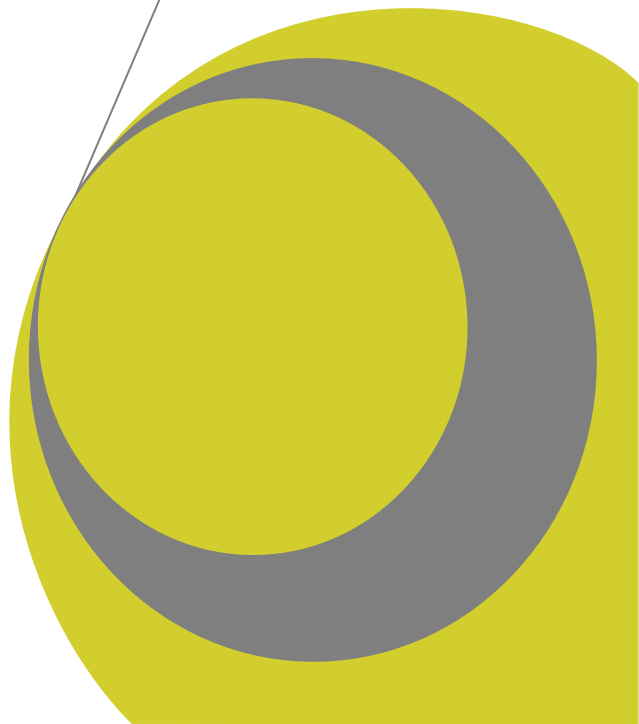
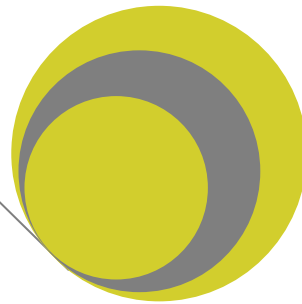
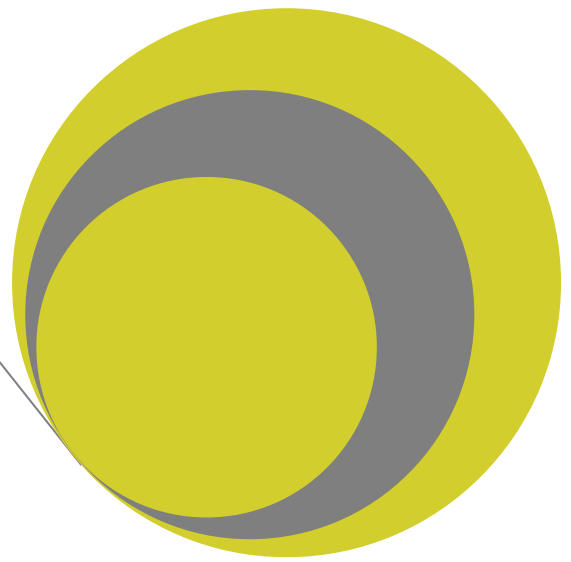


**LEADER PROGRAMME
EVALUATION – FINAL**



19th July 2019



LEADER PROGRAMME EVALUATION

CONTENTS

Page

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i
1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the Leader Programme	1
1.3 The Leader Programme 2016-2020.....	5
2. PROGRAMME ACTIVITY	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Programme Management & Delivery.....	8
2.3 Programme Marketing.....	10
2.4 Programme Activity	10
3. PARTICIPANTS' SATISFACTION WITH, & VIEWS OF, THE LEADER PROGRAMME	12
3.1 Introduction	12
3.2 Satisfaction with the Individual Leader Programme Elements	12
3.3 Views on the One-to-One Business Mentoring.....	13
3.4 Views on the Leadership Coaching	13
3.5 Complementarity of the Business Mentor and Leadership Coach	13
3.6 Views on the Peer Networking Strand	14
3.7 Value for Money – Participants' Views	14
3.8 Invest NI's Influence on Participation.....	14
3.9 Participants' Willingness to Recommend the Leader Programme	14
3.10 Duplication and Complementarity	14
3.11 Participants' Recommendations for Improvement.....	15
4. LEADER PROGRAMME's IMPACT	16
4.1 Introduction	16
4.2 Leader Programme's Effectiveness.....	16
4.3 Reasons for Participation & Extent of their Achievement	16
4.4 Activity Deadweight / Additionality	17
4.5 Achievement of Growth Action Plans' Aims & Objectives.....	17
4.6 Achievement of Outputs.....	18
4.7 Review of Reported Coaching Impacts from Programme Monitoring	18
4.8 Achievement of Business Outcomes – 2016/2020 Programme	18
4.9 Case Studies	22
5. STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK	26
5.1 Invest NI's Senior Management.....	26
5.2 Invest NI's Client Executives.....	28
5.3 Leader Programme Mentors	31
5.4 Leader Programme Coaches.....	32

6. PERFORMANCE AGAINST BUDGET.....	33
6.1 Introduction	33
6.2 Programme Budget per Economic Appraisal	33
6.3 Actual Expenditure	35
7. ACHIEVEMENT OF PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES	37
7.1 Introduction	37
7.2 Performance Against Targets and Objectives	37
8. BENCHMARK LEADERSHIP OFFERINGS	40
8.1 Introduction	40
8.2 Summary Comparison of Benchmark Offerings	40
9. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS	43
9.1 Introduction	43
9.2 Conclusions	43
9.3 Recommendations	47

APPENDICES

- I Objectives of the Evaluation**
- II Progress Towards Action Plan**
- III Participants' Satisfaction with, & Views of, the Leader Programme**
- IV Leader Programme's Impact**
- V Stakeholder Feedback**
- VI Cost Assumptions Featured in the EA**
- VII 2012/16 Leader Programme Impact Assessment Update**
- VIII Benchmark Leadership Offerings**
- IX Additionality & Displacement Analysis**
- X Leader Programme Invest NI Staff Costs**

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
CE	Client Executive
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPD	Construction & Procurement Delivery
DCU	Dublin City University
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning
DfE	Department for the Economy
EA	Economic Appraisal
EAM	Economic Appraisal Methodology
EDO	External Delivery Organisation
EI	Enterprise Ireland
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GB	Great Britain
GBER	General Block Exemption Rules
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GVA	Gross Value Added
HM	Her Majesty's
HMT's	Her Majesty's Treasury
ILM	Institute of Leadership and Management
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IoD	Institute of Directors
Invest NI	Invest Northern Ireland
L4G	Leadership 4 Growth
LP	Leader Programme
LTP	Leadership Team Programme
LWG	Leading within a Group
MLN	Management and Leadership Network
NI	Northern Ireland
NIGEAE	Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPE	Post Project Evaluation
PSM	Private sector Median
PSS	People Solutions Service
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound
SMEs	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
TLP	The Learning Partnership
TOR	Terms of Reference
The UK	The United Kingdom
VAT	Value Added Tax
VfM	Value for Money

Description of Statistics

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	more than 90%
Most	75%-90%
A majority	50%-74%
A significant minority	30%-49%
A minority	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	less than 10%

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI) has commissioned Cogent Management Consulting LLP ('Cogent' or the Evaluation Team) to undertake an independent evaluation of the Leader Programme ('the Programme'):

1. Covering the period June 2016 to January 2019 of the 2016-2020 Leader programme (4 cohorts); and
2. An update of the impact assessment of the 2012-2016 Programme evaluation (adding data from 2 cohorts).

Both elements of the evaluation have been undertaken in line with National and regional requirements and are compliant with Central Government guidance.

Background to the Leader Programme

Invest NI's Corporate Plan 2011-2015 had recognised a need to invest in skills, but particularly management and leadership development to drive productivity and growth within its business base. Subsequently, the Leader Programme was established in October 2011, as a Pilot Programme covering the period February 2012 to January 2013. The Programme was subsequently extended to include a further three-year funding period, covering the period February 2013 to February 2016.

The Programme was specifically aimed at developing the strategic leadership skills of CEOs/Managing Directors of businesses identified as having significant growth potential in Northern Ireland (NI). The overarching aim of the Leader Programme is to:

"Develop the business growth potential of Invest NI client companies through the development of leadership competencies".

Leader Programme participants receive support over a period of nine months. The programme outputs for participants include:

- Between 3 and 5-days' Business Mentoring with an experienced business mentor (up to a maximum of 5 days – prior Invest NI approval required);
- Business mentoring to include 1 pre and 1 post Business diagnostic;
- Business Mentor support in the development of a Growth Action Plan;
- Up to 3 days Leadership Coaching with an accredited Leadership Coach;
- Pre and post Leadership Coaching diagnostics/psychometrics; and
- Up to 6 Peer Networking Events.

In addition to the 3-5 days¹ one-to-one business mentoring with the customer, mentors also receive up to 3 days, where required, funded by Invest NI for programme related work. This can be broken down into 3 key areas:

- Programme Management –meetings with Invest NI Programme Team and facilitation of reports etc.
- Peer Network Facilitation – attendance at various networking sessions throughout the programme dependent on the needs of the group, e.g. the programme launch or presentation of growth plan;
- Stakeholder Engagement – Interactions with Coach and/or Client Executive.

The coach is also allocated time for stakeholder interaction (mentor & Client Executive) funded by Invest NI.

Invest NI is responsible for the identification and selection of business leaders who will participate in the programme. The programme is open to the overall leaders (the Managing Director, Chief Executive or Owner-

¹ It is noted that there can be some flexibility here to increase this time, but only at the business' request since it fund 51% of this cost.

Manager) of SMEs that are customers of Invest NI and whose Invest NI Client Executive has identified them as having growth potential and can demonstrate that they meet the following criteria:

- Their strategic imperative and willingness to make a change in the company;
- Their commitment and time availability to work with the Leadership Coaches, Mentors and participation in Networks;
- A clear customer need and demand for their products/service with turnover ideally greater than £1m;
- A recent record of profitable trading;
- An existing robust business model and can readily identify the potential for recurring revenue streams.

Prospective participants are encouraged to apply in situations such as:

- They spend too much time on operational activities when they should be focusing on setting the direction for their business;
- They need to build a more professional company structure in order to grow internationally;
- They are the founder or driving force of their firm;
- They need to redefine their leadership role in order to grow the company;
- Their company has grown rapidly but they have not had time to focus on setting up the processes to achieve growth; and/or
- They, at times, feel isolated in their role as the leader of the business.

Programme Activity

2012/16 Programme

Table 1 illustrates the number of companies and participants (some companies had joint MDs, so two participants) by cohort on the 2012-2016 Programme.

Table 1: Number of companies and participants supported 2012-2016						
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Cohort 5²	
Number of...	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 (A)	2014/15 (B)	2015/16	Total
Companies	12	17	15	8	16	68
Participants	12	18	17	9	20	76

2016/20 Programme

The number of businesses supported during the period under evaluation and the number of participants are included in the table below.

Table 2: Number of companies and participants supported 2016-2020 (at February 2019)						
Number of...	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Cohort 5	Totals
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 (A)	2018/19 (B)	2019/20³	Totals
Companies	15	11	15	8	Tbc	49
Participants	16	14	17	8	Tbc	55

Each of the participants was involved in all three aspects of the Programme: Business Mentoring, Leadership Coaching and Peer Networking. During the third year (2018/19) there was an additional smaller group of eight participant companies set up in September 2018. This was due to the demand for the programme. These companies had considered participating in April 2018, but business commitments had prevented them from participating at that time. Given their level of interest and the scope within the programme to support twenty per annum i.e. eighty in a four-year period 2016-2020, a one-off additional group was established to meet customer needs.

² Source: Terms of Reference

³ At February 2019, recruitment was underway, with an expectation that this cohort would commence in April 2019.

Satisfaction with the Leader Programme

As part of the Evaluation exercise, Cogent consulted with 43 of the 67 business leaders that have participated in the Leader Programme during the period under review. Of these respondents, almost all indicated that, on an overall basis, they were either satisfied or very satisfied with:

- The one to one business mentoring (95%, N=43);
- The leadership coaching that was provided by representatives of Wilson Sloan Consulting (86%, N=43).
- The series of Peer Networking sessions with best practice speakers (86%, N=42).

Looking specifically at the individual strands of the programme:

<p>Almost all (90%+) of the respondents agreed that the One-to-One Business Mentor or support provided by the Mentor:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were a good fit for their business (95%, N=43); • Had the business experience and knowledge that they required (95%, N=43); • Constructively challenged them in relation to how they were (at that time) leading their business (98%, N=42); • Scrutinised the performance of their business’ management and identified opportunities to improve its functioning (98%, N=42); • Helped them identify and address key constraints and barriers to growth (95%, N=42); • Helped them to identify new product and/or market opportunities (90%, N=42); • Made use of their own business networks to maximise opportunities and facilitate growth within the business (95%, N=41); • Helped them develop an outline and practical “growth action plan” to address key business issues (91%, N=41); • Served to strengthen and enhance their ability to effectively establish and implement their business’ strategy (93%, N=42).
<p>Almost all (86%+) of the respondents agreed that the Leader Programme Business Coach:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was a good fit for the business owner as an individual (88%, N=43); • Helped strengthen their leadership characteristics and attributes e.g. related to issues such as delegation and communication (88%, N=43); • Challenged them as to how best to use any knowledge gained through the mentoring support or networking, in a manner that might accelerate the growth of their business (90%, N=42); • Helped improve their communication and employee engagement skills and attributes (95%, N=43); and • Helped them to become more strategic, more self-aware and more confident (86%, N=43).
<p>In terms of the third strand of the programme, the majority (67%+) of participants agreed (i.e. they either agreed or strongly agreed) that the Peer Networking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helped them to form relationships with other businesses that participated in the Leader Programme (67%, N=42)⁴; • Allowed participants to gain useful knowledge from businesses from different sectoral backgrounds (88%, N=42); • Used high-calibre presenters and facilitators (95%, N=42); • Used inspirational keynote speakers (86%, N=42); and • Provided them with insight into international best practice on a variety of topics relating to the leadership of a business (95%, N=42).

⁴ It is noted that whilst the proportion of respondents reporting that they had formed relationships with other businesses that participated in the Programme is less than most other outcomes, the respondents did not cite any particular issues with the programme. The key factors influencing this finding were that the businesses found it more difficult to sustain a relationship with businesses from sectors different than their own, and secondly that they found it difficult to find the time to sustain a relationship with other participants after the programme had completed, due to their ongoing work priorities.

Programme Impact

On an overall basis, almost all of the respondents stated that the Leader Programme support had been either ‘effective’ or ‘very effective’ in addressing both their business’ needs (95%) or their personal development needs (93%).

Key reasons cited by respondents for participating in the Leader Programme included:

- To redefine their own leadership role within the business (67%, N=43). Indeed, over half (58%, N=43) of respondents cited this as the single most important factor that influenced their decision to participate;
- To explore how to best develop their leadership to facilitate enhanced business growth (58%, N=43);
- To develop a more professional business structure in order to grow outside Northern Ireland (23%, N=43); and
- To develop a business growth plan (21%, N=43).

Encouragingly, almost all (98%+) of the respondents stated that they had either ‘partially’ or ‘wholly’ achieved the objectives that had originally encouraged them to participate in the Leader Programme.

Respondents reported that they have achieved a wide variety of outputs as a result of participating in the Leader Programme. However, the main outputs reported include:

- The respondent considered that they are now better able to manage themselves (98%, N=43) and others (93%, N=43);
- The respondent has been inspired to think and act differently (84%, N=43);
- The respondent considered that they are now a better business leader (thinking more strategically) (77%, N=43) and have strengthened their individual characteristics and attributes as a leader (67%, N=43);
- The respondent has improved their approach to managing staff performance (67%, N=43); and
- The business has defined an executable future roadmap for business growth (63%, N=43).

Revenue/Sales and Gross GVA

Despite the fact that most respondents were continuing to implement their Growth Action Plans (and indeed some were continuing to develop theirs), almost half (44%, N=34) of businesses indicated that they had achieved growth in their sales as a result of the support received through the Leader Programme.

The Evaluation Team’s analysis indicates that the Leader Programme has contributed to supporting businesses to derive a minimum of c.£6.5m in sales/revenue, 64% (or c. £4.1m) of which was derived in external (46% or c. £2.9m) and/or export (18% or £1.1m) markets.

The application of the NI average sectoral level of GVA (i.e. 33%) suggests that these businesses have contributed £2.1m of gross GVA to the NI economy.

Employment Created

Almost four-fifths (79%, N=34) of the respondents indicated that they had achieved growth in their employee numbers as a result of the support received through the Leader Programme. The Evaluation Team’s analysis indicates that 118 gross FTE jobs have been created, 106 of which potentially had salaries in excess of the NI PSM salary.

Summary of Net Additional Monetary Impacts

The removal of the calculated levels of impact deadweight (34%) and local displacement (21%) to the gross monetary impacts potentially achieved by the total unique businesses suggests that the Leader Programme may have directly:

- Contributed a minimum of c. £1.1m in net additional GVA to the NI Economy; and
- Created 62 net additional FTE jobs.

Table 3: Net additional monetary impacts		
	GVA	Employment created (FTEs)
Gross	£2,128,421	118
Less deadweight (@34%)	£723,663	40
Sub-total	£1,404,758	78
Less displacement (@22%)	£294,999	16
Net additional	£1,109,759	62

Anticipated Business Outcomes

In addition to the actual outcomes achieved to date, most of the respondents were of the view that their participation in the Leader Programme will have a positive impact on both their turnover (85%, N=34) and employment (88%, N=34) over the next three years. Two-fifths (38%, N=34) of respondents also anticipate a reduction in their costs.

Most of the businesses were, however, unable to quantify the anticipated tangible increases that might be attributable to the Leader Programme. Nonetheless, 11 businesses suggested that their participation in the Leader Programme would lead to a cumulative increase in their turnover of c. £8m over the next 3 years, whilst 7 businesses suggested that their participation would lead to a cumulative increase of 28 FTEs over the next 3 years.

