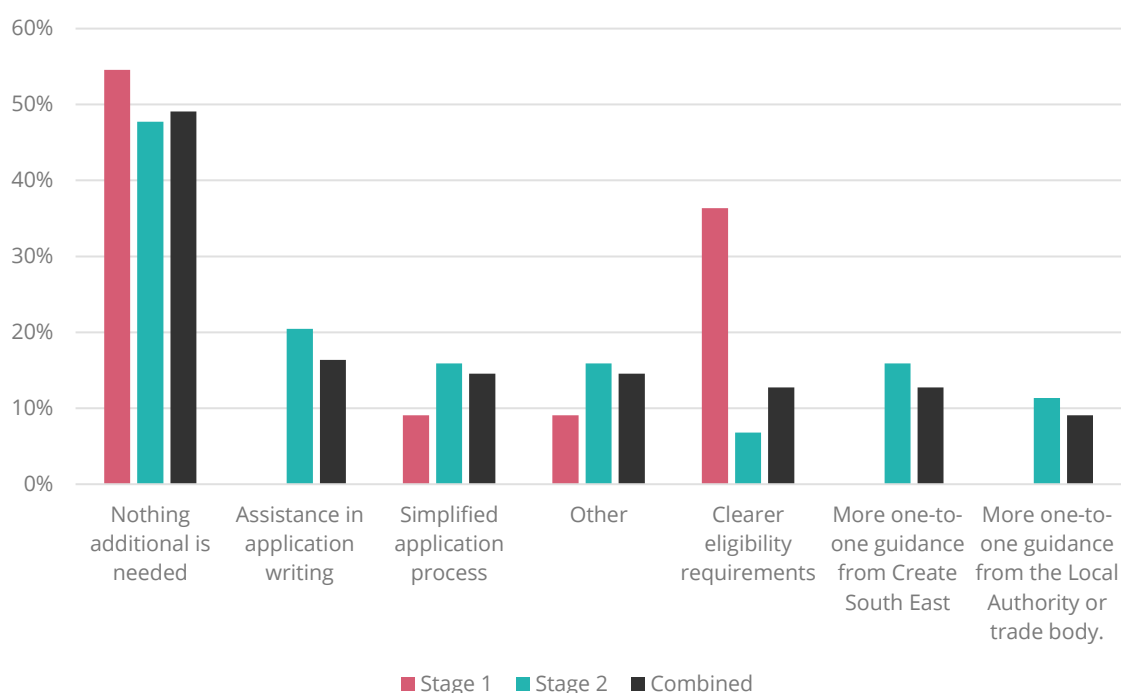
- **Balancing Flexibility and In-Person Interaction:** While the flexibility of the programme's online format was highly valued, participants felt that incorporating more in-person activity would provide opportunity for networking and a culture of peer-to-peer support.

vi) Programme Management and Application

Despite the overwhelmingly positive feedback, several respondents commented on the potential risks and complexity of the detailed communications from the delivery team. With a view to EDI, one beneficiary who identified as neurodiverse suggested refining communication strategies to ensure they are accessible for all participants. This might involve simplifying language, providing alternative formats, or offering communication workshops to meet diverse needs consistently.

Improvements to the application process (see Figure 17) focused on clearer eligibility requirements, a simplified application process, better promotion of support services and offering optional one-to-one support – although around half of respondents in both Stage 1 and Stage 2 said that no improvements or additional support were required.

Figure 17: Potential improvements to the application process. Source: CSE online participant surveys.



7.2 Interaction with investors

Connecting participants to the right investors and industry networks was a prevailing challenge in the programme. The main issues were:

- Mismatch Between Investor Focus and Participant Sectors:** A notable gap was observed between the types of businesses represented in the programme and the investors attending pitch events. Participants often found that investors were not adequately aligned with their sectors, particularly in creative industries like fashion. This mismatch led to a call for better alignment between the investors present and the diverse range of industries seeking funding.
- Limited Diversity of Investors:** Another significant concern was the lack of diversity among investors available to support the wide range of industries involved.

Participants felt that there were insufficient investors focused on traditional creative sectors (i.e. not tech-led), resulting in limited opportunities for businesses in these sectors to secure meaningful connections and funding.

- **Missed Opportunities for Networking:** Participants expressed frustration over missed chances to meet with relevant investors. Many noted that promised connections by the programme team did not materialise, which exacerbated feelings of disconnection from industry and financial resources. There was a strong desire for more curated networking opportunities, especially in sectors where investor engagement is notoriously difficult.
- **Investor Expectations and Engagement:** Pitch events often fell short of participants' expectations regarding sector representation and perceived willingness to invest. Specifically, businesses operating as not-for-profits or reliant on public subsidies found it challenging to attract investor interest.
- **Application of Knowledge Gained:** While participants appreciated the investment knowledge gained through the programme, some felt that they lacked concrete guidance on how to find and engage an investor in practice.

7.3 Stakeholder insights

Respondents to the online stakeholder survey were also asked what *they* thought had worked less well and what had been the main challenges, gaps and lessons learnt from this. Feedback received indicates that there is scope for improvements in accessibility, coordination, investment support, and alignment between national and local initiatives which could enhance its impact and effectiveness.

