

Prosper

Supporting the business of culture

Evaluation of, and Learning from, Prosper Business Support Project

Final Report

Centre for Business in Society (CBIS), Coventry University

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Executive Summary

The Prosper Business Support Project

- In mid-2016, Arts Council England (ACE) launched a call for proposals to deliver 'business support targeted at the arts, museums and libraries sector'. The call was deliberate in targeting a very broad and diverse business population mix of sub-sector, enterprise, organisation, and activity.
- Business support was taken to mean "providing specialist information, guidance and advice to build the capacity of the organisation. This can include, but is not limited to, support for strategic planning, governance development, financial planning, investment readiness, alternative business models, understanding impact, using digital technology, environmental sustainability, diversification of income and HR capability".
- Creative United was grant funded by ACE (£400,000) for the period December 2016 to 31 May 2018 to develop and deliver Prosper. A further £55,000 (and beyond the expected 10% match funding contribution) was raised by Creative United from other funders (Access – The Foundation for Social Investment, Creative Scotland, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Heritage Lottery Fund) and programme partners (Centre for Business in Society (CBiS) at Coventry University and the Arts Marketing Association (AMA)).
- Over a nine-month period, the project provided one-to-one business advice, workshops, masterclasses, webinars and a free-to-access online business support resource to 70 arts organisations, museums and libraries.
- The model was based on a credit system whereby businesses could spend their allotted twelve credits (equivalent to 12 hours of support) on their chosen support activities, having been matched with a specialist Business Advisor.
- As part of Prosper, CBiS at Coventry University was commissioned to provide research and evaluation services. This is the Final Evaluation Report on Prosper.

Key Findings: Delivering business support to the cultural creative sector

- Prosper was designed from previous understandings of 'what works' in business support to the sector, alongside meeting the specification request for regional coverage across the diversity of the arts, museums and libraries sector.
- Design included a credit system allowing clients to self-select from a suite of business support activities (Business Advisor and/or Group Learning events as well as free to access online resources).
- Prosper was very successful in engaging the target sector, achieving 416 online registrations, and 208% of its contracted target.
- Of the 416 organisations that registered, 259 completed and submitted the online application form with key information. This number comfortably exceeded the target of 150 applications from eligible organisations.
- A total of 231 businesses and organisations completed both the application and Diagnostic Tool – a requirement to be considered for the final cohort of 70 Prosper clients.
- Analysis of application data confirmed Prosper's successful engagement and recruitment of the diverse target market - by art form, geography, size, business / organisational type, and life stage.
- Two-thirds of applicants had not used business support in the previous two years. Those that had showed evidence of impact of increased confidence against a range of business development skills in comparison to the broader applicant population.
- Applicants who were not selected for Prosper received an element of 'business support signposting', through a Diagnostic Tool report, feedback on their application and signposting to

other business support resources. Prosper had limited success achieving 'paid for' business support beyond the cohort.

- Over the nine-month project, Prosper achieved high levels of participation (87% of credits used, minimal client drop-out) and high levels of satisfaction (95% would recommend a Prosper project to peers).
- Usage was overwhelmingly through Business Advisors (91% of 715 Prosper hours used), with very high client satisfaction.
- Group Learning events, whilst still positively received, had more mixed client satisfaction related to matching breadth, depth and level of content across participants. The online resources of AMA CultureHive were underutilised.
- Good practice and lessons learned have been created. Three key areas are:
 - *market engagement* (sector, geography);
 - *client choice* within a support offer which, critically, includes 1:1 specialist Business Advisors;
 - *project management* which understands and actively manages an 'intermediary and brokerage' role between client businesses and Business Advisors (successfully matching need, demand and supply).

Key Findings: Prosper business support Outcomes and Impacts

- Prosper generated a range of data, from a number of different methods, which details the outcomes and impacts of its support on clients. This data is both quantitative and qualitative, pre- and post-project in some cases, from clients and the delivery team.
- Overall, following Prosper business support, and across different data collection methods, there was an increase in confidence expressed consistently by the cohort as a whole for all of the business development outcomes.
- Generally, there was greatest uplift in confidence for the weakest business development areas prior to the project. In some instances, reduced individual scores reflected organisational learning and a recognition of a 'misconception' of the level of understanding and skill of a business function held prior to support.
- Evidence for a sub-set of 'key' outcomes demonstrates the Prosper cohort moving towards greater commerciality and/or diversity of funding and/or resilience. This concerns:
 - new products or services, 18% of clients had launched such an outcome and a further 50% planned to do so;
 - 17% had diversified their funding and a further 67% planned to do so;
 - a relatively high 27% of respondents were implementing investment readiness steps, but only 25% planned to do so, and almost half had decided not to.
- A range of evidence provides examples and illustrations of a possibly more profound and deeper sense of organisational and business development, reflecting potentially longer-term impacts on future development and resilience.
- On exit from Prosper the cohort reported an understanding of the value of business support:
 - 95% stated that they would recommend a programme like Prosper to their peers; and
 - 82% stated they would invest in more business support in the future.
- In slight contradiction, only 62% stated that they would 'very likely' or 'definitely' use business support in the future, and 37% 'somewhat likely'. Some evidence suggests that this contradiction may reflect a continued aversion to the term 'business support' and its connotations, given the dual concepts of cultural and commercial value that exist within the target sector.