2016/2020 Programme - Return on Investment (at June 2019)

Taking the direct programme costs and Invest NI staff costs together provides an overall full economic programme cost of £1,011,992⁵ for Cohorts 1-4 of the Leader Programme 2016-2020 (as of circa April 2019).

As outlined above, the Evaluation Team estimates that the Leader Programme has contributed a minimum of £1,109,759⁶ in net additional GVA to the NI Economy; thereby provided a return on investment of £1.10 for every £1 invested by Invest NI and participant businesses or £1.26 for every £1 invested by Invest NI (whose investment was circa £878,788).

As discussed however, most participants are still in the process of either developing or implementing their Growth Action Plans, with most of the respondents indicating that their participation in the Leader Programme will likely have a positive impact on both their turnover (85%, N=34) and employment (88%, N=34) over the next three years. Indeed, 11 businesses suggested that their participation in the Leader Programme would lead to a cumulative increase in their turnover of c. £8m over the next 3 years. On this basis, the Evaluation Team considers that it very likely that the return on investment figures cited above will increase substantially over the next 3-5 years.

⁵ As identified in Section 6.3.

⁶ As identified in Section 4.8.6 and Appendix IV.

2012/2016 Programme - Return on Investment (at June 2019)

Taking the direct programme costs and Invest NI staff costs together provides an overall full economic programme cost of £1,489,402 for Cohorts 1-5 of the Leader Programme 2012-2016.

Combining the results of the 2012/16 (for Cohorts 1-3) and 2016/20 (for Cohorts 4 and 5 of the 2012/16 Programme) evaluation exercises indicates that the 2012/16 Leader Programme generated a minimum of:

- £8,330,310 of net additional sales; and
- £2,620,513 of net additional GVA.

The current Evaluation Team, therefore, estimates that the Leader Programme 2012/16 has thereby provided a return on investment of:

- £1.76 for every £1 invested by Invest NI and participant businesses; or
- £2.09 for every £1 invested by Invest NI (whose investment was circa £1,253,150).

However, it should be recognised that the current evaluation team considers that these figures should be considered ‘minimum’ impacts as at the time of the 2012/16 evaluation exercise few, if any, of the survey participants, would have had up to 3-5 years to implement their Business Action Plans. On that basis, it may be the case that further impacts may have been achieved as a result of their participation in the programme.

Conclusions

The Extent to which Leader Programme’s Objectives & Targets are being Met

Invest NI’s Corporate Plan 2011-2015 had recognised a need to invest in skills, but particularly management and leadership development to drive productivity and growth within its business base. As a result, the Leader Programme was developed. The Programme was specifically aimed at developing the strategic leadership skills of CEOs/Managing Directors of businesses identified as having significant growth potential in Northern Ireland (NI). The overarching aim of the Leader Programme is to:

“Develop the business growth potential of Invest NI client companies through the development of leadership competencies”.

Our consultations with businesses lead the Evaluation Team to conclude that the Leader Programme is achieving this aim. Participation in the Programme has led to a substantial and varied range of impacts upon both the businesses and the individuals that have participated. It is well recognised that measuring and attributing the impact of management and leadership development activities is fraught with methodological difficulties. However, we consider, based upon participants’ feedback that the Leader Programme has proven to be a powerful springboard for participant businesses to envision their business’ future growth, to develop action plans and subsequently to implement changes that are anticipated to drive productivity and growth.

As illustrated in section 7.2, none of the ‘outcome’ targets that have been established have been achieved; albeit it appears that the monetary impact targets will be met. However, the Evaluation Team considers that there is a risk that the granular nature of the outcome targets established means that the overall impact of the mentoring, coaching and peer networking might be lost. Our consultations with participants indicates that many valuable outcomes have been achieved and almost every participant reports the programme as having been considerably beneficial and indicates that almost all (95%, N=43) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the one to one business mentoring. Similarly, almost all were either satisfied or very satisfied with:

- The leadership coaching that was provided by representatives of Wilson Sloan Consulting (86%, N=43); and
- The series of Peer Networking sessions with best practice speakers (86%, N=42).

The Success of Leader Programme's Delivery Model & Management and Operating Structures

The feedback provided to the Evaluation Team from participants is overwhelmingly positive. Participants welcome the multidimensional yet integrated approach to strategic leadership development that is employed with endorsement of each of the three programme elements: business mentoring, action-oriented team coaching and peer networking. Albeit, participants would welcome clearer communication in relation to the programme's operation, so that they are fully aware of the flexibility that is available to them (in terms of choice of coach/mentor and the quantum of days support that they can avail of).

To this end, we consider that there is little in the programme's delivery model, and in its management and operating structures that merit any substantial change. Our conclusion encompasses, for the most part, inter alia the appropriateness of the application and appraisal processes, engagement with participating businesses and the delivery bodies, financial management and output monitoring arrangements. Albeit, we consider that monitoring relating to the financial management of the programme would benefit from substantial streamlining and simplification. A key goal for Invest NI should be to reduce the number of Excel workbooks utilised relating to the programme's financial management to one.

Progress against the Action Plan

As of January 2019, Invest NI has completed and implemented all actions that arose from the August 2015 Evaluation of the Leader Programme.

Internal or External Factors Impacting Upon Programme Performance

No internal or external factors of substance have been identified as having impacted upon the performance of the intervention either positively or negatively, within the period.

Leader Programme's Overall Economic & Wider Impacts

A business' leadership pervades all aspects of a business' operation and performance. Consequently, participation in the Leader Programme has resulted in the achievement of numerous forms of impact both at the level of the individual participants and for their businesses. Such impacts are both tangible (e.g. impacts upon sales and employment) and intangible (e.g. upon knowledge, ambition, confidence etc).

In addition, and what should be particularly encouraging given that most respondents were continuing to implement their Growth Action Plans (and indeed some were continuing to develop theirs), many respondents reported that they had already successfully achieved some form of more tangible business outcome because of the support received through the Leader Programme including both sales and employment growth.

Leader Programme's Economy, Efficiency & Effectiveness

In considering the economy, efficiency and effectiveness relating to the Leader Programme we note the following:

Table 4: Economy, Efficiency & Effectiveness Indicators	
Indicator	Evaluation Team's Commentary
Economy measures are concerned with showing that the appropriate inputs (i.e. the resources used in carrying out the project) have been obtained at least cost	<p>The Leader Programme coaching contractors were appointed following a formal procurement process managed by Construction & Procurement Delivery (CPD), providing assurance that the Leader Programme secured the necessary inputs at least cost.</p> <p>Whilst the daily rates of the Programme's mentors vary, businesses are free to select a mentor that best fits their needs. Furthermore, the businesses pay the majority (51%) of the one-to-one mentor costs. This provides comfort that this element of the programme will be obtained at the least cost.</p>

Table 4: Economy, Efficiency & Effectiveness Indicators

Indicator	Evaluation Team's Commentary
<p>Efficiency relates to measures that are concerned with achieving the maximum output from a given set of inputs</p>	<p>Key points to note in relation to Leader Programme's efficiency include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the end of Year 3 (March 2019), 55 businesses had participated against a target of 60 i.e. 92%; • However, the overall cost of the Programme (inclusive of non-recoverable VAT) is 77% of that projected (£1,011,992 v £1,307,418, whilst Invest NI's contribution is 84% of that projected (£878,788 v £1,045,038). <p>Therefore, it appears that Invest NI has leveraged greater value from the Programme (in terms of cost per business - £18,400 v £21,790) than was originally anticipated. To this end, we consider this to provide clear evidence the maximum output has been secured from a given set of inputs.</p>
<p>Effectiveness measures are concerned with showing the extent to which aims, objectives and targets of the project are being achieved</p>	<p>Participant feedback provides strong evidence to indicate that Leader Programme's aims and impact objectives are being achieved. That is, the majority of respondents to our consultation exercise indicated that participation in the Leader Programme has led to the development of the business growth potential of Invest NI client companies through the development of leadership competencies.</p>

Need and Demand for the Programme

Given its evident impact, the positive feedback from participants and stakeholders and a variety of research that points to the importance of leadership within business, it seems reasonable to conclude that there continues to be a need for the Leader Programme.

However, demand for the programme needs to be carefully considered, so that any future programme is both set at the most appropriate scale and pitched to the most appropriate businesses. Factors that are likely to influence demand for the programme include:

- Whether some businesses recognise that they would benefit from the support, and an accompanying necessity to promote the Programme to potential beneficiaries in a manner that will resonate strongly with them (e.g. through the use of past participants to act as advocates of the programme);
- The fact that Invest NI has a finite customer base;
- There is a time commitment required of participants, which must fit with their other schedule of activities;
- The recognition that there is a greater need for Invest NI to enhance the alignment of its suite of supports (including those related to leadership) with the stage of development of the business and other key segmentation variables e.g. growth potential, the ambition to scale etc. In relation to this, members of Invest NI's SMT have suggested that the Leader Programme Team should work closely with the various sectors teams to undertake this suggested segmentation exercise (with it noted that Invest NI is due to commence a client segmentation exercise in September 2019), and that possibly a slightly adjusted model is needed for different sectors;
- The potential that there may be businesses amongst Invest NI's 'Tracked Client' grouping that could benefit from the programme, those that have the ambition to grow, but perhaps not the capability at present;
- Whether for younger businesses, an executive education aspect may be required (similar to that incorporated with the Leadership Team Programme, but potentially catered for through enhancing linkages with a leadership focussed programme operated by Catalyst Inc or other suitable alternative).

Recommendations

As noted in our conclusions, we consider that there is little in the programme's delivery model, and in its management and operating structures that merit any substantial change. The Evaluation Team's key recommendations relating to the Leader Programme are detailed below:

1. Invest NI should continue to fund the Leader Programme in its current guise (or in one broadly similar to that currently delivered) for those businesses that can demonstrate a need for, or have the potential to significantly benefit from, such support;
2. Demand for the Programme should be carefully considered, and should be completed taking account of Invest NI's suggested new segmentation model. In particular, this activity could take two forms:
 - Consider and ensure that there is alignment between the Leader Programme and the stage of development of prospective participant businesses and other key segmentation variables e.g. growth potential, the ambition to scale etc. Demand for the Programme should be carefully considered, and should be completed taking account of Invest NI's suggested new segmentation model.
 - Consider whether a slightly adjusted model is needed for different sectors or types of businesses (e.g. HPSUs);
 - Consider whether there are potential participants amongst Invest NI's 'Tracked Client' businesses that could benefit from the programme.
3. Once this segmentation and demand analysis is completed, and given the potential impact on participant businesses and in time Invest NI's KPIs through improved Leadership and Management, there may be merit in Invest NI considering whether participation in Leadership and Management supports (such as the Leader Programme) could be mainstreamed amongst those businesses identified as being likely to benefit from participation. For example, should participation be a pre-condition before other support is provided?
4. Linked to the two previous recommendations, but perhaps a wider recommendation than for the Leader Programme in isolation, it was suggested by a member of Invest NI's SMT that Invest NI does not yet articulate well the need for leadership at different levels in a business, with there being some lack of clarity as to what the Leader Programme actually is and under what circumstances a business might require it. On this basis, the Leader Programme Team should consider how the Programme is promoted within Invest NI, so as to ensure all relevant stakeholders have a good understanding of the Programme and the types of businesses that could benefit from it;
5. Secure the cooperation of past participants (perhaps in the form of sector-based Leader Programme Champions) to act as advocates for the programme (e.g. so that they might share their experiences of the Programme and its impact with other businesses)⁷;
6. Enhance communication in relation to the programme's operation, so that participants are aware of the flexibility that is available to them (in terms of choice of coach/mentor and the quantum of days support that they can avail of). This could be achieved in a number of ways that should not prove overly cumbersome e.g. present a slide at the first group session, send an e-mail once the business has committed to participate etc.
7. Given the complexities that exist in relation to measuring the impact of leadership focussed interventions, careful consideration should be given to the most appropriate type of indicators that should be applied to the Leader Programme. In particular, the Evaluation Team recommends that Invest NI reconsider the appropriateness of the 'outcome' indicators that have been established for the programme, including the blanket target of 90% achievement.
8. In relation to programme monitoring, Invest NI should reduce to one the number of Excel workbooks utilised relating to the programme's financial management.

⁷ It is understood that the Leader Programme Team has brought past participants to Invest NI to present to Client Executives on the benefits they achieved. Video case studies have also been prepared so this recommended business-to-business activity represents a natural extension of current practice.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI) has commissioned Cogent Management Consulting LLP ('Cogent' or the Evaluation Team) to undertake an independent evaluation of the Leader Programme ('the Programme'):

1. Covering the period June 2016 to January 2019 of the 2016-2020 Leader programme (4 cohorts); and
2. An update of the impact assessment of the 2012-2016 Programme evaluation (adding data from 2 cohorts).

Both elements of the evaluation have been undertaken in line with National and regional requirements and are compliant with Central Government guidance including:

- The Green Book: Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government, HM Treasury;
- The Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation (NIGEAE), Department of Finance;
- The Magenta Book: Guidance for Evaluation; and
- Invest NI Economic Appraisal Methodology (EAM) guidance.

The key objectives of the evaluation are outlined in Appendix I.

1.2 Background to the Leader Programme

Invest NI's Corporate Plan 2011-2015 had recognised a need to invest in skills, but particularly management and leadership development to drive productivity and growth within its business base. By 2013, Invest NI had a suite of offerings which sought to promote and develop skills within businesses. These included:

- **Awareness Raising and Improved Accessibility** - Best Practice Events and collaboration with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) which aimed to raise awareness of the importance of leadership and management amongst NI business and development of a single knowledge and support access point;
- **The Skills Growth Programme** - Prioritised support for companies seeking to develop leadership and management capability;
- **Leadership and Management Support Framework** - This framework included **The Leader Programme** aimed at the owner-manager and included business mentoring, executive leadership coaching and business leader peer networks (shared learning and access to best practice).

The Leader Programme was first established in October 2011, as a Pilot Programme covering the period February 2012 to January 2013. The Programme was subsequently extended to include a further three-year funding period, covering the period February 2013 to February 2016.

The Programme was specifically aimed at developing the strategic leadership skills of CEOs/Managing Directors of businesses identified as having significant growth potential in Northern Ireland (NI). The overarching aim of the Leader Programme is to:

"Develop the business growth potential of Invest NI client companies through the development of leadership competencies".

The Programme seeks to achieve this aim through a blended support programme incorporating three elements, as follows:

<p>1. One to one business mentoring</p>	<p>Participant leaders are provided with one-to-one business mentoring support from experienced entrepreneurs and business owners. Each participant on the Programme selects their own mentor from Invest NI’s approved pool of Mentors. Participants are encouraged to select the mentor that represents the best fit for their business. Invest NI recommends that each participant meets with several prospective mentors to identify this, encouraging the participant to discuss how the mentor might add value to the business and the participant’s plans for growth based on the mentor’s experience. Each participant agrees on a daily rate with their selected mentor.</p> <p>The primary purpose of the mentoring is to provide the participant leader with a challenge function in relation to how they are strategically leading their business and to offer practical advice, guidance and support throughout the programme (rather than the implementation of this advice). The focus of mentoring is on strengthening and enhancing the capabilities and competence of the MD / Owner-Manager to effectively establish and implement the required strategy, within the context of their ambitions and aspirations for the company. This will include assisting the business to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and address key constraints and barriers to growth; • Identify new product and/or market opportunities; • Develop an outline and practical “growth action plan” to address key business issues; • Utilise business networks to maximise opportunities and facilitate growth; and • Review and monitor progress and modify the “action plan” as required. <p>The mentor completes a Business Diagnostic (provided by Invest NI) with the participant at the outset to establish a baseline position for each business, probing responses as appropriate, to ensure their validity, accuracy and realism. The write-up and distribution of the diagnostic is the responsibility of the mentor.</p> <p>To provide Invest NI with ongoing access to the nature and content of the mentoring, all mentors are required to submit a brief mentor meeting report summarising the content and the actions resulting from each mentor meeting. This is to enable illustration of short-term issues addressed as part of the mentoring for the duration of the programme whilst also capturing the medium and longer term objectives the company has identified as required to grow the business. Pro-Formas outlining the preferred structure and format for the Business Mentor Report are provided to the mentors by Invest NI. The Business Mentor Meeting Report is forwarded by the business mentor to a) the participant, b) Invest NI and c) the allocated leadership coach after each meeting.</p> <p>The outcome of the mentoring element of the Programme is the development of a Business Growth Action Plan by each participant leader. Participants present their Plan to their fellow business leaders at the end of the Programme. Pro-Formas outlining the preferred structure and format for Growth Action Plan are similarly provided to the mentors by Invest NI. Anticipated key aspects relevant to the development of the Growth Action Plan and its content include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Executive Summary - A short summary of key issues and outcomes of the ‘Growth Action Plan’ and the business mentor’s role during the programme. 2. Company Vision & Strategic Objectives - The Strategic Objectives should be realistic when compared with the outputs of the initial SWOT analysis in the business diagnostic. Where possible, the objectives should be expressed in SMART terms, or be detailed so that the measure of success and desired outcome are clear. The strategic objectives should be grouped into logical headings, e.g. Sales Projections, Products / Markets / Customers, Operations / Personnel, Finance / Investment, etc. 3. Leadership & Management - Building on the assessment of the current management team, an outline of the Leadership & Management development needs and priorities across the business e.g. the organisational structure required to support the growing business; strategies on delegation; recognising key employees, and retention strategies. 4. Products & Services (incl. Marketing/ Sales plans & Competitive Advantage) – An outline of the competitive advantage of the business and how the business will be promoted. 5. Business Challenges & Growth Opportunities - Key growth issues the business will face. Where will the business growth come from & when is it projected to start?
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	<p>6. Funding & Investment for Business Growth (incl. Financial Projections) – An illustration of the impact on cash flow, revenues and profitability of growth plans. Summarise the funding requirements of the business for the next 12, 24 and 36 months. Establish arrangements in place and identify sources of funding under consideration. Provide financial projections for the next 12, 24 and 36 months including as a minimum revenue, expenditure, profit and funding requirements.</p> <p>7. Additional Support Required to Implement Growth Action Plan - Comment on any further assistance the business or individual will require to maximise opportunities and facilitate growth outlined in this action plan.</p> <p>Objectives must be fully costed and with resources or responsibilities clearly allocated. Monitoring arrangements should be discussed and considered within the report, to ensure the participants have the capability to track and evaluate their progress with implementation beyond the duration of the mentor’s involvement and the Leader Programme.</p>
<p>2. One to one leadership /executive coaching</p>	<p>Participant leaders are provided with access to accredited and experienced leadership coaches. The coaching support focuses on strengthening the participant’s leadership characteristics and attributes within the context of their growth ambitions for their business. This will underpin the work with the business mentor in developing a Growth Action Plan. The coaching element of the Programme includes the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Pre-programme Leadership diagnostic with each participant business leader. This diagnostic provides both Invest NI and the participant business leader with a baseline upon which to improve and review to establish goals during the coaching intervention; • A Post-programme Leadership diagnostic with each participant business leader. This repeat diagnostic provides both Invest NI and the participant business leaders with a method of capturing the key behaviour changes during the coaching intervention; • 1-2-1 Leadership Coaching - Anticipated to represent an average of 3 days (approx. 22.5 hours approx.) <p>In the first instance, the company that is appointed to deliver the coaching element is provided with each participant business’ details and application form in order to commence the coach matching process. The next stage involves the individual participant having a one to one meeting with a senior individual within the organisation appointed to provide the coaching support and a representative from Invest NI’s Programme Team to discuss this further and identify the most suitable match.</p> <p>The leadership coach and business mentor input are anticipated to be complementary. Combined, they enable the leader to improve performance, realise potential, and remove interference. The Programme Director for the Leadership Coaching (a senior individual within the organisation appointed to provide the coaching support) acts as a touch point between the business mentors and leadership coaches in the first instance. However, as the programme progresses the business mentor and leadership coach allocated to each participant are encouraged to meet/ discuss each other’s interventions with the client. The Programme Director reports on the progress of these interactions to the Invest NI Team. There is also time for mentor and coach feedback with each other at the quarterly reviews held in Invest NI.</p> <p>Some of the anticipated benefits of the Leadership Coaching for the participant include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time to think; • Their development as a stronger, more effective and confident leader; and • Development of their capability to take forward the work with the mentor in developing and implementing the business growth plan. <p>The coaching strand of the programme addresses the requirement to provide tailored support on leadership and management issues such as delegation and communication.</p>