- **Recruitment and Outreach:** There is a need for broader recruitment sessions and more targeted plenaries, particularly around sub-sector market opportunities like screen.
- **Coordination and Stakeholder Engagement:** Enhancing legacy planning with regional business advisors and local stakeholders, and ensuring that all partners are fully engaged, were seen as important considerations. Additionally, there are challenges in balancing activities and competing priorities across various areas.
- **Programme Duration and Scope:** Some respondents felt that the two-year duration of the programme may not have been enough to achieve the intended long-term outcomes, and that the broad geography of the programme made it hard to deliver support evenly. There was a call for greater continuity of funding and delivery to enable longer-term planning, build on successes and continue to address gaps.

- **Local and National Alignment:** There were issues raised with the national grants programme not aligning well with local needs and priorities, also exacerbated by the large regional scope and travel distances.
- **Accessibility:** Concerns were raised about the barriers to accessing support, especially for businesses that need help beyond the diagnostic stage but aren't yet investment ready. Some also noted the need for more engagement with larger corporates and better synergies with big companies, like Meta, that are relevant to certain sectors. Some participants noted systemic barriers that prevented certain businesses from accessing the programme, suggesting that offering a broader range of programme options could help.
- **Decision-Making and Governance:** Group decision-making had felt difficult at times, with governance processes considered time-consuming and complex by some and simplification and clearer financial information needed.
- **Investment and Funding:** Accessing funding and finding suitable investors had been challenging. A concern was expressed that regional investor networks need more development to support creative businesses in the South East.
- **Mentoring and Support:** There were suggestions to spread mentoring hours across a full year and to provide more face-to-face opportunities where possible.
- **Managing Time and Resources:** One respondent highlighted the need to better manage time with teams and spread-out engagement efforts to avoid burnout.

8. Future Priorities

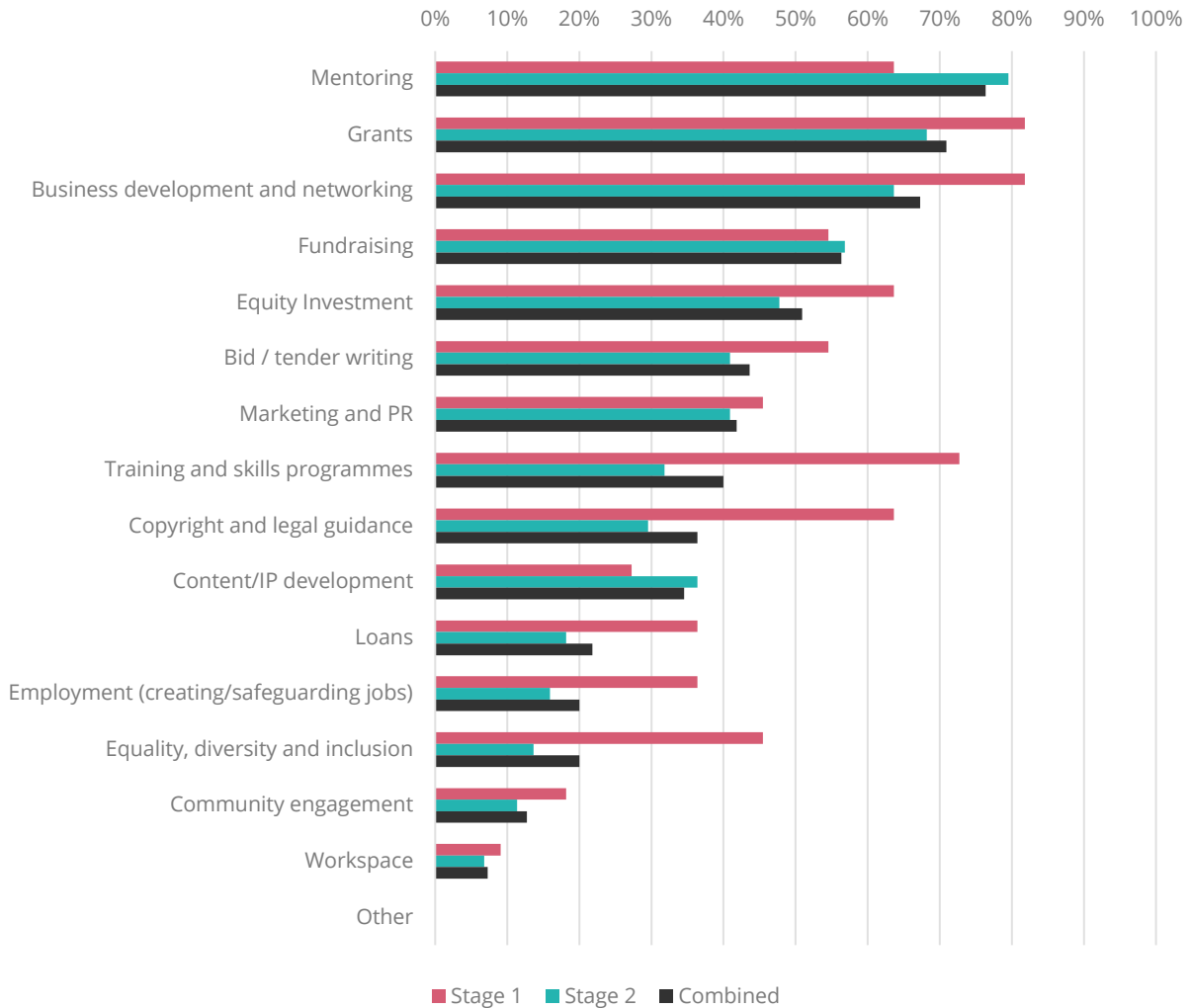
8.1 Participant priorities

Table 20 and Figure 18 summarise the responses to the survey question “which of the following do you feel should be priority areas for further/future regional CCI support?”