Meeting the aims of the ACE Business Support Call

Table ES1 provides a high-level assessment of Prosper’s achievements against the aims of the Business Support Call, and as set out in the Prosper partnership agreement with ACE.

Table ES1: Prosper - meeting the aims of ACE Business Support Call

ACE Aim	Prosper	Evidence base
<p>AIM 1: Improve the resilience of the arts, museums and libraries across the cultural sector nationally by investing in bespoke business/investment readiness support.</p>	<p>Business support programme offering free 1:1 advice, workshops, masterclasses and webinars and online resources for an estimated 70 organisations across the arts, museums and libraries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 70 arts, museum and libraries businesses and organisations supported nationally (80% from outside London) - Additional project investment leveraged from high profile partners and funders - High utilisation rate and high levels of client satisfaction - Wide range of strong evidence of business development outcomes across the cohort - Range of evidence of organisational steps to resilience (cultural change, learning and actions, recognition of value of business support)
<p>AIM 2: Improve understanding of building financial resilience in the sector and what resources are needed in this area, providing evidence to support decision making on longer term national business support investment.</p>	<p>Research and evaluation activities to assess the business development needs, demand and journeys of the cultural creative sector in England and Scotland, particularly through Prosper.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Business Support and the Cultural and Creative Sector in England and Scotland: A Review</i> (2017) - <i>Business Support and the Cultural and Creative Sector in England and Scotland Review: Scottish Survey Module</i> (2018) - Learning Workshops (London and Edinburgh) and Policy Workshop (London) - <i>Evaluation of, and Learning from, Prosper Business Support Project</i> (2018)
<p>AIM 3: Engage with partners nationally to promote co-ordination and provide information more widely on current activities in these areas.</p>	<p>Engagement and Dissemination of knowledge and information on support available to the wider arts/cultural sector.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prosper partners, Funders, Steering Group and Learning Workshops (London and Edinburgh) and Policy Workshop - Prosper engagement, recruitment and launch activity - <i>Compendium of Business Support for the Cultural and Creative Sector</i> (completed 3 times, March 2017 to March 2018) - Addition of 58 pieces of content to AMA CultureHive website - <i>Arts Professional</i> articles, newsletters, social media, presentations

Supporting understanding of cultural creative business support and investment

There is particular interest in the experience of Prosper and the generation of evidence to support decision making on longer term national business support investment to the cultural creative sector.

Table ES2 places the evidence and learning from Prosper within the conceptual policy framework of the 'business support journey' and the process of successfully matching business demand with support supply to achieve maximum economic, social, and in this case cultural, benefits to society.

Table ES2: Learning from Prosper: the business support journey and the cultural creative sector

The Business Support Journey	Conclusion to draw from Prosper experience
<i>Businesses made aware of business support provision and its value</i>	Demonstrated the existence of a high level of national demand for bespoke business support from (the full diversity of) the cultural creative sector
<i>Businesses engage with business support system</i>	Latent demand was accessed by Prosper – only a third of applicants had used business support in the previous two years. Prosper overcame information failure in the business support system
<i>Businesses access business support</i>	A cohort of 70 organisations participated in Prosper Of those who responded, only a third of the unsuccessful Prosper applicants undertook business support activity subsequently within six months of their application Signposting not strong enough and/or other supply not attractive enough? 'Missed opportunity'?
<i>Supply is appropriate and matches need/demand</i>	Participation in and utilisation of Prosper was very high Very small tail of low use due to 'capacity' issues or 'content matching', both of which could be at least partially addressed through lessons learnt
<i>Client satisfaction</i>	At project level, very high satisfaction (demand/need and supply successfully matched) 1:1 Business Advice very highly regarded. Confirms 'what works' for clients Group Learning activities medium satisfaction (partially address through lessons learnt)
<i>Business outcomes</i>	Strong increase in confidence across components of business development (vision, business model, plan, income generation, etc.) Evidence from entrants that previous support delivered business outcomes Small number of 'key' outcomes on new products, funding diversity, investment readiness Variety of evidence of moving towards greater commerciality and/or diversity of funding and/or resilience

<p><i>Impacts</i></p>	<p>Exiting businesses understand the value of business support, recognise appropriate supply, and willing to invest in supply</p> <p>'Backlash?' against 'investment readiness' and continued evidence of cultural aversion to 'language of business support', but not to its activities</p>
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Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Prosper has been a successful national investment in business support to improve the resilience of the arts, museums and libraries.