<p>3. Peer learning networks, including exposure to best practice speakers</p>	<p>This aspect is facilitated by the Invest NI team. Participant leaders in each cohort are provided with the opportunity to partake in a network/forum with peers. The sessions include best practice guest speakers to provide insight in relation to leadership related areas and peer learning where the participants will have the opportunity to discuss and share their practical experiences, with a view to learning from each other in a trusted environment.</p> <p>Guest Speakers have included high-profile advocates of leadership such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gavin Duffy – A communications expert who has spent the past 25 years delivering consultancy, communications and leadership development training to CEOs, Managing Directors and senior executive teams in some of the world’s leading companies. As one of Ireland’s top entrepreneurs, Gavin is publicly known for his work with entrepreneurs on all eight series of RTE’s Dragons’ Den. His early career in the media included presenting the first RTE television business programme, Marketplace; broadcasting on Morning Ireland on RTE Radio One and founding regional radio station LFMF. • Paul O’Dea - Paul has co-founded and helped build several international companies, particularly in the technology sector. Since making the switch from ‘entrepreneur to business advisor’ in 2000, he has worked with hundreds of CEOs in investor backed companies. His passion is to help ambitious CEOs to grow their early-stage companies to over €25m revenue internationally. Paul combines his experience of the uncertainty of early-stage companies and his insight into a CEOs real ambitions to provide practical execution-based advice. He has particular expertise in new customer acquisition, building international sales teams, product-market fit and CEO business coaching. He has been a founder or director in three successful exits to public companies, which generated 4-5 times returns to VC investors. Paul now serves on the Boards of several investor backed companies where he brings his practical experience to challenge assumptions with tough questions that help the management team grow their company more quickly. • Dr Johnny Cash - A Consultant Gastroenterologist & Hepatologist at the Regional Liver Unit, Royal Victoria Hospital. He graduated from Queens University, Belfast, in 1998 and following a period in Dublin, he completed higher specialist training in both gastroenterology and hepatology in the Northern Ireland Deanery. In addition to his clinical work, he has a major interest in the improvement of healthcare services and is the assistant medical director in Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (BHSCT) for continuous improvement and the clinical lead of the Ambulatory Care Centre. He won the Institute of healthcare management Medical Leader of the year award (NI) in 2013. <p>The Peer Networking element of the Programme is considered to be a vital component of the overall Programme structure, as it represents the opportunity where companies can develop networks which they can continue to learn from post the end of the Programme. The overall aim is to build sustainable peer networks that provide support beyond the mentoring and coaching interventions. As such, it is vital that the format and nature of the Peer Networking events are very much catered towards creating an open and honest environment where participants feel at ease at sharing their experiences and learning from each other.</p> <p>As part of the Programme, each cohort group has the opportunity to attend up to 6 Peer Networking Events during the nine-month Programme period, including two residential events. The sessions (apart from the residential) normally form a half-day morning session.</p> <p>Typical ‘ground rules’ applied to the peer network sessions that participants are expected to adhere to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidentiality • Collaborative - sharing • Friendly & relaxed • Informative • Open & honest • Enjoyable • Relevant • Opportunity • Committed to the group.
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Leader Programme participants receive support over a period of nine months. The programme outputs for participants include⁸:

- Between 3 and 5-days' Business Mentoring with an experienced business mentor (up to a maximum of 5 days – prior Invest NI approval required);
- Business mentoring to include 1 pre and 1 post Business diagnostic;
- Business Mentor support in the development of Growth Action Plan;
- Up to 3 days Leadership Coaching with an accredited Leadership Coach;
- Pre and post Leadership Coaching diagnostics/psychometrics; and
- Up to 6 Peer Networking Events.

In addition to the 3-5 days⁹ one-to-one business mentoring with the customer, mentors also receive up to 3 days, where required, funded by Invest NI for programme related work. This can be broken down into 3 key areas:

- Programme Management –meetings with Invest NI Programme Team and facilitation of reports etc.
- Peer Network Facilitation – attendance at various networking sessions throughout the programme dependent on the needs of the group, e.g. the programme launch or presentation of growth plan;
- Stakeholder Engagement – Interactions with Coach and/or Client Executive.

The coach is also allocated time for stakeholder interaction (mentor & Client Executive) funded by Invest NI.

1.3 The Leader Programme 2016-2020

1.3.1 Overview

The Economic Appraisal (EA) of the Leader Programme 2016-2020¹⁰ recognised that the concept of Leadership and Management is difficult to accurately define. In relation to this, it noted that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)¹¹ had stated:

“there is no single definition of what constitutes good management and leadership skills. What is appropriate for any individual business is often context dependent. However, there is a range of skills associated with good management and leadership practices including effective leadership in setting direction, strategy and planning, people management, budgeting and financial planning, risk management, fostering innovation and creativity and working with partners”.

As a result, the EA suggested that the Leader Programme's adaptive and flexible delivery model which is anticipated to be tailored to the needs of individual participants was its key strength. For this reason (and others), the Economic Appraisal's Preferred Option recommended a continuation of the programme structure and format that had been implemented during the period 2012-2016, with the exception that the Peer Networking element of the Programme would be altered to include more sophisticated guest speakers that would bring more value add to this element of the Programme. This suggested change was made in response to the evaluation findings that the guest speakers did not in all cases live up to the expectations of the participants, who, according to both the Programme team and mentors, were growing in sophistication year on year.

Nonetheless, whilst recognising that the Programme's firm focus was upon achieving business performance impacts, the Economic Appraisal noted that the lack of a strict leadership definition posed

⁸ A day is defined as 7.5 hours.

⁹ It is noted that there can be some flexibility here to increase this time, but only at the business' request since it funds 51% of this cost.

¹⁰ Leader Programme 2016 – 2020 Economic Appraisal (Invest NI, January 2016)

¹¹ 'Leadership and Management in the UK – The Key to Sustainable Growth (July 2012).

challenges for the measurability of Programme outcomes for individual participants, which could vary across participant leaders.

1.3.2 Programme Aim

The Economic Appraisal of the Leader Programme 2016-2020 identified the overarching Programme aim as being to:

“develop the business growth potential of Invest NI client companies through the development of leadership competencies”.

1.3.3 Programme Content & Structure

As discussed, the 2016-2020 Leader Programme continued with the blended approach adopted in the 2012-2016 programme. The EA noted that each of the three programme elements was designed to form complementary supports for the participant business leaders, with the ultimate goal of assisting the participant leaders to identify how to and plan for the future growth of their business.

1.3.4 Target Audience

Invest NI is responsible for the identification and selection of business leaders who will participate in the programme. The programme is open to the overall leaders (the Managing Director, Chief Executive or Owner-Manager) of SMEs that are customers of Invest NI and whose Invest NI Client Executive has identified them as having growth potential and can demonstrate that they meet the following criteria:

- Their strategic imperative and willingness to make a change in the company;
- Their commitment and time availability to work with the Leadership Coaches, Mentors and participation in Networks Commitment;
- A clear customer need and demand for their products/service with turnover ideally greater than £1m;
- A recent record of profitable trading;
- An existing robust business model and can readily identify the potential for recurring revenue streams.

Prospective participants are encouraged to apply in situations such as:

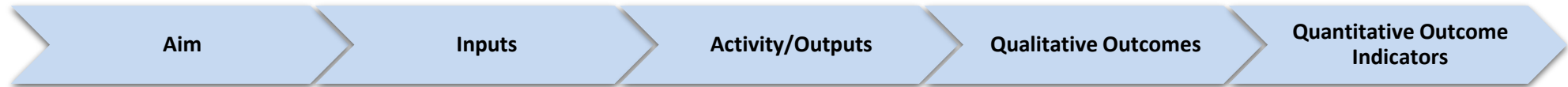
- They spend too much time on operational activities when they should be focusing on setting the direction for their business;
- They need to build a more professional company structure in order to grow internationally;
- They are the founder or driving force of their firm;
- They need to redefine their leadership role in order to grow the company;
- Their company has grown rapidly but they have not had time to focus on setting up the processes to achieve growth; and/or
- They, at times, feel isolated in their role as the leader of the business.

1.3.5 Programme Logic Model

Figure 1.1 overleaf sets out the suggested logic model for the Leader Programme which identifies the interlinkages between the Programme aims, the inputs, outputs/outcomes, and impacts. Whilst the EA had noted that there were implicit difficulties associated with measuring quantified monetary business impacts associated with leadership type interventions such as the Leader Programme, it utilised the results of the 2015 evaluation exercise to inform monetary benefit valuation and Return on Investment (ROI) target formulation for the Programme.

Figure 1.1 also sets out a summary of the minimum SMART activity, output, outcome and impact targets that were established for the 2016-2020 Leader Programme.

Figure 1.1: Leader Programme Targets and Logic Chain (per Economic Appraisal)



Programme Aim	Inputs	Activities/Outputs	Qualitative Outcomes	Quantitative Outcomes
To develop the growth potential of Invest NI companies through the development of leadership competencies	<p>Invest NI contribution towards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring • Coaching • Peer networking • Programme Team staff time: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DP - 100% of time - EO – 60% of time - Grade 7 – 20% of time <p>Private Company funding contribution to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring • Coaching 	<p>At a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring - 80 (20 x 4) individual participant interventions completed across the four years • Coaching - 80 (20 x 4) individual participant interventions completed across the four years • Peer Networking - 24 (6 x 4) peer networking interventions completed across the four years, with a 100% participant attendance level 	<p>Mentoring – Participants;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting an improved understanding of their company’s strategic objectives; • Reporting an improved understanding of their company’s key growth potential areas; • Reporting an improved understanding of their key market opportunity areas; • Reporting an improved understanding of the actions required across their business to deliver on their company’s strategic objectives; • Reporting an improvement in the way their company’s strategic objectives are being communicated to company staff; • Identifying changes in company structure including the development of key roles <p>Coaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participants developing their understanding of their leadership role and its impact on the business • participants strengthening their individual characteristics and attributes as a leader. • participants reporting an improvement in their approach to managing staff performance • participants reporting an improvement in their approach to managing their customers and responding to their needs <p>Peer Networking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participants reporting having benefited from the peer-networking events. 	<p>Monetised economic impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contribution to the net and gross GVA targets; • ROI targets.

2. PROGRAMME ACTIVITY

2.1 Introduction

This section provides a summary of Leader programme activity and management during the period 2016-2019.

2.2 Programme Management & Delivery

The different elements of the programme are delivered as follows:

Programme Activity	Delivery through	Managed by
Business Mentoring	Invest NI Expression of Interest list held within Skills & Strategy Division	Individual mentors selected by participant MD/CEOs. Invest NI provide support through a Letter of offer to participating companies
Leadership Coaching	CPD Procurement for appropriate coaching provider	Contract awarded to Wilson Sloan Consulting for the four-year period 2016 - 2020
Peer learning networks	Facilitated by Invest NI Programme team	Invest NI – organise and facilitate various workshops & guest speakers.

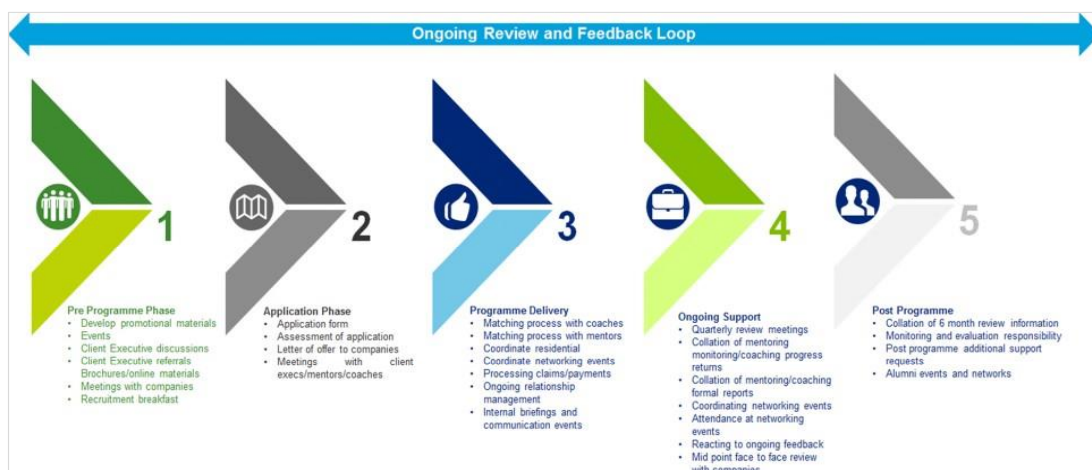
The Leader Programme sits within the Invest NI Business Solutions Group and specifically within the Skills and Strategy Division. The Programme has been managed by 1.8 FTE staff. Overall responsibility for the Programme sits with the Skills and Strategy Director. The daily operation of the Programme is managed by one Programme Manager (Deputy Principal) and one support role/administrators (EO2), with oversight from one Leadership and Enterprise Solutions Team Manager (Grade 7).

Table 2.1: Anticipated Core Programme Team Required to Deliver Programme

Staff Level	No Staff	% Time
Leadership and Enterprise Solutions Team Manager - Grade 7	1	20%
Programme Manager - DP	1	100%
Programme Support - EO2	1	60%

Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the delivery model and programme structure that is implemented by the Invest NI Leader Programme Team. The Programme Team have an active role to play across all areas, with activities ranging from liaison with participants, receipting and reviewing applications, matching companies to mentors/coaches, facilitating networking events, managing the claims process, managing the formal report/progress submissions and providing accessible ongoing support throughout the programme. The Coaching contract (secured through Construction & Procurement Delivery -CPD), quality assurance of the Business Mentors and ideas development for the Networking events are also included in this.

Figure 2.1: Programme Delivery Model



As set out above, the Programme can be divided into five activity areas. Some of the key Programme Team activities are:

<p>Pre-Programme Phase:</p>	<p>This phase includes the main awareness raising elements of the Programme including attendance at events/roadshows, working with the Client Executives, registering the expressions of interest and holding meetings to discuss the Programme with potential participants. The Programme Team are responsible for promoting the Programme to Client Executives, raising awareness of the support available and encouraging Client Executives to promote and offer the Programme to their eligible clients, as appropriate, in line with the client's needs, which will be identified going forward in the Account Development Plans (ADPs).</p>
<p>Ongoing Support (Relationships):</p>	<p>The Programme Team play an important role in fostering relationships. The Programme Team initially facilitate an introduction between the Client Executives and the mentor/coach. The Programme team subsequently have formal and informal checkpoints in place with the mentors/coaches throughout the process. These checkpoints serve as checks on the participant's progress and offer the opportunity to address any issues which may arise. The Client Executive, coach and mentor will share information and knowledge as the participant progresses through the Programme.</p>
<p>Post Programme Support:</p>	<p>The Programme Team has responsibility for monitoring and measuring the impact of the Programme. The Team collect information on the performance of the participant and their company before they enter onto the Programme (in the Programme application form), during the Programme (initial business diagnostic report) and following the Programme (currently a six-month post-project review following completion of the Programme). Information is also collected on an ongoing basis from the coach and the mentor e.g. formal progress review reports and quarterly review face to face review meetings are carried out between the team and the pool of mentors and coaches.</p>

Participants are responsible for:

- Committing time to participate in the Programme
- Providing the required monetary contribution to direct mentor and coach costs
- Completing:
 - Initial Programme application
 - Initial business diagnostic
 - Psychometric assessments
 - A Business Growth Action Plan (and presenting this to the group)
 - Post project reviews
- Participating in evaluations

External experts (mentors, coaches, guest speakers) are responsible for:

- Working with the Leader Programme Team to deliver the Programme
- Completing Programme administration requirements (some of which are noted above)
- Participating in all evaluation exercises.