Table 20: Priorities for future CCI support. Source: CSE online participant surveys.

	Stage 1 (n=11)		Stage 2 (n=44)		Combined (n=55)	
Mentoring	7	64%	35	80%	42	76%
Grants	9	82%	30	68%	39	71%
Business development and networking	9	82%	28	64%	37	67%
Fundraising	6	55%	25	57%	31	56%
Equity Investment	7	64%	21	48%	28	51%
Bid / tender writing	6	55%	18	41%	24	44%
Marketing and PR	5	45%	18	41%	23	42%
Training and skills programmes	8	73%	14	32%	22	40%
Copyright and legal guidance	7	64%	13	30%	20	36%
Content/IP development	3	27%	16	36%	19	35%
Loans	4	36%	8	18%	12	22%
Employment (creating/safeguarding jobs)	4	36%	7	16%	11	20%
Equality, diversity and inclusion	5	45%	6	14%	11	20%
Community engagement	2	18%	5	11%	7	13%
Workspace	1	9%	3	7%	4	7%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

Figure 18: Priorities for future CCI support. Source: CSE online participant surveys.



Based on the findings from multiple cohorts, we can identify several common themes and priorities for any future business support programmes. The overall ask is for programmes that provide a holistic approach that includes mentoring, various funding options, networking opportunities and targeted skills development.

The preferences appear to lean towards more direct support (grants, mentoring) rather than debt-based options (loans), possibly reflecting the stage and nature of the businesses involved. These priorities also likely reflect the evolving needs of businesses as they progress through different stages of growth and the changing economic landscape.

Mentoring: Mentoring consistently emerged as a top priority across all cohorts, with an average score of 76%. It suggests that businesses highly value personalised guidance and expertise to help them grow.

Funding and Financial Support in various forms were raised:

- Grants: Highlighted by all cohorts (identified as a priority by 71% of survey respondents), with some specifically preferring grants over equity investment and loans (identified by 51% and 22% respectively).
- Fundraising: mentioned by a few cohorts and for some, an area which emerged as an avenue through the programme. 56% of survey respondents identified this as a priority for future support.
- Bid / tender writing: 44% of all survey respondents identified this as a priority.

Business Development and Networking: Networking opportunities were consistently identified as a priority underscoring the importance of connecting businesses for potential collaborations, knowledge sharing and growth opportunities. 67% of survey respondents identified this area as a priority (ranking it third, behind mentoring and grants).

Specialised Training and Skills Development: For example, copyright and legal guidance, marketing and PR, content/IP development, and employment (creating/safeguarding jobs). 40% of survey respondents identified 'training and skills programmes' as a priority, with 36% specifically identifying 'copyright and legal guidance'.

Business Infrastructure Support: there were additional references to EDI interventions (identified by 20% of survey respondents) and workspace provision (just 7% of survey respondents, indicating that it was not seen as a priority by participants).

8.2 Stakeholder priorities

When asked about the effectiveness of different types of business support for the sector, there was a consensus among stakeholders that, while general business principles apply, creative industries require specialised support that considers their diversity and the constantly changing environment. Specialist mentoring, market awareness, and more flexible financial products were seen as key areas to focus on, along with tailored support in areas such as branding, marketing, social media, AI, IP control, and income diversification.

9. Legacy

Counterculture's interim report in June 2024 explored the legacy for the Create South East programme and partnership. It looked specifically at outputs and actions for the remainder of the programme at the time (10 months) and after the programme's completion beyond March 2025. This basis for the legacy framework was shaped by ideas and feedback from those closely involved in running the programme in Kent, Essex and Sussex at a series of workshops. This included the Steering Group and delivery team.

At the time, workshop participants felt they had delivered on the core investment readiness programme, meeting the stretch target of supporting 120 unique businesses and placing commercial creative business investment firmly on local and regional agendas.

Both the partners and delivery team acknowledged their ability to be 'fleet of foot' in responding to the requirements and perceived challenges posed by DCMS and Innovate UK. They were able to manage and adapt the national programme to suit local circumstances and to meet the needs and interests of businesses. This success is reflected in the positive feedback from programme participants.

Workshop participants also recognised the strength of the partnership and the variety of knowledge, expertise and experience that has shaped the programme which will also be critical to continued success. However, the large partnership also brought complications as different partners' needs, perceptions, expectations, capacity, timescales and aspirations were not always aligned and, at times, led to a lack of clarity.