Prosper was over-subscribed, highly utilised, delivered to high client satisfaction, achieved a range of business development outcomes and clients have demonstrated organisational steps towards resilience.

Conclusion 2: Prosper has demonstrated aspects of 'what works' and good practice in business support to the arts, museum and libraries sector, based upon the 'managed brokerage' of 1:1 business advice.

Key to Prosper achievement of client satisfaction and outcomes has been the *active matching and relationship management* of a network of sector specialist advisors with clients, as part of a flexible support offer of a suite of activities (1:1, group, online).

Conclusion 3: Prosper has confirmed (Arts Council England) evidence of national demand for tailored business support for cultural creative organisations.

Applications for Prosper from across the diversity of the sector exceeded places available several times over, with even greater registered interest expressed. Two thirds of applicants had not used business support in the previous two years.

Conclusion 4: Evidence from Prosper suggests gaps in, and under-utilisation of, business support provision to the cultural creative sector.

Prosper outcomes included substantially increased knowledge about sources of business support by clients but under-utilisation of online resources. On exiting Prosper, clients expressed the value of appropriate business support and a willingness to invest in future support. In contrast, the limited evidence available on unsuccessful applicants suggested that, in the main, they had not gone on to access other provision.

Conclusion 5: The cultural creative sector continues to demonstrate an aversion to the 'language of business support', but not to its activities.

Prosper demonstrated strong commitment to business development, enterprise and innovation that is driven and shaped by the histories, missions, value systems and 'hybrid' business models of the cultural creative sector. These drivers are only partially reflected by much of the language of business support, and even possibly discouraged by others (such as 'investment readiness').

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Invest in tailored business support to the cultural creative sector to fully access latent and expressed demand and maximise the development of a culture of enterprise, innovation and sector resilience.

Recommendation 2: Future business support programmes should recognise the continued evidence base for the effectiveness of tailored business advice through sector-based advisors.

Recommendation 3: Continue to reflect the culture, values, organisational diversity and languages of the cultural creative sector to ensure the delivery of efficient and effective business support.

1 Introduction

1.1 Arts Council England Business Support

In mid-2016, Arts Council England (ACE) launched a programme call for proposals to deliver ‘business support targeted at the arts, museums and libraries sector’. The call was deliberate in targeting a very broad and diverse business population mix of sub-sector, enterprise, organisation, and activity.

For the purposes of the call, business support was taken “to mean providing specialist information, guidance and advice to build the capacity of the organisation. This can include, but is not limited to, support for strategic planning, governance development, financial planning, investment readiness, alternative business models, understanding impact, using digital technology, environmental sustainability, diversification of income and HR capability”.¹

ACE recognised applications for existing support from the sector showed evidence of demand nationally, including calls for tailored and bespoke provision. The aim of the programme was to address that need and increase knowledge of current availability of support and potential gaps in provision.

Creative United was grant funded by ACE (£400,000) for the period December 2016 to 31 May 2018 to deliver a business support project. It was delivered by Creative United in partnership with the Arts Marketing Association (AMA) and the Centre for Business in Society (CBiS at Coventry University). Additional funders to the core funding of ACE were: Access – The Foundation for Social Investment, Creative Scotland, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Heritage Lottery Fund.

1.2 This Report

As part of Prosper, CBiS at Coventry University was commissioned to provide research and evaluation services: to support understanding of provision and demand/need for business support services for the cultural creative sector; and provide evidence to support decision making on longer term business support investment.

A number of activities have taken place during the project including: the repeat production of a *Compendium of Business Support*; a research report *Business Support and the Cultural and Creative Sector in England and Scotland: A Review*²; Learning Workshops in Edinburgh and London, and awareness raising and dissemination (presentations, practitioner pieces³, social media, etc.).

This Report provides a Final Evaluation of the Prosper Business Support Project.

1.3 Evaluation objectives

The overarching objective of the evaluation is to assess the contribution of Creative United’s Prosper project against the aims of the ACE call:

- **Aim 1:** improve the resilience of the arts, museums and libraries across the cultural sector nationally by investing in bespoke business/ investment readiness support;

¹ ACE (2016) Business Support programme, Guidance for applicants. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/business-support#section-3>

² <http://www.creativeunited.org.uk/about-us/news/first-prosper-research-review-released-by-coventry-university/>

³ <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/article/achieving-productivity-and-mission-boost>

- **Aim 2:** improve understanding of building financial resilience in the sector and what resources are needed in this area, providing evidence to support decision making on longer term national business support investment; and
- **Aim 3:** engage with partners nationally to promote co-ordination and provide information more widely on current activities in these areas.