2.3 Programme Marketing

It was anticipated that the Invest NI Programme Team would use Invest NI's Client Executives as the main conduit to access prospective companies. In relation to this, it was the Programme Team's responsibility to:

- Ensure all Client Executives working with eligible companies had a full appreciation of the Programme and the potential business benefits associated with participation in the Programme.
- Increase awareness of the actual level of time commitment required from business leaders in participating on the Programme, ensuring an awareness of the fact that much of the support is provided on the job.

Best Practice events and Masterclasses have also been utilised to make Invest NI customers aware of the programme.

To help Client Executives fully understand the Programme, the type of businesses that it might help and the types of outcomes that they might achieve, the Leader Programme Team has brought past participants to Invest NI to present to Client Executives on the benefits they achieved. Video case studies have also been prepared.

2.4 Programme Activity

The number of businesses supported during the period under evaluation and the number of participants (some companies had joint MDs, so two participants) are included in the table below.

Number of...	2016/17 Yr1	2017/18 Yr2	2018/19 (A) Yr3	2018/19 (B) Yr3	2019/20 Yr4 ¹²	Totals
Companies	15	11	15	8	Tbc	49
Participants	16	14	17	8	Tbc	55

Each of the participants was involved in all three aspects of the Programme: Business Mentoring, Leadership Coaching and Peer Networking. During the third year 2 (2018/19) there was an additional smaller group of eight participant companies set up in September 2018. This was due to the demand for the programme. These companies had considered participating in April 2018, but business commitments had prevented them from participating at that time. Given their level of interest and the scope within the programme to support twenty per annum i.e. eighty in a four-year period 2016-2020, a one-off additional group was established to meet customer needs.

¹² At February 2019, recruitment was underway, with an expectation that this cohort would commence in April 2019.

Key dates for participants in the four cohorts (to February 2019) are summarised below:

Table 2.3: Key Dates for Participants				
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 (A)	2018/19 (B)
Mentoring commence	June 2016	April 2017	April 2018	Sept 2018
Coaching commence				
Peer Networking Commences				
Business Diagnostics, Individual psychometrics & PDP	July 2016	April/May 2017	May 2018	Sept/Oct 2018
Mid-Project Review with Invest NI (Participant 1-1 feedback sessions)	Dec 2016	July/Aug 2017	Aug 2018	Jan 2019
Residential & Growth Plan Presentations	Jan 2017	December 2017	December 2018	May 2019 (Projected)
Final Growth Action plans due	March 2017	December 2017	December 2018	May 2019 (Projected)
Programme Evaluation	March/April 2017	Jan 2018	Jan 2019	June 2019 (Projected)

3. PARTICIPANTS' SATISFACTION WITH, & VIEWS OF, THE LEADER PROGRAMME

3.1 Introduction

As part of the Evaluation exercise, Cogent consulted with 43 of the 67 business leaders that have participated in the Leader Programme during the period under review, as follows:

Cohort	Unique Businesses – contact details	No. of surveys completed	% of surveys completed
2014/15 (B)	8	2	25%
2015/16	13	7	54%
2016/17	14	10	71%
2017/18	11	7	64%
2018/19 (A)	13	10	77%
2018/19 (B)	8	7	88%
Total	67	43	64%

Appendix III presents a detailed analysis of those consultations relating to participants' satisfaction with and views of the Leader Programme. As both the 2012-2016 (cohorts 4 and 5) and the 2016-2020 programme (cohorts 1-4) have been delivered by the same personnel in a broadly similar manner, satisfaction levels have been analysed together.

Key findings detailed within that appendix are summarised below.

3.2 Satisfaction with the Individual Leader Programme Elements

3.2.1 *The Core Programme Elements*

On an overall basis, almost all of the Leader Programme respondents indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with:

- The one to one business mentoring (95%, N=43);
- The leadership coaching that was provided by representatives of Wilson Sloan Consulting (86%, N=43).
- The series of Peer Networking sessions with best practice speakers (86%, N=42)¹³.

3.2.2 *The Diagnostic Elements*

The majority of the Leader Programme respondents indicated support for the aspects of the programme that were used to establish a baseline for their business, with over four-fifths (81%, N=43) of respondents in agreement that the business diagnostic had helped them to fully understand their business' current (at that time) position.

Most (70%, N=43) respondents were in agreement that the individual psychometric tests had helped them to better understand their skills and knowledge, abilities, personality traits, attitudes and potential.

¹³ Note: One participant could not recall the peer networking element of the Leader Programme.

3.3 Views on the One-to-One Business Mentoring

Looking specifically at the Mentoring strand of the programme, almost all (90%+) of the respondents agreed that the One-to-One Business Mentor or support provided by the Mentor:

- Were a good fit for their business (95%, N=43);
- Had the business experience and knowledge that they required (95%, N=43);
- Constructively challenged them in relation to how they were (at that time) leading their business (98%, N=42);
- Scrutinised the performance of their business' management and identified opportunities to improve its functioning (98%, N=42);
- Helped them identify and address key constraints and barriers to growth (95%, N=42);
- Helped them to identify new product and/or market opportunities (90%, N=42);
- Made use of their own business networks to maximise opportunities and facilitate growth within the business (95%, N=41);
- Helped them develop an outline and practical “growth action plan” to address key business issues (91%, N=41);
- Served to strengthen and enhance their ability to effectively establish and implement their business' strategy (93%, N=42).

3.4 Views on the Leadership Coaching

Almost all (86%+) of the respondents agreed that the Leader Programme Business Coach:

- Was a good fit for the business owner as an individual (88%, N=43);
- Helped strengthen their leadership characteristics and attributes e.g. related to issues such as delegation and communication (88%, N=43);
- Challenged them as to how best to use any knowledge gained through the mentoring support or networking, in a manner that might accelerate the growth of their business (90%, N=42¹⁴);
- Helped improve their communication and employee engagement skills and attributes (95%, N=43); and
- Helped them to become more strategic, more self-aware and more confident (86%, N=43).

3.5 Complementarity of the Business Mentor and Leadership Coach

The Leadership Coach and Business Mentor input are anticipated to be complementary. Combined, they are anticipated to enable the participant to improve performance, realise potential, and remove interference within their business. Encouragingly, almost all (95%, N=43) respondents agreed (either ‘Yes – Fully’ (60%) or ‘Yes – To a Large Extent’ (35%)) that the two elements of support worked together in a seamless manner to achieve that goal.

¹⁴ One respondent was unable to comment on this as they are still at an early stage of the coaching element of the programme.

3.6 Views on the Peer Networking Strand

In terms of the third strand of the programme, the majority (67%+) of participants agreed (i.e. they either agreed or strongly agreed) that the Peer Networking:

- Helped them to form relationships with other businesses that participated in the Leader Programme (67%, N=42)¹⁵;
- Allowed participants to gain useful knowledge from businesses from different sectoral backgrounds (88%, N=42);
- Used high-calibre presenters and facilitators (95%, N=42);
- Used inspirational keynote speakers (86%, N=42); and
- Provided them with insight into international best practice on a variety of topics relating to the leadership of a business (95%, N=42).

3.7 Value for Money – Participants’ Views

As part of the Programme, each business contributed to the cost of the programme. Positively, almost all (98%, N=43) of the respondents agreed (either ‘strongly agreed’ (40%) or ‘agreed’ (58%)) that the contribution that they were required to make had represented value for money.

3.8 Invest NI’s Influence on Participation

All (100%, N=43) of the respondents suggested that their relationship with Invest NI and Invest NI’s endorsement of the programme had been influential (either ‘extremely influential’ or ‘moderately influential’ or ‘slightly influential’ – 9%, 70% and 21% respectively) in terms of their decision to participate in the programme.

3.9 Participants’ Willingness to Recommend the Leader Programme

Perhaps unsurprisingly, all (100%, N=43) of the respondents stated that they would recommend the Leader Programme to other business leaders.

3.10 Duplication and Complementarity

Very few (5%, N=43) of the respondents considered that, in the absence of the Leader Programme, they would have been able to get the same or similar support elsewhere.

Respondents suggested that they would have been able to get the same or similar support from the following sources:

- Management and Leadership Network (MLN);
- Leaders of creative industries including Clearleft Ltd¹⁶ mentors and Leading Design Conferences¹⁷ which can provide specific support related to their specific industry.

¹⁵ It is noted that whilst the proportion of respondents reporting that they had formed relationships with other businesses that participated in the Programme is less than most other outcomes, the respondents did not cite any particular issues with the programme. The key factors influencing this finding were that the businesses found it more difficult to sustain a relationship with businesses from sectors different than their own, and secondly that they found it difficult to find the time to sustain a relationship with other participants after the programme had completed, due to their ongoing work priorities.

¹⁶ A strategic design consultancy based in Brighton

¹⁷ An annual conference for people leading design teams, organised by Clearleft.

3.11 Participants' Recommendations for Improvement

Notwithstanding the high levels of satisfaction with the individual elements of the Leader Programme, almost half (47%, N=43) of respondents suggested that there are aspects of the programme's content, structure or delivery methods could be improved. The respondents' recommendations included the following¹⁸:

Programme Aspect	Participants' Recommendations
Overall	Improve the promotion and awareness of the programme.
<p>The one-to-one mentoring support.</p> <p>Encouragingly, given the high levels of satisfaction expressed with the one-to-one business mentoring, only a minority (16%, N=43) of respondents suggested that elements of the mentoring support could be improved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer follow up mentoring support 6 months after completion of the Leader programme (N=3); • Enhance the pool of mentors available for business selection, and include more information on the mentors (including their fields of expertise) (N=2); • Ensure that the mentors are adequately supporting the business to complete their growth plan (N=1); • Extend the time that businesses can have with their mentor during the programme (N=1).
<p>Leadership Coaching</p> <p>A significant minority (35%, N=43) of respondents suggested that aspects of the Leadership Coaching could be improved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement more structured coaching sessions, as businesses felt the sessions were unstructured and too open-ended (N=8); • Reduce the frequency of the coaching sessions towards the end of the Programme, as businesses suggested the Coach covered less ground with each session or information was repetitive (N=3); • Allow businesses to choose their own coach, similarly to the selection of a mentor (N=3); and • Encourage coaches to hold sessions away from the business premises to ensure the participant can focus more on their individual development and not be thinking about the business (N=1).
<p>Peer Networking events</p> <p>A significant minority (36%, N=42) of respondents suggested that aspects of the Peer Networking events could be improved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the mix of industries within the peer groups so that businesses are matched with those who are in the same or similar industries (N=4); • Improve the quality (N=3) and quantity (N=1) of Best Practice and Keynote Speakers involved in the events; and • Encourage networking outside of the programme and perhaps helping to facilitate businesses staying in touch after their programme had ended (N=3).

¹⁸ NB it is noted that Invest NI has reviewed the various suggestions to ascertain whether any have sufficient merit to be carried forward to the Evaluation's main recommendations. However, it was not considered that this should be the case for the following reasons: the number of respondents making the recommendations was low; the mechanics of offering additional mentoring support 6 months after the programme is formally completed would be difficult through the LoO process. In addition, businesses can avail of mentoring support through the Invest NI's SME Mentoring Scheme if required. Furthermore, the mentor list is just a sample of prospective mentors. Clients have the flexibility to select their own mentor from their own pool of contacts.

4. LEADER PROGRAMME'S IMPACT

4.1 Introduction

This section summarises respondents' feedback relating to the impact that the Leader Programme has had on them personally or on their business. Appendix IV provides a detailed analysis.

4.2 Leader Programme's Effectiveness

On an overall basis, almost all of the respondents stated that the Leader Programme support had been either 'effective' or 'very effective' in addressing both their business' needs (95%) or their personal development needs (93%).

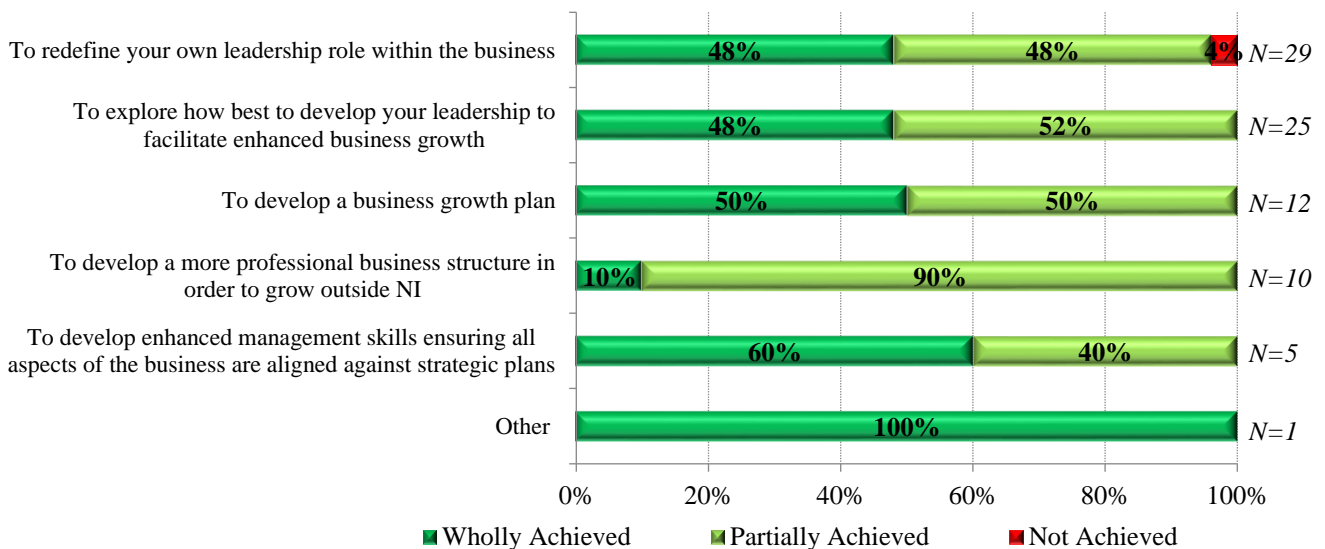
4.3 Reasons for Participation & Extent of their Achievement

Key reasons cited by respondents for participating in the Leader Programme included:

- To redefine their own leadership role within the business (67%, N=43). Indeed, over half (58%, N=43) of respondents cited this as the single most important factor that influenced their decision to participate;
- To explore how to best develop their leadership to facilitate enhanced business growth (58%, N=43);
- To develop a more professional business structure in order to grow outside Northern Ireland (23%, N=43); and
- To develop a business growth plan (21%, N=43).

Encouragingly, as reflected in Figure 4.1, almost all (98%+) of the respondents stated that they had either 'partially' or 'wholly' achieved the objectives that had originally encouraged them to participate in the Leader Programme.

Figure 4.1: Achievement of factors that influenced the business' decision to participate in the Leader Programme



4.4 Activity Deadweight / Additionality

Appendix X provides a detailed overview of the Evaluation Team’s deadweight/additionality calculations. However, in summary, we have calculated levels of activity deadweight using a ‘participant self-assessment’ methodology. The methodology utilises a series of questions¹⁹ within the participant survey and assigns weightings (agreed in conjunction with DfE’s Economist Team) to the individual responses.

The analysis of participants’ responses indicates that there is a high level of additionality (75%) associated with the Leader Programme relating to businesses’ decision to develop their leadership skills or where relevant, to undertake these activities to a similar scale and/or within a similar timescale.

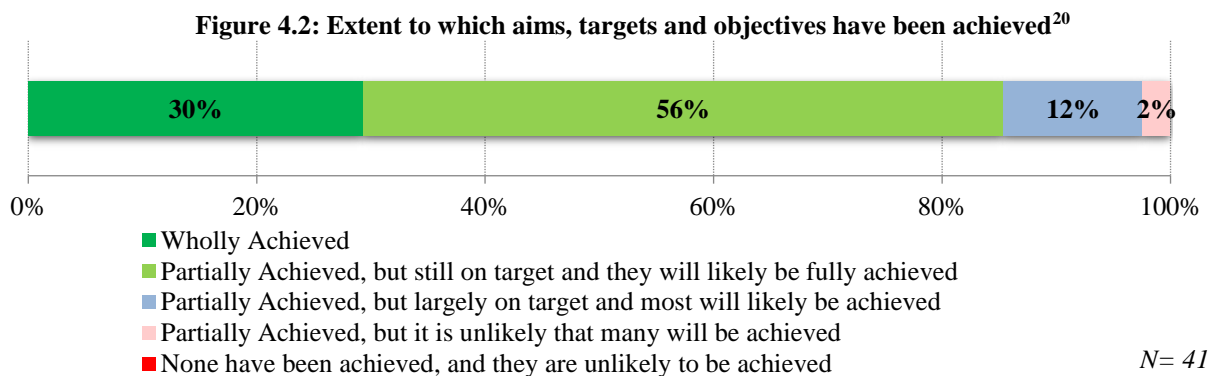
It is the Evaluation Team’s view that the level of activity additionality (75%) associated with the LP’s leadership development activities should be viewed positively. We consider that this is a high level of additionality, in the context that there are many forms that leadership development can take and many options for businesses to potentially adopt. Despite this, few respondents considered that they would have been able to develop their leadership capabilities in a similar manner in the absence of the Leader Programme.

4.5 Achievement of Growth Action Plans’ Aims & Objectives

A key focus of the majority (67%, N=43) of respondents’ Growth Action Plan was the ‘People and Structure’ of their business, with over half suggesting that a key focus of their plan was the strategic direction of their business (58%, N=43) or ‘Sales and Marketing’ (56%, N=43).

Focus	% of businesses
People & Structure	67%
Strategy	58%
Sales & Marketing	56%
Finance	19%
Ambition	9%
N=	43

Perhaps unsurprisingly (given that many respondents reported that the Leader Programme Growth Action Plans had a 3 to 5-year focus) only 30% (N=41) of respondents stated that they had ‘wholly achieved’ the aims, objectives and targets that were established within their Plan.