Key themes

Six key themes emerged from the partnership and delivery team workshops as the focus for further work to bring a range of benefits to the region. The themes were:

- Networking
- Storytelling
- Investors
- The business model
- Data and research
- Skills and resources

See interim report for further information.

9.1 Framework Development

Counterculture provided outline priorities and actions as a basis for the legacy framework. These were split by timeframe: actions that should be initiated during the remainder of the programme, before March 2025, and those that should be initiated on completion of the programme, after March 2025. Owners or responsible partners were listed where possible.

The next steps were for partners to review and prioritise the proposed actions, confirm their roles and involvement, and participate in a workshop to develop a comprehensive legacy plan, including vision, management, resources and evaluation metrics.

Actions before March 2025

Networks (£10K estimated budget)

1. Commission a report on existing networks and how creative businesses stay informed and connected (steering group)
2. Identify which networks should be prioritised due to their strategic links to specific places, assets, organisations, investment and sectors, and where there are gaps that a new network should fill (steering group).
3. Develop a plan to engage existing and build new physical and digital networks. The plan should set out who will lead the work, how it will be resourced, and the engagement activities.

Storytelling

4. Clarify the different language to be used in storytelling so that communications are clear and meaningful for the intended audience. Audiences include the creative sector, investors, local authorities, institutional partners and government.
5. Commission the development of a range of case studies that can be used for telling stories to different audiences. Case studies should reflect the diversity of businesses and geographies (steering group). (*£10K estimated budget*).
6. Produce stories for:
 - o DCMS that focus on the positive start, evidence of need and impact, lessons learned, and improvements (steering group and Creative UK).
 - o The investment community which focuses on sector and regional opportunities; the positive impact on businesses; awareness raising and encouraging future investment; and addresses some of the concerns investors may have about investing in the creative industries (Creative UK).

- Creative businesses that signpost future opportunities and provide case studies showing diversity, business growth, personal development, cross-sector working, and investment.

Investors (£10K estimated budget)

7. Clarify the scope for investment including what areas of financial support are included and not included.
8. Commission a report on the investment ecosystem in the region, mapping current infrastructure and assets, and where the biggest opportunities lie for creative businesses and investors (steering group).

The business model

9. Agree answers to the five questions set out in section 2.5 and identify components of the business model that can be revised to increase market funding and delivery.
10. Work with local authority colleagues to embed the work into economic development strategies and infrastructure, such as the Thames Estuary Production Corridor, and leverage local resource (local authority partners).
11. Agree if and how the scope of legacy work can be broadened to have greater impact across the creative industries subsectors and to increase return on investment for organisations, particularly local authorities, committing resource and capacity to future activity.

Data and research

12. Collect data to create collective intelligence on the sector, investors and networks and ensure it's accessible to all partners.

Skills and resources

13. Audit and map partners' priorities, skills and capacity for future work.

i) Actions after March 2025

Networks

1. Implement the output of Action 3: the plan to engage existing and new networks.

Investors

2. Based on the findings in Action 8 (the commissioned report), set up activities, tools and resources to help creative businesses and investors understand each other and make connections.
3. Create events and opportunities to introduce investors to B2B and CreaTech companies and to bring together stakeholders to develop a cross-platform IP.

The business model (£55K estimated budget)

4. Research, develop, launch and expand market funded models for ongoing activity.

Data and research

5. Commission a research report to assess need, ambition and opportunity across the region (steering group).

Skills and resources

6. Arrange a knowledge exchange session with Create Growth Programmes in other regions.
7. Following Action 12, deliver relevant training sessions for partners to develop skills and knowledge.

ii) Legacy Statement

Workshop participants were also asked to create a phrase of around six words to summarise their ambitions for the legacy of Create South East. The responses focused on raising investment; the range of investment; business growth; and access, skills and resources. Some examples were:

One-stop-shop for all creative industries

Access to a range of finance options with support

South East creatives bringing in the cash

Understanding creativity is an essential ingredient

Investors and creative talking and telling (e.g. connections, narratives)

Support to bridge the gap between subsidy and investment

The six-word ambition statements suggest that partners agree that the legacy is to put mechanisms in place that will enable creative businesses in the South East to secure finance.

10. Conclusions and Recommendations

A summary of our conclusions is set out below. We recommend that these, including points 5-9 in particular, be considered in the design and delivery of any follow-on CCI business support and investment programme(s) in the region:

1. While Create South East was designed to deliver a number of outputs, outcomes and impacts, unlocking inclusive, sustainable economic growth in the region's creative sector was seen by programme partners and stakeholders as its primary long-term objective. Improving the investment readiness of high-growth potential creative businesses was seen as the primary mechanism for delivering this.
2. Understanding investment was the most common reason given by businesses for applying to join the programme, followed by revenue growth, innovation, becoming pitch ready, and networking and partnership development. Understanding investment and becoming pitch ready were also the outcomes most frequently achieved by participating businesses, with nearly four out of five businesses saying the programme had helped them achieve this.
3. Nearly all the businesses supported expected their income and employment headcount to grow in the three years following their time on the programme.
4. Evidence suggests high levels of satisfaction with the design and delivery of the programme overall (nearly 9/10 on average), and with the different aspects of it – with the CSE team's management and communications receiving the highest scores among these (4.7/5 on average). 97% of respondents to Create South East's own survey stated that they would recommend the programme to others. The application process was felt to be straightforward (scoring 4.4 out of 5 on average for ease of application).
5. Mentoring, coaching sessions and workshops were seen as the most beneficial areas of support, with mentors' skills and knowledge being ranked highly. Support that was tailored, practical, holistic and delivered by industry experts was seen as particularly impactful, compared with more generic support. There was also a desire for more contact time and follow-on support.
6. Participatory, face-to-face delivery was generally seen by participants as more effective than online support – among other things, helping to build confidence, knowledge, networks, business opportunities and a sense of creative community.
7. Businesses highlighted the need for greater clarity of programme structure and expectations from the outset, along with better matching (at least in some cases) between mentors, investors and cohort participants. It was felt that closer alignment of expertise, business size, and experience levels would strengthen networking and

learning opportunities and deliver stronger programme outcomes and impact overall. There was also a call for ongoing efforts to improve reach and diversity.

8. Programme partners and stakeholders highlighted the need for more targeted outreach activities, better stakeholder coordination and engagement, longer funding horizons, more streamlined governance and improved accessibility.
9. The top priority for future regional CCI support among participating businesses was specialist mentoring, followed by funding (both direct grants and fundraising/bid-writing support), business development & networking opportunities, and equity investment (all of which were requested by at least 50% of surveyed participants).

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Appendix A: Case Studies

Curious Families UK is a social enterprise that creates original interactive experiences and playful resources for families and children. The founder and director, Sally-Anne, applied to the CSE programme to identify the commercially viable elements of her business and how to take it in a new direction with the right type of investment. Sally-Anne was concerned that the business was no longer growing after 10-years and what the future prospects might be.

The workshops provided her with an understanding of investment which she did not previously have. Her mentor was vital; working at her pace, he built on the workshops and helped her determine if investment was right and for what means. In the end, rather than seeking investment for her current business, the goal became establishing a new commercially-focused business with a new digital platform for agencies and organisations working with families.

Sally-Anne also participated in the impact and pitching event in Eastbourne and presented on behalf of the scheme at a Kent County Council event, which supported her with networking and business development (vital as she was relatively new to Kent).

One area of improvement would be more and diverse pitching opportunities to cater for the different businesses, development of other skills (e.g. presentation tools, creative ways of communication with investors) and a longer length span to support progression to the key pitch events, which on their own could feel inaccessible or unsuitable (a one-size that did not work for all). Sally-Anne did not participate in the 7-minute pitch event as she did not feel ready but was one of four to pitch at the end.

Following a successful pilot of the digital platform with the Imperial War Museum, Sally-Anne plans to build the platform infrastructure alongside further pilot projects to test the market.

Donna Forte ('strong women') is a fashion brand providing high-quality, adaptive post-surgery underwear for women, combining fashion with function. It was founded by Caroline Hill who had worked in the fashion industry for over 20 years, following her personal experience with breast cancer. The mission is to fill a gap in the market, support breast cancer awareness and contribute to related charities.

Caroline's business was at the pre-launch stage and she applied to the CSE programme to:

1. **Enhance Growth Opportunities:** Utilise the programmes resources and mentorship to scale her business.

2. **Networking and Collaboration:** Forge valuable connections with industry experts, entrepreneurs, and potential partners.
3. **Strategic Development:** Refine her business strategy under the guidance of experienced professionals to ensure long-term success.
4. **Access to Funding:** Identify funding opportunities to support product innovation and expansion.
5. **Increased Visibility:** Enhance her brand's visibility through the exposure provided by the programme.
6. **Community Engagement:** Connect with like-minded organisations to amplify the social impact of my business.

Caroline felt she had achieved her goals and, in the process, gained a more in-depth understanding of her business and the confidence to pursue investment. She found the programme personable and tailored to her needs, particularly in overcoming challenges she faced as a sole trader, such as isolation. This support allowed her to focus on scaling her business with confidence. The mentoring was invaluable, providing crucial support on tight deadlines, demonstrating a strong commitment to her success, and serving as a reliable sounding board.

Additionally, while the programme offered excellent networking opportunities and mutual support from other businesses, Caroline felt it could be further enhanced by providing more connections to investors specialising in the fashion industry. In her experience, these types of investors are more difficult to find, and building relationships with them could significantly benefit entrepreneurs in fashion.

Fleur De Lis is a female-led classical theatre company specialising in producing shows with advanced physical skills including stage combat, dance, circus and puppetry. With a keen focus on developing artistic talent across the UK, the company has successfully supported hundreds of artists and young people through training, employment and facilitation opportunities as well as working in school settings.

The main objectives for participating in CSE were to:

1. **Attract Investment:** securing angel or equity investment to transition from a primarily part-time to a full-time team and to secure a facility to expand operations.
2. **Enhance Confidence in Fundraising:** developing skills and confidence in securing diverse funding, balancing public grants with private investment.