¹⁹ In-line with DfE guidance, these questions focused on identifying the likelihood that the individual would have undertaken the research activities, what scale of activities would have been undertaken in the absence of support (if relevant) and how much later would the activities would have been undertaken (if relevant).

²⁰ A small number of 2018-19 participants (N=2) are still in the process of developing their plan.

However, and encouragingly, over half (56%, N=41) of respondents instead suggested that they had partially achieved the aims, targets and objectives that were established, but were still on target and they were likely to be fully achieved.

4.6 Achievement of Outputs

Per Appendix IV, respondents reported that they have achieved a wide variety of outputs as a result of participating in the Leader Programme. However, the main outputs reported include:

- The respondent considered that they are now better able to manage themselves (98%, N=43) and others (93%, N=43);
- The respondent has been inspired to think and act differently (84%, N=43);
- The respondent considered that they are now a better business leader (thinking more strategically) (77%, N=43) and have strengthened their individual characteristics and attributes as a leader (67%, N=43);
- The respondent has improved their approach to managing staff performance (67%, N=43); and
- The business has defined an executable future roadmap for business growth (63%, N=43).

4.7 Review of Reported Coaching Impacts from Programme Monitoring

The Evaluation Team has also reviewed monitoring materials provided by Invest NI, where programme participants have reported the types of impacts that they have experienced as a result of the coaching support. Key impacts reported include the following:

- Enhanced understanding of their leadership role and style, including their strengths and weaknesses;
- Increased awareness of the impact of their own interpersonal style on those around them;
- Recognition that they needed to develop the leadership attributes of their senior team as well as themselves;
- Increased self-confidence and belief in their own ability;
- Increased ambition – personal and business;
- Improved communication skills;
- Better work/life balance, including the introduction of time management tools;
- Enhanced structures/approaches for managing staff performance, including the introduction of personal development meetings and/or staff appraisal processes;
- Improved their approach to managing their customers and responding to their needs;
- Greater recognition of their own accountability;
- A movement away from operational activities towards more strategic roles – better able to delegate;
- Greater clarity surrounding future plans for the business and their own personal life, alongside improved planning practices across the business;
- Use of ‘Urgent/Important matrix’ to help clarify and prioritise actions; and
- Better able to manage work-related stress.

4.8 Achievement of Business Outcomes – 2016/2020 Programme

This section provides a summary of the business outcomes (sales, employment, profit, GVA) experienced by businesses participating in the 2016/2020 Leader Programme, with key headline findings including:

- The Leader Programme has contributed to supporting businesses to derive a minimum of c.£6.5m in gross sales/revenue;
- The application of the NI average sectoral level of GVA (i.e. 33%) and level of deadweight (34%) and displacement (22%) suggests that these businesses have contributed £1.1m of net additional GVA to the NI economy.
- 62 net additional FTE jobs have been created.

- The Programme has provided a return on investment of £1.10 for every £1 invested by Invest NI and participant businesses or £1.26 for every £1 invested by Invest NI (whose investment was circa £878,788).

Appendix VII provides the update of the impact assessment of the 2012/2016 programme evaluation.

4.8.1 Revenue/Sales and Gross GVA

Despite the fact that most respondents were continuing to implement their Growth Action Plans (and indeed some were continuing to develop theirs), almost half (44%, N=34) of businesses indicated that they had achieved growth in their sales as a result of the support received through the Leader Programme.

Encouragingly, 14 of the 15 businesses that indicated that they achieved sales increases as a result of their participation in the Leader Programme considered that they were in a position to quantify those sales. Across the 14 businesses, they suggested that their turnover had increased by a cumulative c. £5.8m. However, it should be noted that one of the business (representing an outlier) reported a sales increase of £4.5m, of which £2m was in the NI market and £2.5m was in the GB market.

The Evaluation Team's grossing up analysis indicates that the Leader Programme has contributed to supporting businesses to derive a minimum of c.£6.5m in sales/revenue, 64% (or c. £4.1m) of which was derived in external (46% or c. £2.9m) and/or export (18% or £1.1m) markets.

The application of the NI average sectoral level of GVA (i.e. 33%) suggests that these businesses have contributed £2.1m of gross GVA to the NI economy.

4.8.2 Employment Created

Almost four-fifths (79%, N=34) of the respondents indicated that they had achieved growth in their employee numbers as a result of the support received through the Leader Programme.

All of these businesses were willing and able to quantify the impact of the support on their employment levels and suggested that they had increased employment by 87 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs), 90% (or 78 FTEs) of whom have salaries in excess of the NI PSM (i.e. in excess of c£21,000).

Grossing this up to the unique number of participant businesses (N=46) suggests that a further 118 gross FTE jobs have been created, 106 of which potentially had salaries in excess of the NI PSM salary.

4.8.3 Impact on Operating Profit

A minority (15%, N=34) of respondents suggested that participation in the Leader Programme had an impact on their operating profit. Four of those businesses were able to quantify the impact. On average, businesses increased their level of operating profit by 2.5%, from 14.8% to 17.3%.

4.8.4 Impact Deadweight / Additionality

It is important to note that the net impact (i.e. its additionality) of the Leader Programme on businesses' sales, costs, employment or other outturns can only be measured after making allowances for what would have happened in the absence of the intervention. That is, the impact must allow for deadweight. 'Deadweight' refers to outcomes that would have occurred in the absence of the Leader Programme. The analysis of individual survey responses and application of the same 'participant self-assessment' methodology used to assess 'activity additionality', results in the following levels of 'impact deadweight and additionality'²¹:

²¹ See Appendix X for further details.

Table 4.2: Impact Additionality/deadweight (N=29)	
Additionality ²²	Deadweight
66%	34%

The Evaluation Team’s benchmarking of the Leader Programme’s level of ‘impact additionality’ with interventions that seek to develop skills indicates that it is performing relatively better than other support offerings that focus on developing skills.

Table 4.3: Benchmarking of impact additionality/deadweight ²³			
Location	Nature of interventions	Mean Additionality	Mean Deadweight
UK Regional	All interventions	57.0%	43.0%
	Programme interventions only	56.2%	43.8%
	Workforce/skills development	61.4%	38.6%
Invest NI	Leadership Team Programme	48%	52%
	Leader Programme	66%	34%

We further note that none of the participants reported full deadweight. Instead, a number suggested that it might have taken them longer to achieve the same level of business impacts in the absence of the Leader Programme or that they would have achieved some of the reported impacts but not all.

4.8.5 Displacement

The Evaluation Team has also considered the potential displacement that might be created by the impact of the Leader Programme support. To assess this, we have again utilised a series of questions²⁴; the answers to which are assigned a ‘displacement factor’ in both the NI market and the broader UK market.

On an overall level, the Evaluation Team’s analysis suggests that the displacement factor at the NI level is 21%; whilst at the GB level, it is 15%.

4.8.6 Summary of Net Additional Monetary Impacts

The removal of the calculated levels of impact deadweight (34%) and local displacement (21%) to the gross monetary impacts potentially achieved by the total unique businesses suggests that the Leader Programme may have directly:

- Contributed a minimum of c. £1.1m in net additional GVA to the NI Economy; and
- Created 62 net additional FTE jobs.

Table 4.4: Net additional monetary impacts		
	GVA	Employment created (FTEs)
Gross	£2,128,421	118
Less deadweight (@34%)	£723,663	40
Sub-total	£1,404,758	78
Less displacement (@22%)	£294,999	16
Net additional	£1,109,759	62

²² This compares with 48% ‘impact additionality’ for Invest NI’s Leadership Team Programme

²³ Source: Research to Improve the Assessment of Additionality (BIS, 2009).

²⁴ Developed in conjunction with DfE’s Economists.

4.8.7 Anticipated Business Outcomes

In addition to the actual outcomes achieved to date, most of the respondents were of the view that their participation in the Leader Programme will have a positive impact on both their turnover (85%, N=34) and employment (88%, N=34) over the next three years. Two-fifths (38%, N=34) of respondents also anticipate a reduction in their costs.

Most of the businesses were, however, unable to quantify the anticipated tangible increases that might be attributable to the Leader Programme. Nonetheless, 11 businesses suggested that their participation in the Leader Programme would lead to a cumulative increase in their turnover of c. £8m over the next 3 years, whilst 7 businesses suggested that their participation would lead to a cumulative increase of 28 FTEs over the next 3 years.

One business was able to quantify (estimate) that their cost savings as a result of the programme would amount to £30,000 over the next 3 years.

4.8.8 Return on Investment (at June 2019)

As outlined in Section 6.3, taking the direct programme costs and Invest NI staff costs together provides an overall full economic programme cost of £1,011,992 for Cohorts 1-4 of the Leader Programme 2016-2020 (as of circa April 2019).

As has been calculated at Section 4.8.6, the Evaluation Team estimates that the Leader Programme has contributed a minimum of £1,109,759 in net additional GVA to the NI Economy; thereby provided a return on investment of £1.10 for every £1 invested by Invest NI and participant businesses or £1.26 for every £1 invested by Invest NI (whose investment was circa £878,788).

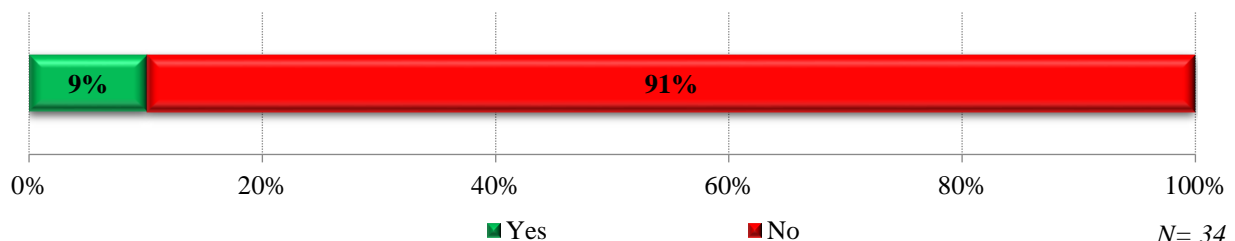
As discussed however, most participants are still in the process of either developing or implementing their Growth Action Plans, with most of the respondents indicating that their participation in the Leader Programme will likely have a positive impact on both their turnover (85%, N=34) and employment (88%, N=34) over the next three years. Indeed, 11 businesses suggested that their participation in the Leader Programme would lead to a cumulative increase in their turnover of c. £8m over the next 3 years. On this basis, the Evaluation Team considers that it very likely that the return on investment figures cited above will increase substantially over the next 3-5 years.

4.8.9 Other Benefits Derived

A small number (9%, N=34) of businesses stated that they had achieved other benefits or unexpected impacts/outcomes as a result of the support received through the Leader Programme. These included:

- Website development (N=2); and
- Achieving ISO 9001 accreditation²⁵ (N=1).

Figure 4.3: Has LP support led to any other benefits or unexpected impacts?



²⁵ ISO 9001 is a quality of management systems standards designed to help organisations ensure that they meet the needs of customers and other stakeholders while meeting statutory and regulatory requirements related to a product or a service.

4.8.10 No Tangible Benefits Derived

Only one respondent (3%, N=34) suggested that the business has not achieved any tangible business benefits, nor do they anticipate doing so over the next three years, as a result of their participation in the Leader Programme.

4.8.11 Other Support Received

A minority (15%, N=34) of businesses indicated that they had secured further support from Invest NI or other sources, as a result of their participation in the Leader Programme.

The additional support secured by Leader Programme participant businesses included:

- Leadership Team Programme (N=2);
- Invest NI R&D grant support (N=1);
- Brexit Grant support Invest NI (N=1);
- ICT grant from Invest NI for website development (N=1); and
- InterTradeIreland's Brexit: Start to Plan Voucher Scheme (N=1).

4.9 Case Studies

4.9.1 Company A

Company A is an ambitious Mechanical, Electrical and Facilities Management contractor, providing a full range of services to public and private sector clients for new-build and refurbishment projects throughout the UK and Ireland. The company works across a range of industry sectors including Workplace, Education, Healthcare, Heritage, Residential and Hospitality & Leisure.

Having experienced a period of considerable, but rapid and profitable growth in the preceding three years, Company A found itself competing with larger and longer established businesses, with associated challenges therein. In addition, as a result of its growth, the Company found that skills issues were becoming more apparent, with its customers now requiring services in areas where it had less experience, so as to provide them with a more complete offering.

Sustained growth was also placing new pressures on the senior management team, with greater focus being placed on the day-to-day operations of the business, rather than its strategic direction.

The business' owner also had uncertainties as to succession issues and the appropriate approach by which to plan to introduce the company's directors into its ownership structure.

Working in parallel with the Company's Client Executive, it was identified that the structured support available through the Leader Programme might provide a platform upon which to address the issues that the Company was experiencing.

The Company identified a prospective mentor from the pool available who had substantial experience in the construction sector and soon found that the mentor was able to provide objective insight into the organisation and operation of the business, and also a robust challenge function. Company A notes that *"We worked well with the mentor. He helped us formulate more informed options for taking the business forward, and also identified areas of the business that were not profitable"*.

The Company also found the Coach's input to be important noting that *"the Coach was a good fit for what I needed. Her advice and guidance has strengthened my leadership ability and encouraged me to communicate better with the company's staff. I'm now more open with my employees and have communicated our strategy with them. I think that this has helped the business overall, as everyone now understands where we want to get to"*.

In terms of the impact of the Leader Programme on Company A’s Chief Executive and on the business’ performance, Company A notes that *“I think that I am now a better business leader. I’m less involved in many of the operational issues that had taken up a lot of my time previously and now have more time to focus on the business’ strategy. I involved my senior team in the development of the Business Growth Action Plan, which has led to a shared understanding and ownership of the company’s strategic objectives. Focusing on the most appropriate structure/service offerings and people has facilitated a 50% increase in our sales and enabled us to bid for much higher value contracts. Our turnover has increased by c£9m since we participated in the Leader Programme. However, I think that our growth would have been only half of that had we not participated in the Programme, and taken the various courses of actions that we identified in our Business Growth Action Plan. We owe a lot to the advice and guidance that we received from the mentor. I would not hesitate in recommending the programme to other business leaders.”*

4.9.2 Company B

Based outside Belfast, Company B provides an interior fit-out, shopfitting and specialist joinery service within a range of industry sectors throughout the UK and Ireland; from blue-chip big names to smaller independent companies.

Despite strong sales in both the domestic and export markets, Company B had not previously developed a business or strategy plan with the Company’s performance being driven by organic growth. However, concerns relating to access to skills and uncertainties relating to Brexit and its impact on market confidence and exchange rates led the Company to identify that it needed a business plan to outline its plan for sustainable growth. The Company notes *“managing growth had been a very important reason for us joining the Leader Programme, although we had also hit a plateau as a business and were really struggling with how to move forward”*.

In addition, the Company’s owners also wished to consider their own strengths and weaknesses and how their own performance as leaders might influence the development and growth of the business. The Company notes that *“it was very important for me to develop my leadership attributes to help take the business to the next level”*. An outworking of the Company’s history of organic growth had also been that it had not received much external assistance of any type before participating in the Leader Programme. The owners were therefore curious as to the potential value that an experienced mentor who had encountered a variety of business challenges during their own career might bring, and were also keen to discuss business issues in an open forum with like-minded businesses.

Company B notes that *“the receipt of the Leader Programme mentor support arrived at the perfect time for the business. Factors in the marketplace meant that we needed to carefully consider how we went forward. We needed someone to come in and provide a completely new perspective on how we were performing and how we should move forward. The mentor helped us to do this, analysing the profitability of different sectors and work types, and also in helping us select our key target markets. The mentor wasn’t afraid to criticise some aspects of our operation. This was helpful as we can now see that we needed to improve. Although, it should be said that the mentor remained positive throughout. The mentor also helped us to more clearly define the key roles in the organisation – as a result, we are now much more organised and structured”*.

“The coaching support was also very beneficial. It was very intense. It helped a lot with my own personal development and how I deal with workplace issues and communication amongst employees. I’m now much more self-aware and confident in my own ability.”

“We now have a solid plan - something that we can focus our efforts on. We have increased our sales, profit margin and employment by focusing on the ‘right’ clients. We now have the confidence not to bid for every project, but instead to be more selective. We might have achieved a similar result had we not participated in the Leader Programme, but it would have taken us much longer to get there.”

4.9.3 Company C

Company C is an award-winning, online and in-store retailer, shipping items across the world. It has enjoyed great success and considerable growth since its launch in 2007. However, despite the growth experienced, the Company continued to have uncertainty as to the steps necessary to take the business forward, and a recognition that there were some skills and experience issues amongst the senior team that might hinder future growth potential.

Company C notes that *“the mentor we selected was very sharp, a great strategic thinker. She provided a great challenge function to some of the initial plans that we had to take the business forward and has helped me to formulate different options for driving further expansion and growth. She has also provided introductions to people that we can connect with if we encounter any issues in implementing our plans”*.

“The advice and guidance of the business coach have been very valuable. It has made me more accountable for how I was developing the business and has helped me grow as a person and leader of the business”.

“We’ve also found the peer networking to be particularly beneficial. I’ve been invited to three of the businesses that were in my group in the Programme. Whilst they are not in similar sectors to my own business, they face similar issues, so it’s very useful to hear first-hand from other business owners as to how they address issues that you also are facing”.

The key reason why we joined the Leader Programme was that we were unsure of how we would achieve further growth given the structure that we had in place. Participating in the Programme has helped influence our sales and marketing strategy and the organisation structure surrounding those functions. The mentor also provided key advice relating to the skills needs of our marketing team. Although we are still implementing our Business Growth Action Plan, I would wholeheartedly recommend the Programme to other businesses as it has fundamentally changed our outlook as to what is possible for the business”.

4.9.4 Company D

Following three decades in operation, Company D has grown to offer considerable and comprehensive sub-contract capabilities for engineering fabrication, surface finishing and product assembly throughout the UK and Ireland.