The most impactful support was the effective mentorship pairing. The mentor, with extensive performing arts industry experience, offered tailored guidance on pitch development, industry navigation and strategic planning which resulted in three key outcomes: a refined pitch deck, enhanced funding strategy and a significant boost in business confidence. The CSE team also facilitated valuable industry and investor connections, including Angels of Essex, and this networking led to additional mentorship opportunities and potential new revenue pathways.

The company plans to continue pursuing investment opportunities whilst maintaining a nuanced approach to funding that balances public grants with private investment sources due to the nature of their sector. This involves applying for public grants where they add clear value, but without becoming financially dependent on them.

The company will now leverage the programme to develop its artistic and educational offer.

Luma-ID is a specialist product design and manufacturing consultancy providing technical and related business services (e.g. intellectual property) to a wide range of industries. Mark Little (co-founder) initially applied to the Create South East programme to grow the consultancy side of the business after a challenging few years with Covid-19 and market conditions, but the business had also just completed an Innovate UK programme with a new product spinout ('Flexyb.in'). After discussing the product with his mentor, they agreed to pivot towards creating a new company and getting that product off the ground because of the higher growth potential which would, in turn, benefit other aspects of their business like the consultancy.

Through the programme, Mark was able to create a new business and pitch deck that turned the competition award into a tangible idea. The business support sessions were relevant and informative, but the mentoring was particularly impactful and a new experience for Mark. His mentor did not work in the same industry, but nevertheless was able to provide detailed, flexible and tailored support throughout the process, drawing experience and insight from their work. Mark also benefited from showcasing opportunities, whether that was practice pitch events which helped build confidence and provided useful feedback, or exhibiting at Climb24 where he networked with potential investors.

Mark is now refining his pitch deck before seeking investment.

Studio Sam Causer is a conservation architecture practice based in Margate, Kent. Its team and collaborators hold a strong interest in food politics and urbanism. When Jarred

was promoted to Associate Director two and a half years ago, he was encouraged to develop a business plan for a long-standing idea around sustainable resource management and food waste. Jarred was concerned about the economic risks related to this disruptive innovation and wanted to understand how the project could be developed as a beneficial offshoot that complemented the studio's core business.

The diagnostics at the start of the CSE programme and the feedback from each activity built Jarred's confidence in his project and in his capabilities. The workshops reinforced what he knew and helped to provide him with the language of business and an understanding of investment. He also benefited from informal learning through discussions with peers. An excellent mentor was particularly key, providing advice and attending key meetings. Jarred took part in the full pitching development activities which expanded his skills and confidence in presenting to investors and public speaking in general.

As a result of the programme, Jarred has successfully found an Investor Partner who is actively working to secure private equity match funding, and submitted another funding application to Innovate UK with academic partners he met through the programme. He has expanded his network and has a vision of how to achieve his business goals.

"Now I have a very clear path of how to raise money. I can write it down and programme it."

Sussex Tweed is a weaving company specialising in caps. The founder, Jonathan Kelly, was previously a film editor and operated the company part-time, but in recent years had transitioned to full-time when his film work reduced. The company employs one part-time person, a recent textile and weaving graduate who now owns 10% of the business, as part of Jonathan's commitment to nurturing young talent in the sector.

Jonathan joined the programme when he was trying to reposition the business as a tweed manufacturer. This was partly due to concerns around UK manufacturing and if it could meet his needs, as well as a desire for more control over the production process. The main objective for participating in CSE was to become investment-ready and to understand what types of investment would be suitable for the business to support its long-term sustainability.

Jonathan benefitted from mentoring, pitch practices and online workshops, particularly around topics like branding and finance. The mentor who formerly worked for Arcadia, was particularly transformational, helping him critically evaluate the business model, develop a pitch deck from scratch, and provided guidance on sales strategies, market dynamics and positioning. His mentor enabled him to successfully reposition the company

by developing a new company structure to facilitate investment and has gained two new orders through a more targeted sales approach.

Jonathan confidence, networking skills and overall business acumen has improved and how feels able to present his business to potential investors. He will now refine his investment strategy including exploring EISS or equity investment and continue to expand his client base across local, national, and global markets.

The Holding Time Project is led by Lisa, a visual artist and marketing professional. Since 2018, she has received Arts Council England and NHS funding for the project which is a health and arts initiative that uses marketing tools combined with creative techniques (creative writing, portraits, video, VR) to communicate and advocate for breastfeeding mothers.

Lisa found the Stage 1 programme insightful and encouraging. It provided in-depth understanding of core business goals and opportunities for reflection on what her customer base is, how to sell and price. It also provided a significant confidence boost as to the viability of the project and its important position within the arts and health sectors.

As a multi-disciplinary practice and without a health qualification, Lisa had sometimes struggled to find her place as well as suitable funding and support. She commended the openness of CSE and the generalist nature of the Stage 1 programme worked particularly well for visual arts and multi-disciplinary practices that, historically, had not been fully supported in these areas. For Lisa, the most beneficial aspects were the investment session, mentoring and the IP workshop, all of which helped her develop a strategy for growth and provided ideas on how to shift away from grants.

Lisa applied to Stage 2 of the CSE programme but was unsuccessful. Although Lisa has not yet secured investment, she feels capable of doing so. She has been invited to apply for a funded PhD, for the Women in Innovation Award and the Femtech Accelerator from Innovate UK. She has also won contracts for new work and has also appointed a new production manager to support her business growth.