As a strategic supply chain partner to the aerospace, automotive, construction, materials handling, oil/gas and renewable energy sectors, Company D is keenly aware of the demands required for the professional delivery of its products to its customers’ facilities at a timescale of their choosing. Company D’s focus on excellence is particularly critical given that many of the parts and assemblies which it fabricates and/or coat are destined for export markets, often for use in demanding operating environments.

However, despite its many years of successful trading, the Company did not have a formal Business Plan or a good understanding of the organisational structure that might be required to achieve further sustainable growth. Other issues that the business sought to address through the Leader Programme including identifying the most appropriate senior management team structure and skills to facilitate further growth, and methodologies to communicate with staff and delegate activities. In particular, the business owner wished to spend more time working ‘on’ the business, rather than ‘in’ the business.

Company D notes *“our Leader Programme mentor was very practical, and his experience was relevant to our business needs. He had a wealth of knowledge and provided a good challenge to my brother and me as to how we operated the business”*.

The coach also held me to account, which has been very helpful in improving my communication style and my approach to managing the business. In addition, I got a lot out of the peer networking sessions. It's always good to talk to other businesses, as most businesses experience similar issues at one time or the other. It's a few years since I participated in the Programme, and I can still pick up the phone and call the other businesses that were in my group".

"The business has to contribute to some of the costs of the Programme, but in truth, I got much more out of the Programme than I put in. As a result of the advice we received, we have now targeted new markets and streamlined a lot of our operations. This has meant that we are more efficient and better able to take on more work. There's also been an overall improvement in our staff's wellbeing. As a direct result of the Programme, we now have a 5-year Business Plan that we are working to. We have already substantially increased our sales, taken on a number of new employees and increased our profits. The Programme was brilliant – both for the business and my own personal development".

5. STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

This section provides the summary²⁶ findings from the Evaluation Team's consultations with key stakeholders including:

- Invest NI's Senior Management;
- Invest NI's Client Executives;
- Leader Programme Mentors; and
- Leader Programme Coaches.

5.1 Invest NI's Senior Management

As part of the evaluation exercise, the Evaluation Team consulted with 4 members of Invest NI's Senior Management Team (SMT). Key findings emerging from those consultations are summarised below.

5.1.1 Need and Demand for the Programme

Each of the 4 consultees was in agreement that there was a need for the Programme and for general 'leadership' development amongst Invest NI's client base. In addition, each of the SMT members were in agreement that there should be a demand for the programme from Invest NI's client base, albeit it was suggested that some businesses may not recognise that they would benefit from the support and it further noted that ultimately Invest NI has a finite customer base (so the solutions offer must be kept 'fresh').

Particular points of interest and feedback included:

- Invest NI does not yet articulate well the need for leadership at different levels in a business, with there being some lack of clarity as to what the Leader Programme actually is and under what circumstances a business might require it. It was suggested the Leadership Team Programme is, at present, better defined than the Leader Programme;
- There was a continuing need to clearly articulate to Invest NI's Client Executives how the Leader Programme might make a difference to their clients, with it noted that it must be 'pitched as the right solution' available at the right time;
- Amongst client businesses, there is a need to drive their 'ambition', and counter some cultural barriers amongst the NI population relating to growing a business, but not necessarily seeking to grow it beyond the scale that can provide a good lifestyle.
- It was suggested that the credibility of the programme amongst clients should be such that they should want to go on the Programme, before being asked;
- Invest NI needs to enhance the alignment of its suite of supports (including those related to leadership) with the stage of development of the business and other key segmentation variables e.g. growth potential, the ambition to scale etc. In relation to this, it was suggested that the Leader Programme may best fit with those businesses whose turnover is between £1m and £3m, but possibly also those with turnover in the range £3m and £10m. It was suggested that the Leader Programme Team should work closely with the various sectors teams to undertake this suggested segmentation exercise (with it noted that Invest NI is due to commence a client segmentation exercise in September 2019), and that possibly a slightly adjusted model is needed for different sectors;
- A further suggestion was that there may be businesses amongst Invest NI's 'Tracked Client' grouping that could benefit from the programme, those that have the ambition to grow, but perhaps not the capability at present;
- It was suggested that for younger businesses, an executive education aspect may be required (similar to that incorporated with the Leadership Team Programme), but that this might be catered for through enhancing linkages with a leadership focussed programme operated by Catalyst Inc.

²⁶ The detailed findings are presented in Appendix V.

- Once the aforementioned segmentation and alignment is completed, it was suggested that it was then necessary for Invest NI to ‘sell’ the Leader Programme to the appropriate businesses;
- Whilst recognising that Invest Northern Ireland has a stated ambition to become a trusted business partner, to deepen its engagement with its clients to better understand their aspirations, identify their growth potential and pinpoint where its support can unlock any constraints, it was suggested that the Leader Programme Team should not underestimate the power of advocacy from other businesses, and related to that the following should be considered:
 - Hold ‘advocacy workshops’ where businesses discuss the benefits that they have derived from participation on the Programme to their business leader peers;
 - Face-to-face contact is key;
 - Perhaps create ‘leader programme’ champions on a sectoral basis, so there is greater potential that businesses will resonate with the impacts that past participants have had.
- The challenges associated with Industry 4.0²⁷ and the adoption of new practices and technologies require leadership from the very top of organisations, providing scope for greater demand for the Leader Programme.

5.1.2 Views on the Programme’s ‘fit’ within Invest NI’s broader portfolio of Programmes/initiatives

Each of the 4 consultees was in agreement that the Leader Programme ‘fits’ with Invest NI’s strategic goals and programme offerings.

Outwith Invest NI, it was suggested that there could be scope for the Leader Programme to link with (perhaps on a signposting basis) initiatives such as the Vistage network or other similar networks, with Leader Programme participants perhaps encouraged to join such a network.

Table 5.1: The Vistage model

The Vistage model has been in operation since 1957 when a group of American chief executives met to share their knowledge and experiences to help each other generate better results for themselves and their businesses. Soon this group of businessmen were probing, asking questions and making suggestions. They challenged each other, working together to solve issues and grow.

Today, Vistage operates in 16 countries around the world. Its members meet in private advisory groups every month under the same guiding principles - to help one another become better leaders, make better decisions and achieve better results. The Vistage members are now connecting in many ways: learning from hundreds of top industry speakers, tapping into a vast online resource library, and collaborating online around the world.

Vistage recognises that when you own or run a business, even the simplest decisions can have profound implications. Vistage suggests that:

- Its members find that the peer advisory and leadership development training it provides has a profound effect on their growth as a leader and the growth of the business.
- It works because in every group and in every meeting, no topic is off-limits. If the participant is willing to talk candidly about the tough decisions they face, fellow members will rally around them, listen, ask tough questions and bring to bear every resource they have to help the participant grow as a leader and improve the workings of their business.
- When its members have access to new perspectives – whether from fellow business peers, their Vistage Chair, or expert speakers – they expand their view beyond their company walls in a way that traditional executive leadership training just cannot offer.
- Vistage private advisory groups enable business leaders to leverage the wisdom and experience of their peers, the guidance of an expert leadership coach (called a Vistage Chair) and the collective knowledge of the worldwide Vistage community.

²⁷ Industry 4.0 is a name given to the current trend of automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies. It includes cyber-physical systems, the Internet of things, cloud computing and cognitive computing. Industry 4.0 is commonly referred to as the fourth industrial revolution.

Table 5.1: The Vistage model

How It Works

Vistage offers a unique combination of resources for accelerating business performance: monthly meetings with non-competitive business peers; one-to-one executive coaching & mentoring sessions; expert speakers and interactive workshops; a rich online library of content, best practices, webinars, and more. Access to a global member network of more than 22,000 business leaders.

- **Private Advisory Group** – A problem-solving peer group with 10-15 senior executives and business leaders. Members are carefully selected for each purpose-built private advisory group – members are invited to join a group; they cannot simply pay to join. To ensure trust and openness, no group contains direct competitors, suppliers or customers.
- **Vistage Chairs** are recruited for their ability, wealth of knowledge and experience – a Vistage Chair has on average 21 years of MD/CEO or P&L ownership experience. Each Chair also undergoes at least 126 hours of specific training before they start to support members. Subsequently, they participate annually in up to 240 hours of continual development with further access to bespoke Vistage online training and resources.
- **Executive Coaching & Mentoring** - Each month the participant and their Chair will have a private, one to one session designed to help them identify their most important needs and opportunities.
- **Speaker Workshops & Keynote Events** - Engage and gain valuable insight from expert speakers in a small group setting; attend events where a wide array of members come to connect. Vistage speakers go through a detailed selection, on-boarding and accreditation process. Only speakers that consistently achieve at least 80% ratings by members for both content and delivery are accredited and available to lead workshops in all private advisory group meetings. Subject matter Best Practice modules containing a variety of articles, tools, and other resources, are chosen and edited by subject matter experts to provide a level of business insider information you're not likely to find anywhere else.
- **Online Community, Learning & Best Practice Toolkits** – Use of MyVistage to connect with fellow members between group meetings, access a wealth of leadership content and tap into the broader international Vistage community. The most Inspirational and informative video and webinars from the best Vistage speakers are recorded and made available to access from the member private website.

All UK members and Chairs sign binding confidentiality agreements.

In the UK, Vistage has 650 members, who form around 60 groups (as of February 2019). Membership costs £10,000 a year.²⁸

Within NI, Vistage is reported to have specific groups for CEOs/MDs running larger SME business (typically £3-£50m); executives running smaller businesses (typically £1-3m); key executives who report to a CEO/MD; and for organisations that wish to bring Vistage inside their organisation for all their senior management team.

5.1.3 Business Outcomes

Some SMT members noted that they have seen a considerable change in the outlook and approach taken by business leaders that have participated in Invest NI's suite of leadership programmes, including the Leader Programme.

5.2 Invest NI's Client Executives

5.2.1 Introduction

As part of the evaluation exercise, the Evaluation Team consulted with client executives:

- That had referred clients to the Leader Programme (17 of 40 Client Executives); and also, those
- Whose clients have not yet participated (N=14) in the Programme (14 of 25).

²⁸ Sources: Vistage Website and <https://startups.co.uk/vistage/>

5.2.2 Need for the Programme

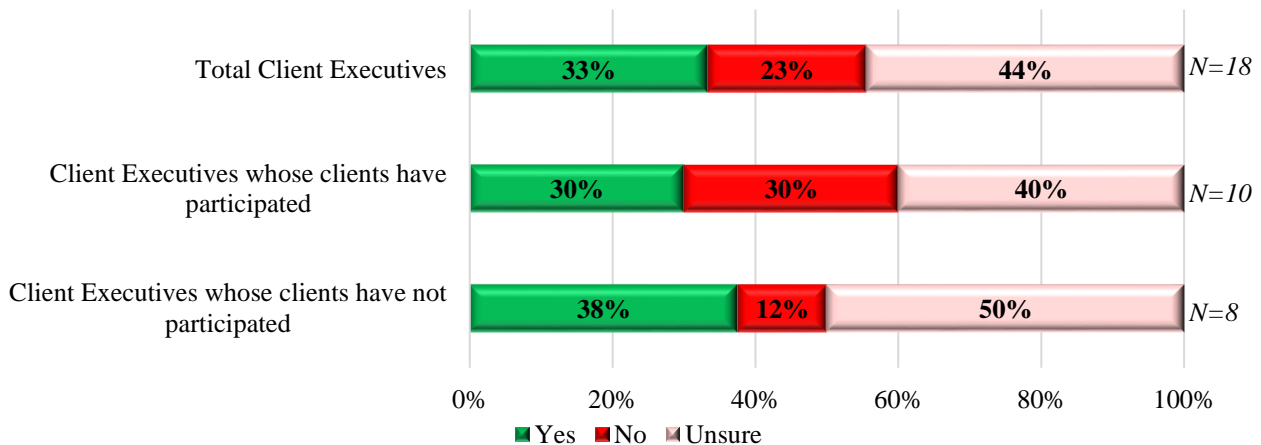
Encouragingly, most Client Executives (83%, N=31) suggested that they see a need for the Leader Programme amongst the Owner Managers/CEOs of their client businesses, including for the following reasons:

- The client is often drawn into operational day-to-day activities when they should be focussing on the strategic side of the business;
- The client feels isolated in their role as a leader;
- The client faces management or personnel issues;
- The client needs to build a more professional business structure; and
- The client’s business has grown rapidly, and they have not had the time to focus on setting up processes that support growth in the longer term.

A significant minority (36%, N=14) of the Client Executives whose clients have not yet participated stated that they do not see the need for the Leader Programme amongst their clients. The key reason for this was the suggestion that their client base consisted largely or exclusively of micro or start-up businesses, who they considered would not be suitable for the Programme.

It is noted that the majority (58%, N=31) of the Client Executives that participated in the consultation exercise suggested that they work with High Growth Potential Businesses. Almost two-thirds (67%, N=18) of these Client Executives suggested that there is either no specific ‘leadership’ support needed for Owners Managers/ CEOs of those businesses, over and above that already delivered through the Leader Programme (or they were unsure as to whether there is a need).

Figure 5.1: Specific ‘Leadership’ support needed for High Growth Potential Businesses



However, a significant minority (33%, N=18) of Client Executives suggested that the Owners Managers/CEOs of High Growth Potential Businesses do require specific ‘Leadership’ support. The suggestions included offering a shorter, more compact version of the Leader Programme and also offering a greater number of one-to-one mentoring support.

5.2.3 Demand for the Programme

The Client Executives that engaged in the consultation exercise cover a client base of 1,088, of which the Client Executives suggested that 14% (or 150 clients) should avail of Leader Programme support.

Very few (N=2) Client Executives indicated that their clients had raised the programme with them in terms of them possibly being interested in participating. Those clients that had raised the programme with them had heard about it from other businesses that had previously participated.

5.2.4 *Factors that Encourage and Inhibit Clients from Participating*

The Client Executives whose clients have participated in the programme suggested that the following factors had encouraged their participation:

- Hearing testimonials from past participants; and
- Engagement from the Invest NI Leader Programme Manager who could provide a background to and information on the specific details and potential benefits of the programme.

However, the Client Executives also identified a number of factors that may potentially inhibit their clients from participating in the Leader Programme, including:

- The amount of time they are required to commit to the programme – either clients are unwilling to take the time away from the business or cannot afford to;
- Clients are not convinced of the need for and/or benefit of participating in the programme;
- Clients feel that the timing to participate is not right for them or their business; and
- Clients are risk averse or are not ready for change.

5.2.5 *Views on the Programme's 'fit' within Invest NI's broader portfolio of Programme's/initiatives*

All of the Client Executives, where they considered that they were suitably informed to comment, agreed that the Leader Programme 'fits' within Invest NI's broader portfolio of programmes/initiatives and also those offered within the broader marketplace.

5.2.6 *Views on the Programme's Structure and Content*

All of the Client Executives whose clients have participated, that had a view, suggested that they were satisfied with the programme's structure and content, and how it is being delivered. Specifically, Client Executives noted the following:

- No negative feedback has been received from their clients;
- The mix of mentors and coaches had worked well for their clients;
- There is a good blend of activities and mixture of internal staff and external resources involved; and
- The programme length is appropriate as it allows clients to build relationships and start to implement change.

None of the Client Executives whose clients have not yet participated considered themselves suitably informed to comment on the Programme's structure and content.

5.2.7 *Business Outcomes*

Positively, all (100%, N=17) of the Client Executives whose clients have participated in the programme suggested that they saw changes in their client/client business as a result of their participation in the Leader Programme. Specific changes mentioned included the following:

- Improvements in their individual characteristics and attributes as a leader, including confidence and communication;
- The identification of necessary changes in the company structure including the development of key roles; and
- Increases in sales as a result of the changes implemented.

5.2.8 Recommendations

Only a small number of Client Executives provided recommendations as to how the Leader Programme could be improved. These recommendations included:

- Offering follow-on support to participants 6-12 months after the Programme’s completion (N=3);
- Improving the promotion of the Programme amongst Invest NI client businesses (N=2); and
- Educating the Client Executives on the potential benefits of the Programme (N=2).

5.3 Leader Programme Mentors

5.3.1 Introduction

As part of the evaluation exercise, the Evaluation Team consulted with 13 of 19 mentors that have provided mentor support to the 2016/20 programme’s participants.

5.3.2 Need for the Programme

Perhaps unsurprisingly, all (N=13) of the Mentors stated that they saw a need for the Leader Programme amongst the businesses that they have worked with, including for the following reasons:

- The business owner’s lack of confidence or self-belief;
- The business owner is too caught up in the business’ operational day-to-day activities when they should be focussing on the strategic side of the business;
- The business owner facing management or personnel issues; and
- The business owner needing to build a more professional business structure.

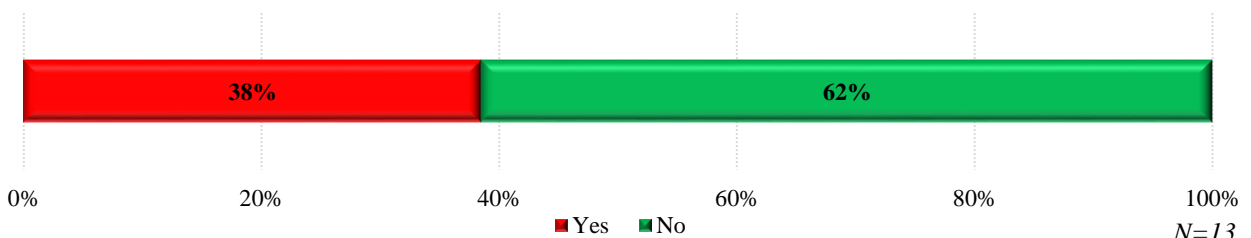
5.3.3 Views on the Programme’s Structure and Content

Each of the mentors indicated that they are satisfied with the programme’s structure and content and how it is being delivered. Specifically, mentors expressed satisfaction with the following:

- The length of the programme (over a 9-month period); and
- The mixture and complementarity of the three elements of the programme.