The Modern Calligraphy Company specialises in training calligraphers for luxury events, organising nationwide brand activations, and building a community of calligraphy enthusiasts through educational content and experiences focusing on talent development as well as wellbeing. They offer various masterclasses and workshops for both amateur and professional calligraphers.

Jill joined the programme to gain a broader perspective on finance and investment and to improve connections with other creative businesses. The aim was to regain momentum following the pandemic and identify opportunities to support business expansion.

Jill particularly benefited from her mentor who provided encouragement and support with business ideas, acting as a vital sounding board, the online workshops which provided a rounded education, and networking opportunities which have led to potential collaborative opportunities. Key outputs included identifying new income streams and funding options, which she previously had little knowledge of and confidence to pursue. This included insights into grant funding options which were not previously part of the business' commercial model and could have supported quicker expansion. Jill also benefited from creating a pitching deck and practicing pitching, identifying and using with real-world statistics.

Despite the benefits, the programme's timing over the Christmas sales period meant it was difficult for her to fully engage, and she would have benefited from more one-to-one support, such as for pitch development.

Looking ahead, Jill plans to complete the pitch deck, explore potential collaborations with other participants, and keep an eye on grant funding options as she continues to navigate the balance between traditional craft and digital processes.

UTA Architects is run by Ulla, who had been working in the architecture industry for 20 years when she decided to set up her own business in designing healthy buildings. She began testing approaches and developing her services two years ago. She currently does freelance work for other architects while trying to build her own business. When looking online for sources of funding, she came across the CSE programme and applied for the Stage 2 programme. At diagnostics she was encouraged to apply for Stage 1.

Ulla found the programme extremely useful. The investor workshop helped her understand what investors look for and she acknowledged that her current business model is unlikely to attract investment as a source of funding. The sessions taught her about opportunities for IP commercialisation that she hadn't previously considered possible. The storytelling session improved her understanding of how to market her business and attract new clients.

As a result of the programme, Ulla changed her business proposition to develop a new technology-based service that will disrupt traditional architectural practices. The workshops led her to refine her business idea and her pitch, and the Angel Investment Simulator helped her to improve her pitch deck. Ulla applied for funding to develop this revised business model and was successful. This funding award will enable her to focus full time on building her company and to employ another person, which will grow her

business. This new proposition is likely to position UTA well for future investment, but Ulla plans to continue learning about investment before deciding whether an investor is the right source of funding for her business.

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Appendix B: Theory of Change (Supporting Information)

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Figure 19: CSE – Planned Inputs (Original Application, 2022).

BUDGET (SEPT 2022 – MAR 2025)				
BUDGET LINE	DESCRIPTION	TOTAL	%	
Programme Management				
Programme Director	1 x Project Director	£120,000.00	17%	
	FT for 24 months			
	£60K pa inc. on costs			
Programme Manager	1 x Manager	£76,000.00		
	FT for 24 months			
	£38K pa inc. on costs			
Temporary freelance project manager supporting start-up phase pre-staff recruitment	1 x freelance project manager @ £45K pa	£18,750.00		
Recruitment & Network Creation				
Marketing and communications	Design, branding, materials, placement and communications	£20,000.00		9%
Programme design and recruitment	Sector Leaders x 5 (inc. Screen South, Wired Sussex, Creative UK, plus 2 x to be recruited) start-up and core costs	£50,000.00		
Sector engagement and activation	In-person networking, events, platforming and outreach	£35,000.00		
Diagnostics	Fees to investors to take part in selection and pre-onboarding diagnostics.	£10,000.00		
Investment Readiness Programme				
Programme delivery	Investment readiness and sub-sector specialist content with division to be dictated by sub-sector split of businesses recruited and detailed programme design	£780,000.00	64%	
Evaluation of programme delivery	Evaluation from first 4 x cohorts to inform changes to programme design	£10,000.00		
Access and inclusion fund	Access requirements	£15,000.00		
Diversity Champion	10 days @ £550 pd to attend project boards, feed into programme design and 'check and challenge'	£5,500.00		
Legacy				
Local area knowledge and skills dissemination	Events, training and programme design with local business support providers etc.	£20,000.00	4%	
Embedding investor networks	Working with Angels @ Essex to delivery local investor legacy	£30,000.00		
Overheads				
Kent County Council legal fees	Contracts and partnership agreements	£5,000.00	2%	
Kent County Council finance and monitoring	Compliance with PCR 2015; Kent County Council financial regs; monitoring partner spend	£9,000.00		
Office overheads	Laptops and hot desking	£3,000.00		
Travel	Staff travel	£4,000.00		
Contingency				
Contingency		£63,750.00	5%	
TOTAL				
Total		£1,275,000.00	100%	

Figure 20: CSE - Planned Activities (Original Application, 2022).