Over a third (38%, N=13) of mentors suggested that elements of the mentoring support could be improved.

Figure 5.2: Could the mentoring support be improved?



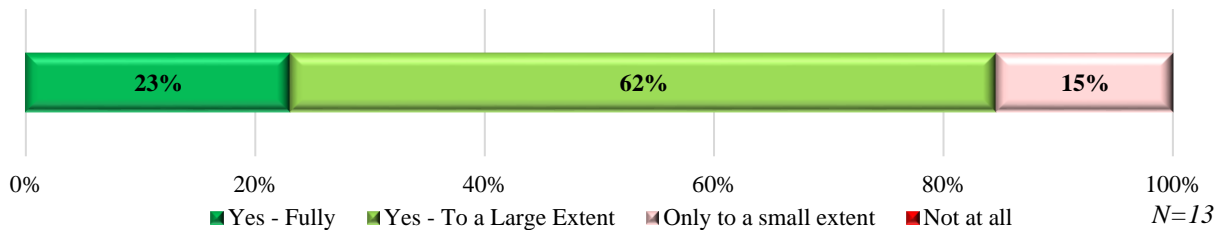
Their suggestions included:

- Extending the time that the businesses can have with their mentor during the programme (N=3).
- Offering follow up mentoring support 6 months after completion of the Leader programme (N=1); and
- Inviting mentors to attend residential events (N=1).

5.3.4 Complementarity of the Business Mentor and Leadership Coach

The Leadership Coach and Business Mentor input are anticipated to be complementary. Combined, they are anticipated to enable the business to improve performance, realise potential, and remove interference within the business. Encouragingly, almost all (85%, N=13) of the mentors agreed that the two elements of support worked together in a seamless manner to achieve that goal for the business.

Figure 5.3: Do the two elements of the programme complement each other?



Two mentors suggested that the two elements of support only worked together to a small extent and indicated that there was perhaps a lack of communication between the two parties and that they would have benefited from structured joint meetings.

5.3.5 Views on Invest NI's Management of the Programme

All of the mentors were in agreement (either 'strongly agreed' (69%) or 'agreed' (31%)) that Invest NI's management and operation of the Leader Programme is appropriate and effective, including their engagement with them as a mentor on the programme.

5.3.6 Recommendations

The mentors provided a range of recommendations as to how the Leader Programme could be improved, which included:

- Increasing the amount of time that the businesses can have with their mentor during the programme (N=3).
- Offering follow-on support to participants after the Programme, in the form of one-to-one mentoring support or facilitating networking forums (N=2);
- Improving the promotion of the programme (N=2);
- Educating Client Executives on the Programme (N=2);
- Educating the Mentors on the suite of Invest NI support offerings (N=1).

5.4 Leader Programme Coaches

The Leader Programme coaching provider noted the following:

- The content and structure of the Programme works well (and considers that nothing material requires amendment), noting that it has been subject to incremental change as it has been rolled out;
- Some clients have very different needs from the support provided by the coach than that provided by the mentor, and so naturally there is little overlap; however, on other occasions where the needs align there is substantial engagement between the coach and mentor.

6. PERFORMANCE AGAINST BUDGET

6.1 Introduction

This section of the reports considers the actual cost of the Leader Programme against those anticipated at the outset.

6.2 Programme Budget per Economic Appraisal

The Economic Appraisal's Preferred Option established a projected total full economic cost for the programme over a 4-year period (consisting of 1 cohort per annum with 20 participants per annum²⁹) of £1,794,360 (incl. VAT, where applicable). Of this, it was anticipated that participant businesses would contribute £352,248. The full anticipated budget is shown in Table 6.1 overleaf.

It was anticipated that the Programme's Mentoring and Coaching elements would be funded through Skills & Strategy Division GBER Training Aid, whilst the Networking element would be funded through De Minimis.

Since 2012, Invest NI has contributed 49 per cent of the direct one-on-one mentor-leader time costs, as notified to the European Commission under General Block Exemption Rules (GBER) Training Aid³⁰.

The costs of the peer networking element of the Programme were fully funded by Invest NI. With the introduction of the new GBER (General Block Exemption Regulations) with effect from 1 July 2014, the residential accommodation costs are supported under De-Minimis Aid.

Programme management costs are identified as procured costs and do not fall under GBER.

The assumptions that were applied to the budget projected in the EA are featured in Appendix VI.

²⁹ Invest NI's experience with the dynamics of differing cohort group sizes had identified that a maximum ceiling of 20 participants per cohort was preferable from a Programme delivery perspective, in terms of striking the balance between having enough participants from which the business owners can learn from as part of the peer networking, whilst at the same time not sacrificing the cohesion of the group.

³⁰ Under the Training Aid rules, 60% of costs can be covered for companies with 50 – 249 employees; and 70% for companies with between 1 and 49 employees.

Table 6.1: Original 2016/20 Programme Budget

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total
	Yr 0	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	
Programme Delivery - INI							
Mentoring – client element	37,044	38,155	39,300	40,479			154,978
Mentoring – non-client element	45,360	46,721	48,122	49,566			189,769
Coaching – client element	41,160	41,160	41,160	41,160			164,640
Coaching – stakeholder engagement	27,000	27,000	27,000	27,000			108,000
Coaching PM	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000			240,000
Coaching psychometrics	4,704	4,704	4,704	4,704			18,816
Peer Networking – 4 sessions	1,800	1,854	1,910	1,967			7,531
Peer Networking – 2 residential	8,892	9,145	9,405	9,673			39,159
Peer Networking - speakers	7,200	7,416	7,638	7,868			30,122
Invest NI Staff Costs	97,312	113,568	116,424	119,356	14,898		461,557
Sub-Total	330,472	349,723	355,663	361,772	14,898		1,414,572
Programme Delivery – Private Companies							
Mentoring – client element	38,556	39,713	42,131	42,131			161,304
Coaching – client element	42,840	42,840	42,840	42,840			171,360
Coaching psychometrics	4,896	4,896	4,896	4,896			19,584
Sub Total	86,292	87,449	89,867	89,867			352,248
Evaluation & Appraisal			9,180	9,180		9,180	27,540
Sub-total			9,180	9,180		9,180	27,540
Full Economic Costs – Total	416,764	437,171	453,483	460,820	14,898	9,180	1,794,360
Full Economic Costs – Invest NI Only	330,472	349,723	364,843	370,952	14,898	9,180	1,442,112
Cost for Approval (i.e. less INI staff costs)	233,160	236,155	251,597	251,597	-	-	980,555

6.3 Actual Expenditure

A review of Invest NI's Programme Tracking information, with further input from Invest NI's Leader Programme Management Team indicates that the actual costs (excluding Invest NI staff costs) for Cohorts 1-4 of the 2016/20 Programme were £436,299 (excl. VAT) and £656,763 when non-recoverable VAT (charged to Invest NI) and the participants' contributions are accounted for.

Table 6.2: Actual Programme Costs (excluding Invest NI Staff Costs)						
Cohort		Cohort 1 16/17	Cohort 2 17/18	Cohort 3 18/19 (A)	Cohort 4 18/19 (B)	Sub-total
No. of businesses		15	11	13	8	47
Coaching Costs (to INI) (excl. VAT)	Programme Director	£54,609	£39,790	£47,073	£23,422	£164,894
	One-to-One Coaching (49%)	£21,492	£18,760	£24,599	£10,694	£75,546
	Stakeholder Liaison	£5,474	£9,155	£11,258	£4,191	£30,078
	Psychometrics (49%)	£1,890	£1,600	£1,751	£882	£6,123
	Sub-Total	£83,465	£69,305	£84,681	£39,189	£276,641
Mentoring Costs	Total known mentoring hours	364	235	458	212	1269
	One-to-one cost to Invest NI @ 49% (excl. VAT)	£11,638	£10,824	£19,523	£4,326	£46,311
	PM Mentoring Costs (100% INI) (excl. VAT)	£20,084	£16,213	£26,673	£8,867	£71,836
	Sub-Total	£31,722	£27,037	£46,196	£13,193	£118,147
Networking Costs	(excl. VAT)	£12,305	£10,463	£10,472	£8,270	£41,511
Total Cost to Invest NI (excl. VAT)		£127,492	£106,805	£141,349	£60,652	£436,299
Non-Recoverable VAT @ 20%		£25,498	£21,361	£28,270	£12,130	£87,260
Total Cost to Invest NI (excl. VAT)		£152,990	£128,166	£169,619	£72,782	£523,559
Participants' Contributions	One-to-One Coaching (51%)	£22,369	£19,526	£25,603	£11,130	£78,630
	Psychometrics (51%)	£1,967	£1,665	£1,822	£918	£6,373
	One-to-One Coaching (51%)	£12,113	£11,266	£20,320	£4,503	£48,201
	Sub-Total	£36,449	£32,457	£47,745	£16,551	£133,204
Total Cost		£189,439	£160,623	£217,364	£89,333	£656,763

Invest NI notes that there is a variance between projected and actual expenditures due to factors such as the broad range of daily rates for business mentors; participants not utilising (and potentially not claiming for) all available mentoring and coaching time allocated; actual coaching programme management costs being lower than projected; and competitively securing rates for networking events, including some best practice speakers for no fee.

Invest NI's Leader Programme staff costs over the 3-year period (2016/19) amount to circa £355,229 (as summarised in Table 6.3, with the calculations provided in Appendix XI):

Table 6.3: Leader Programme Invest NI Staff Costs					
	% of Time on Programme	Staff Cost			
	Years 1 - 3	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Staff Grade	16/19	16/17	17/18	18/19	
Grade 7	10%	£8,495	£8,714	£8,938	£26,146
DP	100%	£67,371	£69,080	£70,836	£207,287
EOII	90%	£39,637	£40,590	£41,568	£121,795
Number of FTEs	2	£115,504	£118,384	£121,341	£355,229

Taking the direct programme costs and Invest NI staff costs together provides an overall programme cost of £1,011,992 for Cohorts 1-4 of the Leader Programme 2016-2020 (as of circa April 2019).

7. ACHIEVEMENT OF PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

7.1 Introduction

This section considers the extent to which the Leader Programme is meeting its stated aims, objectives and targets.

7.2 Performance Against Targets and Objectives

The 2016/20 Leader Programme’s objectives and impact targets as established in the Economic Appraisal are set out below, alongside the Evaluation Team’s commentary as to the extent to which they have been achieved (at May 2019):

Table 7.1: Leader Programme Objectives & Impact Targets - Extent of Achievement			
Summary of EA’s Anticipated Leader Programme Activity, Output, Outcome and Impact			Evaluation Team’s Commentary
Activities and Outputs	Mentoring	Deliver at a minimum one to one mentoring support to a minimum of 20 participants (individuals) per annum	At the time of evaluation, circa three programme years have been implemented suggesting a total target of 60 participants over the 3-year period. This target has been largely (92%) achieved with 55 individuals receiving one-to-one mentoring and coaching support. Six peer networking events (including two 2-day residential) were held for each cohort of participants.
	Coaching	Deliver at a minimum one to one coaching support to a minimum of 20 participants (individuals) per annum	
	Peer Networking	Deliver at a minimum 6 peer networking events (2 residential) to each cohort of participants, with a 100% attendance rate	
Outcomes	Mentoring	90% of participants reporting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An improved understanding of their company’s strategic objectives (42%); An improved understanding of the actions required across their business to deliver on their company’s strategic objectives (26%); An improvement in the way their company’s strategic objectives are being communicated to company staff (26%); Identifying changes in company structure including the development of key roles (21%); An improved understanding of their company’s key growth potential areas (56%); An improved understanding of their key market opportunity areas (40%). 	The Evaluation Team has reflected the percentage of respondents achieving these metrics in bold at the end of each indicator in the column to the left (full details presented in Appendix IV). It is noted that the suggested target of 90% of participants achieving each of these metrics has not been reached. However, the Evaluation Team considers that there is a risk that the granular nature of the targets established means that the overall impact of the mentoring might be lost. Our consultations with participants suggest that almost every participant reports the programme as having been considerably beneficial and indicates that almost all (95%, N=43) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the one to one business mentoring. Similarly, almost all were either satisfied or very satisfied with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The leadership coaching that was provided by representatives of Wilson Sloan Consulting (86%, N=43); and The series of Peer Networking sessions with best practice speakers (86%, N=42).
	Coaching	90% of participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing their understanding of their leadership role and its impact on the business (56%); Strengthening their individual characteristics and attributes as a leader (67%); 	

Table 7.1: Leader Programme Objectives & Impact Targets - Extent of Achievement

Summary of EA's Anticipated Leader Programme Activity, Output, Outcome and Impact		Evaluation Team's Commentary
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reporting an improvement in their approach to managing staff performance (67%); Reporting an improvement in their approach to managing their customers and responding to their needs (47%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constructively challenged them in relation to how they were (at that time) leading their business (98%, N=42); Scrutinised the performance of their business' management and identified opportunities to improve its functioning (98%, N=42); Helped them identify and address key constraints and barriers to growth (95%, N=42); Helped them to identify new product and/or market opportunities (90%, N=42); Made use of their own business networks to maximise opportunities and facilitate growth within the business (95%, N=41); Helped them develop an outline and practical "growth action plan" to address key business issues (91%, N=41); Served to strengthen and enhance their ability to effectively establish and implement their business' strategy (93%, N=42).
Outcomes (Cont.)	Peer Networking	<p>90% of participants report having benefited from the peer-networking events, including for example shared learning, ongoing networks outside Programme etc (26%).</p> <p>Furthermore, almost all (86%+) of the respondents agreed that the Leader Programme Business Coach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was a good fit for the business owner as an individual (88%, N=43); Helped strengthen their leadership characteristics and attributes e.g. related to issues such as delegation and communication (88%, N=43); Challenged them as to how best to use any knowledge gained through the mentoring support or networking, in a manner that might accelerate the growth of their business (90%, N=42); Helped improve their communication and employee engagement skills and attributes (95%, N=43); and Helped them to become more strategic, more self-aware and more confident (86%, N=43). <p>In terms of the third strand of the programme, the majority (67%+) of participants agreed (i.e. they either agreed or strongly agreed) that the Peer Networking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helped them to form relationships with other businesses that participated in the Leader Programme (67%, N=42); Allowed participants to gain useful knowledge from businesses from different sectoral backgrounds (88%, N=42); Used high-calibre presenters and facilitators (95%, N=42); Used inspirational keynote speakers (86%, N=42); and Provided them with insight into international best practice on a variety of topics relating to the leadership of a business (95%, N=42).

Table 7.1: Leader Programme Objectives & Impact Targets - Extent of Achievement

Summary of EA's Anticipated Leader Programme Activity, Output, Outcome and Impact			Evaluation Team's Commentary
Impacts	Monetised economic impacts	<p>Generate a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gross GVA of £5.82m in undiscounted terms at Year 6 (assuming the Programme commences implementation in Year 0); Net GVA of £2.86m in undiscounted terms at Year 6 (assuming the Programme commences implementation in Year 0); Net return on investment of £1.98 in undiscounted net additional GVA for every £1 of Invest NI full economic expenditure within 3 years of the final programme cohort completing the Programme. 	<p>As outlined in Section 4.8, the Evaluation Team estimates that the Leader Programme has generated (at Circa April/May 2019):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gross GVA of £2.1m in undiscounted terms at Year 2 (2016/17 represents Year 0); Net GVA of £1.1m in undiscounted terms at Year 2; A Net return on investment of £1.26 in undiscounted net additional GVA for every £1 of Invest NI full economic expenditure. <p>However, the Programme has yet to reach its completion, and most participants amongst Cohorts 1-4 are still in the process of either developing or implementing their Growth Action Plans, with most of the respondents indicating that their participation in the Leader Programme will likely have a positive impact on both their turnover (85%, N=34) and employment (88%, N=34) over the next three years. Indeed, 11 businesses suggested that their participation in the Leader Programme would lead to a cumulative increase in their turnover of c. £8m over the next 3 years (equivalent of a further £1.4m of net additional GVA).</p> <p>On this basis, the Evaluation Team considers that it very likely that the Leader Programme will meet or exceed the monetary targets established.</p>

8. BENCHMARK LEADERSHIP OFFERINGS

8.1 Introduction

Many public sector and private sector bodies across the UK and Ireland provide ‘leadership development’ offerings. Target audiences for these offerings range from junior executives, middle management, senior executives, female executives, the senior management team of firms etc. However, neither the Evaluation Team nor Invest NI has identified a benchmark leadership offering that has a similar singular focus on developing the leadership skills of CEOs/Managing Directors of businesses as the Leader Programme does.

As such, the Evaluation Team has considered key facets of a small number of programmes that have some similarities (e.g. similar aims and objectives) as the Leader Programme. They include:

- Skillnet Ireland’s Business Leadership Programme (NB As of May 2019, as a result of changes in the operations of Skillnet Ireland, this programme is no longer implemented);
- Enterprise Ireland’s suite of Management Development Programmes, but in particular the Go Global 4 Growth Programme (which the Evaluation Team considers offers the most commonality with the Leader Programme) and the Leadership 4 Growth Programme;
- The Clinton Institute at Queen’s University Belfast’s Business Leaders Programme;
- Scottish Enterprise’s Leadership Development Programme. NB At May 2019, Scottish Enterprise has announced that it will be launching its refreshed leadership development programme in the coming months. Workshops will focus on supporting leaders to develop their organisational values, resilience and manage change.

8.2 Summary Comparison of Benchmark Offerings

The table overleaf compares key facets of these offerings with the Leader Programme. Key points to note:

- Like Invest NI, it is evident that economic development agencies elsewhere recognise the need to develop the leadership capabilities of their client businesses.
- However, it is similarly evident that there is a spectrum in term of duration, scale of activity (executive education workshops, coaching and other activities), cost to businesses (from as little as £400 for Scottish Enterprise’s Leadership Development Programme up to €21,300 for an SME for Enterprise Ireland’s Leadership 4 Growth Programme) and calibre of providers;
- Enterprise Ireland, in particular, has developed a comprehensive suite of leadership development programmes³¹.

³¹ Unfortunately, evaluation reports for these programmes were not available to the Evaluation Team.

Table 8.1: Summary Comparison of Benchmark Leadership Offerings

Programme	Leader Programme	Invest NI's LTP	Invest NI's Leading within a Group (LWG)	Skillnet Ireland Business Leadership Programme	The Clinton Institute at QUB's Business Leaders Programme	EI's Go Global 4 Growth Programme	EI's Leadership 4 Growth Programme	Scottish Enterprise's Leadership Development Programme
Target Audience	The Owners/CEOs of Invest NI client SMEs	The Senior Management Teams of Invest NI client SMEs	Site leads of externally owned companies	The Owners/CEOs of SMEs	Senior Audiences from all sectors	Ambitious SME top teams from all sectors	CEOs of SMEs that lead scalable, innovative companies capable of growing exports and jobs	Key decision makers
No. of Participants	1-2 (depending on the ownership structure of SME)	3 (CEO plus two top managers)	1 per company	1 per company		3 (CEO plus two top managers)	The CEO at modules	A maximum of two participants per company
Delivery Bodies	Experienced Business Mentors/Wilson Sloan	Dublin City University/Wilson Sloan	Dublin City University/Wilson Sloan	Skillnet Ireland	QUB	Dublin City University	The IESE Business School (IESE) and CLG in partnership with The Learning Partnership (TLP)	
Duration	9 months	10 months	6 months	6 months	4 months	7 months	12 months	2 months
Key Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business diagnostics and Leadership psychometrics; 3 and 5-days' Business Mentoring; Up to 3 days Leadership Coaching; and Up to 6 Peer Networking Events (including residentials) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x business diagnostic per company; 1 x leadership diagnostic tool per person; 4 x 2-day executive education modules on a range of topics (including strategy, leadership, communication, finance, sales & marketing, people and international growth); 2 x overnight residentials; 3.5 days of business coaching per team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x business diagnostic per company; 1 x leadership diagnostic tool per person; 2 x 2 days (residential) executive education modules on a range of topics (including strategy, leadership, communication, people and international growth); 3.5 days Executive Coaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company diagnostic; 6 x full-day workshops; 12 hours of follow-on coaching; Peer-to-peer learning; Access to the Action COACH library of resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 days of off-site module for 3 modules; One-to-one coaching; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 x days education including peer learning 4 x half-days in-company management advisory sessions; 3 x 2-hour one-to-one leadership coaching sessions; Online learning modules. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 x residential modules Each participant is assigned a Business Adviser Coach; A critical element of the programme comes from its focus on executing participants' strategic goals. This involves the CEOs and their senior teams working through assignments between modules, relating to the challenges and opportunities facing their company. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 x half-day workshops; Business Mentor support

Table 8.1: Summary Comparison of Benchmark Leadership Offerings

Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varies depending on the mentor's daily rate, but averages £2,834 (excluding Invest NI contribution) for Cohorts 1-4. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> £6,000 (excl. VAT) for small businesses; and £8,000 (excl. VAT) for medium-sized businesses 	£5,700 per participant	€2,000 (but suggested to be 'highly subsidised')	£3,900	€9,000 per SME ³²	The full programme fee is €53,300. The cost to the company is €21,300 for an SME and €26,700 for a large company.	The programme is subsidised and is available to participants for £400 + VAT
Included/ Excluded Costs		Fees include all programme elements.		All training, coaching, course materials, lunches and refreshments.		Fees include all programme elements, meals and overnight accommodation/group dinner at the formal residential module. Fees <u>do not</u> include accommodation for other overnights, however, competitive rates for hotel accommodation close to DCU have been secured and will be shared with participants before programme launch.	Price includes accommodation and meals in overseas locations during modules but does not include overseas travel costs.	

³² It is understood that the fee payable represents in the region of 50% of the total cost with the remainder subsidised by Enterprise Ireland. For Large Companies, a slightly higher fee may apply

9. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Introduction

This section provides the Evaluation Team's key conclusions and recommendations relating to the Leader Programme.

9.2 Conclusions

9.2.1 *The Extent to which Leader Programme's Objectives & Targets are being Met*

Invest NI's Corporate Plan 2011-2015 had recognised a need to invest in skills, but particularly management and leadership development to drive productivity and growth within its business base. As a result, the Leader Programme was developed. The Programme was specifically aimed at developing the strategic leadership skills of CEOs/Managing Directors of businesses identified as having significant growth potential in Northern Ireland (NI). The overarching aim of the Leader Programme is to:

"Develop the business growth potential of Invest NI client companies through the development of leadership competencies".

Our consultations with businesses (see Appendices III and IV for full details) lead the Evaluation Team to conclude that the Leader Programme is achieving this aim. Participation in the Programme has led to a substantial and varied range of impacts upon both the businesses and the individuals that have participated. It is well recognised that measuring and attributing the impact of management and leadership development activities is fraught with methodological difficulties. However, we consider, based upon participants' feedback that the Leader Programme has proven to be a powerful springboard for participant businesses to envision their business' future growth, to develop action plans and subsequently to implement changes that are anticipated to drive productivity and growth.

As illustrated in section 7.2, none of the 'outcome' targets that have been established have been achieved; albeit it appears that the monetary impact targets will be met. However, the Evaluation Team considers that there is a risk that the granular nature of the outcome targets established means that the overall impact of the mentoring, coaching and peer networking might be lost. Our consultations with participants indicates that many valuable outcomes have been achieved and almost every participant reports the programme as having been considerably beneficial and indicates that almost all (95%, N=43) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the one to one business mentoring. Similarly, almost all were either satisfied or very satisfied with:

- The leadership coaching that was provided by representatives of Wilson Sloan Consulting (86%, N=43); and
- The series of Peer Networking sessions with best practice speakers (86%, N=42).

9.2.2 *The Success of Leader Programme's Delivery Model & Management and Operating Structures*

The feedback provided to the Evaluation Team from participants is overwhelmingly positive. Participants welcome the multidimensional yet integrated approach to strategic leadership development that is employed with endorsement of each of the three programme elements: business mentoring, action-oriented team coaching and peer networking.

To this end, we consider that there is little in the programme's delivery model, and in its management and operating structures that merits any substantial change. Our conclusion encompasses, for the most part, inter alia the appropriateness of the application and appraisal processes, engagement with participating businesses and the delivery bodies, financial management and output monitoring arrangements. Albeit, we consider that monitoring relating to the financial management of the programme would benefit from substantial streamlining and simplifying. A key goal for Invest NI

should be to reduce the number of Excel workbooks utilised relating to the programme's financial management to one.

9.2.3 *Progress against the Action Plan*

As reflected in Appendix II, as of January 2019, Invest NI has completed and implemented all actions that arose from the August 2015 Evaluation of the Leader Programme.

9.2.4 *Internal or External Factors Impacting Upon Programme Performance*

No internal or external factors of substance have been identified as having impacted upon the performance of the intervention either positively or negatively, within the period.

9.2.5 *Leader Programme's Overall Economic & Wider Impacts*

A business' leadership pervades all aspects of a business' operation and performance. Consequently, and as reflected in detail in Appendix IV, participation in the Leader Programme has resulted in the achievement of numerous forms of impact both at the level of the individual participants and for their businesses. Such impacts are both tangible (e.g. impacts upon sales and employment) and intangible (e.g. upon knowledge, ambition, confidence etc).

Some of the more prevalent impacts that businesses reported included:

- The respondent considered that they are now better able to manage themselves (98%, N=43) and others (93%, N=43);
- The respondent has been inspired to think and act differently (84%, N=43);
- The respondent considered that they are now a better business leader (thinking more strategically) (77%, N=43) and have strengthened their individual characteristics and attributes as a leader (67%, N=43);
- The respondent has improved their approach to managing staff performance (67%, N=43); and
- The business has defined an executable future roadmap for business growth (63%, N=43).

In addition, and what should be particularly encouraging given that most respondents were continuing to implement their Growth Action Plans (and indeed some were continuing to develop theirs), many respondents reported that they had already successfully achieved some form of more tangible business outcome because of the support received through the Leader Programme including both sales and employment growth. Key points to note include:

- The Evaluation Team's analysis indicates that the Leader Programme has contributed to supporting businesses to derive a minimum of c.£6.5m in sales/revenue, 64% (or c. £4.1m) of which was derived in external (46% or c. £2.9m) and/or export (18% or £1.1m) markets.
- The application of the NI average sectoral level of GVA (i.e. 33%) suggests that these businesses have contributed £2.1m of gross GVA to the NI economy.
- Almost four-fifths (79%, N=34) of the respondents indicated that they had achieved growth in their employee numbers as a result of the support received through the Leader Programme, with the Evaluation Team estimating that 118 gross FTE jobs have been created, 106 of which potentially have salaries in excess of the NI PSM salary.
- The removal of the calculated levels of impact deadweight (34%) and local displacement (21%) to the gross monetary impacts potentially achieved by the total unique businesses suggests that the Leader Programme may have directly:
 - Contributed a minimum of c. £1.1m in net additional GVA to the NI Economy; and
 - Created 62 net additional FTE jobs.

- In addition to the actual outcomes achieved to date, most of the respondents were of the view that their participation in the Leader Programme will have a positive impact on both their turnover (85%, N=34) and employment (88%, N=34) over the next three years. Two-fifths (38%, N=34) of respondents also anticipate a reduction in their costs. Most of the businesses were, however, unable to quantify the anticipated tangible increases that might be attributable to the Leader Programme. Nonetheless, 11 businesses suggested that their participation in the Leader Programme would lead to a cumulative increase in their turnover of c. £8m over the next 3 years, whilst 7 businesses suggested that their participation would lead to a cumulative increase of 28 FTEs over the next 3 years.

9.2.6 Leader Programme's Economy, Efficiency & Effectiveness

In considering the economy, efficiency and effectiveness relating to the Leader Programme we note the following:

Table 9.1: Economy, Efficiency & Effectiveness Indicators	
Indicator	Evaluation Team's Commentary
Economy measures are concerned with showing that the appropriate inputs (i.e. the resources used in carrying out the project) have been obtained at least cost	<p>The Leader Programme coaching contractors were appointed following a formal procurement process managed by Construction & Procurement Delivery (CPD), providing assurance that the Leader Programme secured the necessary inputs at least cost.</p> <p>Whilst the daily rates of the Programme's mentors vary, businesses are free to select a mentor that best fits their needs. Furthermore, the businesses pay the majority (51%) of the one-to-one mentor costs. This provides comfort that this element of the programme will be obtained at the least cost.</p>
Efficiency relates to measures that are concerned with achieving the maximum output from a given set of inputs	<p>Key points to note in relation to Leader Programme's efficiency include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the end of Year 3 (March 2019), 55 businesses had participated against a target of 60 i.e. 92%; • However, the overall cost of the Programme (inclusive of non-recoverable VAT) is 77% of that projected (£1,011,992 v £1,307,418, whilst Invest NI's contribution is 84% of that projected (£878,788 v £ 1,045,038). <p>Therefore, it appears that Invest NI has leveraged greater value from the Programme (in terms of cost per business - £18,400 v £21,790) than was originally anticipated. To this end, we consider this to provide clear evidence the maximum output has been secured from a given set of inputs.</p>
Effectiveness measures are concerned with showing the extent to which aims, objectives and targets of the project are being achieved	<p>Participant feedback provides strong evidence to indicate that Leader Programme's aims and impact objectives are being achieved. That is the majority of respondents to our consultation exercise indicated that participation in the Leader Programme has led to the development of the business growth potential of Invest NI client companies through the development of leadership competencies.</p>

9.2.7 Return on Investment (at June 2019)

Taking the direct programme costs and Invest NI staff costs together provides an overall full economic programme cost of £1,011,992 for Cohorts 1-4 of the Leader Programme 2016-2020.

The Evaluation Team estimates that the Leader Programme has contributed a minimum of £1,109,759 in net additional GVA to the NI Economy; thereby provided a return on investment of £1.10 for every £1 invested by Invest NI and participant businesses or £1.26 for every £1 invested by Invest NI (whose investment was circa £878,788)³³.

As discussed however, most participants are still in the process of either developing or implementing their Growth Action Plans, with most of the respondents indicating that their participation in the Leader Programme will likely have a positive impact on both their turnover (85%, N=34) and employment (88%, N=34) over the next three years. On this basis, the Evaluation Team considers that it very likely that the return on investment figures cited above will increase substantially over the next 3-5 years.

This result provides a strong indication that the Leader Programme has the potential to deliver a substantial return on investment and considerable value for money on a monetary return basis (notwithstanding the many other positive non-monetary benefits that the Leader Programme has delivered such as those featured at Section 9.2.5).

9.2.8 Need and Demand for the Programme

Given its evident impact, the positive feedback from participants and stakeholders and a variety of research that points to the importance of leadership within business, it seems reasonable to conclude that there continues to be a need for the Leader Programme.

However, demand for the programme needs to be carefully considered, so that any future programme is both set at the most appropriate scale and pitched to the most appropriate businesses. Factors that are likely to influence demand for the programme include:

- Whether some businesses recognise that they would benefit from the support, and an accompanying necessity to promote the Programme to potential beneficiaries in a manner that will resonate strongly with them;
- The fact that Invest NI has a finite customer base;
- There is a time commitment required of participants, which must fit with their other schedule of activities;
- The recognition that there is a greater need for Invest NI to enhance the alignment of its suite of supports (including those related to leadership) with the stage of development of the business and other key segmentation variables e.g. growth potential, the ambition to scale etc. In relation to this, members of Invest NI's SMT have suggested that the Leader Programme Team should work closely with the various sectors teams to undertake this suggested segmentation exercise (with it noted that Invest NI is due to commence a client segmentation exercise in September 2019), and that possibly a slightly adjusted model is needed for different sectors;
- The potential that there may be businesses amongst Invest NI's 'Tracked Client' grouping that could benefit from the programme, those that have the ambition to grow, but perhaps not the capability at present;
- Whether for younger businesses, an executive education aspect may be required (similar to that incorporated with the Leadership Team Programme, but potentially catered for through enhancing

³³ Whilst the return on investment achieved (at June 2019) is less than that estimated for the 2012-2016 Programme (see Appendix VII), it should be noted that the participants surveyed from that Programme by the current Evaluation Team have had up to 2 more years to achieve monetary impacts, and in addition the results reported from that programme have been influenced by an outlier that achieved £2.4m of sales as a result of the programme.

linkages with a leadership focussed programme operated by Catalyst Inc or other suitable alternative).

9.2.9 Equality Considerations

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in the Act.

Invest NI has published its Equality Scheme which sets out how it proposes to fulfil the Section 75 statutory duties, and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Participation in the Leader Programme is open to all Invest NI client businesses and is understood to be compliant with all equality policies and procedures that govern how the organisation operates.

9.3 Recommendations

As noted in our conclusions, we consider that there is little in the programme's delivery model, and in its management and operating structures that merit any substantial change. The Evaluation Team's key recommendations relating to the Leader Programme are detailed below:

1. Invest NI should continue to fund the Leader Programme in its current guise (or in one broadly similar to that currently delivered) for those businesses that can demonstrate a need for, or have the potential to significantly benefit from, such support;
2. Demand for the Programme should be carefully considered, and should be completed taking account of Invest NI's suggested new segmentation model. In particular, this activity could take two forms:
 - Consider and ensure that there is alignment between the Leader Programme and the stage of development of prospective participant businesses and other key segmentation variables e.g. growth potential, the ambition to scale etc. Demand for the Programme should be carefully considered, and should be completed taking account of Invest NI's suggested new segmentation model.
 - Consider whether a slightly adjusted model is needed for different sectors or types of businesses (e.g. HPSUs);
 - Consider whether there are potential participants amongst Invest NI's 'Tracked Client' businesses that could benefit from the programme.
3. Once this segmentation and demand analysis is completed, and given the potential impact on participant businesses and in time Invest NI's KPIs through improved Leadership and Management, there may be merit in Invest NI considering whether participation in Leadership and Management supports (such as the Leader Programme) could be mainstreamed amongst those businesses identified as being likely to benefit from participation. For example, should participation be a pre-condition before other support is provided?
4. Linked to the two previous recommendations, but perhaps a wider recommendation than for the Leader Programme in isolation, it was suggested by a member of Invest NI's SMT that Invest NI does not yet articulate well the need for leadership at different levels in a business, with there being some lack of clarity as to what the Leader Programme actually is and under what circumstances a business might require it. On this basis, the Leader Programme Team should consider how the Programme is promoted within Invest NI, so as to ensure all relevant stakeholders have a good understanding of the Programme and the types of businesses that could benefit from it;

5. Secure the cooperation of past participants (perhaps in the form of sector-based Leader Programme Champions) to act as advocates for the programme (e.g. so that they might share their experiences of the Programme and its impact with other businesses)³⁴;
6. Enhance communication in relation to the programme's operation, so that participants are aware of the flexibility that is available to them (in terms of choice of coach/mentor and the quantum of days support that they can avail of). This could be achieved in a number of ways that should not prove overly cumbersome e.g. present a slide at the first group session, send an e-mail once the business has committed to participate etc.
7. Given the complexities that exist in relation to measuring the impact of leadership focussed interventions, careful consideration should be given to the most appropriate type of indicators that should be applied to the Leader Programme. In particular, the Evaluation Team recommends that Invest NI reconsider the appropriateness of the 'outcome' indicators that have been established for the programme, including the blanket target of 90% achievement.
8. In relation to programme monitoring, Invest NI should reduce to one the number of Excel workbooks utilised relating to the programme's financial management.

³⁴ It is understood that the Leader Programme Team has brought past participants to Invest NI to present to Client Executives on the benefits they achieved. Video case studies have also been prepared so this recommended business-to-business activity represents a natural extension of current practice.