Phase	Activation & Recruitment		Investment Readiness Programme				Legacy
Stage	ONE	TWO	THREE	FOUR	FIVE	SIX	SEVEN
Core Thrust	Outreach	Network Creation	Discover	Define	Develop	Deliver	Sustaining Delivery
Programme Objective	BUSINESS AWARENESS	BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT & SIGNUP	DIAGNOSTIC	GROWTH PLAN	INVESTMENT STRATEGY & PITCH DECK	INVESTOR CONNECTIONS	EMBEDDING DELIVERY
Number of Businesses	2000	1000	150	120	110	100	100
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online & face to face engagement Website & Knowledge Base Regular e-updates Locally delivered sector-led network events and industry panels Ongoing recruitment builds cohorts over programme 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer to Peer/network development/relationship building with Investors Expression of Interest Online Application Eligibility Screening Application scoring – investors, specialists etc. Diagnostic meeting with an investor and sector Specialist Acceptance / Rejection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer to Peer/network development/relationship building with Investors Dedicated Sector Mentor Personalised Support Plan Growth Readiness Programme – 1:1, peer-to-peer and workshop based Stress Test Growth Plan, Investment Goals, Revenue Model & Business Structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated Sector Mentor Personalised Support Plan Sub-sector workshop programme – opportunity links, investor links, technical inputs on legal and finance Workshops to address common challenges Specialist support to produce investment strategy and pitch deck 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to investor networks One-to-one Investor Engagement Founders pitches to investors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer to Peer/network development/relationship building with Investors Dedicated Sector Mentor Personalised Support Plan Website & Knowledge Base Access to investor networks Access to an embedded specialist sector network Regular e-newsletters
Delivery	Project Board						
	Interim PM	PM Team	PM Team	PM Team	PM Team	PM Team	
	Sector Leaders		Investment Readiness Providers	Investment Readiness Providers	Investment Readiness Providers	Investment Readiness Providers	
			Sector Based Investment Readiness Support	Sector Based Investment Readiness Support	Sector Based Investment Readiness Support	Sector Based Investment Readiness Support	Sector Based Investment Readiness Support

Figure 21: CSE - Planned Outputs and Outcomes (Original Application, 2022).

Outputs	Target
Invest in Creative Toolkit Registrations, by Registered Investors	50
EOI's Received to join the programme	150
SMEs Enrolled	120
Businesses completing the programme	100
Individual '121' sessions	480
Workshops for Business	48
Investors receiving support	30
Group sessions / workshops for investors	8
No of business support providers delivering legacy programmes	4
Outcomes	Target
Percentage of businesses increasing the number of hours of formal advice / mentoring accessed (12 month position)	80%
Percentage of businesses increasing the number of hours of access to finance advice / guidance received	50%
Percentage of businesses with a business plan which is kept up to date/regularly reviewed	60%
Percentage of businesses with fewer skills gaps within the senior management team	60%
Percentage of businesses increasing the number of non-execs on their boards	8%
Percentage of businesses that have a mentor	40%
Percentage of businesses that have access to a regular peer to peer network	80%
Percentage of businesses with an IP strategy	15%
Percentage of businesses valuing their IP	5%
Percentage of businesses increasing their interactions with investors	20%
Percentage of businesses increasing employment	40%
Percentage of businesses increasing turnover	50%
Percentage of businesses increasing their customer / client base	30%
Percentage of businesses increasing exporting activity	20%
Percentage of businesses increasing profitability	40%
Percentage of businesses increasing their access to equity finance	10%
Percentage of businesses increasing their access to 'other' finance	10%
Percentage of businesses increasing their propensity to seek equity finance (very or fairly likely)	40%
% of businesses that rate their knowledge of finance options as above average	70%
% of businesses who have sought equity investment in the past 3 years	20%

Figure 22: CSE - recommended EDI KPIs (Create South East, 2023).

Demographic	Regional Demographic (ONS) Essex, Kent, Sussex	Suggested KPI	Rationale
Ethnicity	8.83%	13%	Stretch target for the region, DCMS benchmark
Disability	17.93%	12%	Creative Industries benchmark
LGBTQ+	2.78%	6%	Stretch target for the region. 10.73% gay in Brighton & Hove
Gender	M 48.6% / F 51.4%	50% / 50%	Balanced representation
Low-socio economic	-	27%	SMC Creative Industries benchmark

Figure 23: DCMS (2023). Create Growth Programme. Annex A - Key Performance Indicators.

1. CURRENT KPIs

Innovate UK
 Total business apps received;
 Total apps over 70% and 60%;
 Total apps approved;
 Total amount of finance distributed;
 Total amount of finance leveraged (investor partnerships)

Innovate KTN -
 Number of activities planned;
 Number of activities delivered;
 Number of investors engaged with.

Regions
 Business engagement - Business applications received; Businesses enrolled; Businesses successfully completed programme.
 Delivery - Activities planned; activities delivered.
 Financial Forecast - Planned & actual spend.

2. NEW QUALITATIVE KPIs

Legacy KPI:
 Provide an annual RAG rating on how your are delivering legacy based on what was outlined in your bids to participate in the CGP. New programmes or strategies developed that build on the CGP objectives, learnings and/or networks.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion KPI:
 Provide an annual RAG rating on how your are delivering EDI based on the commitment outlined in your CGP bids *to opening up access and broadening the diversity of workforce in creative businesses in your areas.*
 Total number of diverse businesses, employing those with protected characteristics, engaged as part of the CGP.