In meeting these aims, impacts are expected to:

- strengthen the organisations who have received direct support from this programme;
- increase awareness across the sector of current business support offers; and
- increase understanding of the needs of the sector and how well they are currently met.

1.4 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation has involved a number of data collection and evaluation activities, including:

- Review of project documentation, including bid material, contract and development of a project logic model;
- Monitoring information on activities, deliverables and outputs;
- Interviews with delivery team and stakeholders;
- Outcomes assessment based upon a pre- and post- participant Diagnostic Tool, outcomes reporting, exit surveys, and case studies with clients; and,
- Policy review and workshop.

1.5 Structure of the Report

The remainder of this Report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides a description of the Prosper project, including its objectives, Partners, expenditure and activities;
- Section 3 sets out a detailed assessment of the activities and outputs of Prosper, client experiences and delivery lessons learned;
- Section 4 provides an assessment of the business and organisational outcomes generated by Prosper; and
- Chapter 5 presents Conclusions and Recommendations.

Annexes provide supporting material including:

- Annexes 1 and 2 contain selected results from the Prosper Client Exit Survey.

2 The Prosper Business Support Project

2.1 Project description, aims and objectives

Creative United was funded for the period December 2016 to 31 May 2018 to develop and deliver Prosper. The project provided free one-to-one business advice, workshops, masterclasses, webinars and an online business support resource to 70 arts organisations, museums and libraries.

The project included research on the needs and provision of business support among cultural organisations and an evaluation to share the outcomes of Prosper and lessons learned.

Working within the overall aims of the Call, Prosper's aims were to:

- provide bespoke business development advice to arts, creative and cultural organisations across England;
- provide (where appropriate) investment readiness support and access to finance and social investment to arts, creative and cultural organisations across England;
- strengthen the business development knowledge and commercial skills of key decision makers and leadership teams within the cultural creative sector;
- undertake research and evaluation to assess the business development needs, demand and journeys of the cultural creative sector in England and Scotland, including charities and social enterprises delivering social impact; and
- collect, document and share information on the current provision of business support and funding opportunities open to organisations in the cultural creative sector, including charities and social enterprises delivering social impact.

2.1.1 The project partners

The project partners comprised those supporting delivery and funders of the project:

- **Creative United (CU):** *Accountable body* for the project, providing project management and the substantial majority of delivered activity, including through their network of freelance Business Advisors;
- **Arts Marketing Association (AMA):** specialist non-profit membership organisation for arts and culture supporting awareness raising and dissemination by editing and publishing online content for their CultureHive website;
- **Centre for Business in Society, Coventry University:** provide research and evaluation on business support for the cultural creative sector and Prosper.

Additional Prosper funders were:

- **Access – The Foundation for Social Investment:** Given their interest in the business development needs of arts and cultural organisations which are charities or social enterprises and deliver social impact;
- **Creative Scotland:** as the national development agency for the arts and creative industries in Scotland, and given their on-going interest in business support to the sector, Creative Scotland funded a small extension to the research activity to cover Scotland. This entailed extension of the literature review to cover Scotland, *Business Support and the Cultural and Creative Sector in England and Scotland: A Review*, a bespoke extension of the business Diagnostic Tool as a survey tool including reporting⁴, and

⁴ Henry, N. Broughton, K. and Hastie, C. (2018) *Business Support and the Cultural and Creative Sector in England and Scotland: Scottish Survey Module*. A Report to Creative Scotland, January.

delivery of a Learning Workshop to survey respondents and broader stakeholders at Creative Scotland, Edinburgh.

- **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF), Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (EFF) and Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF):** each with an interest in supporting the financial resilience and commercial capacity of the creative and cultural sectors.

2.1.2 Project investment

Under the terms of the ACE award, Creative United needed to achieve at least a 10% match of cash funding to set against ACE funding of £400,000.

Table 2.1 sets out the match funding achieved across a range of project funders and through earned income equating to £55k of match and an additional 14% of ACE project funding leveraged.

Table 2.1 Prosper project funding

Organisation	'Match' Funding
Creative United	c. £5,700 <i>(earned income)</i>
Arts Marketing Association	£2,550
CBIS, Coventry University	£7,000
Access	£10,000
Creative Scotland	£10,000
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation	£10,000
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	£5,000
Heritage Lottery Fund	£5,000
TOTAL	£55,250

To ensure an ACE objective that a minimum of 75% of their Lottery funding is spent outside London, it was agreed that no more than 20% of benefit from the funding would be delivered to London-based organisations.

2.2 Management arrangements

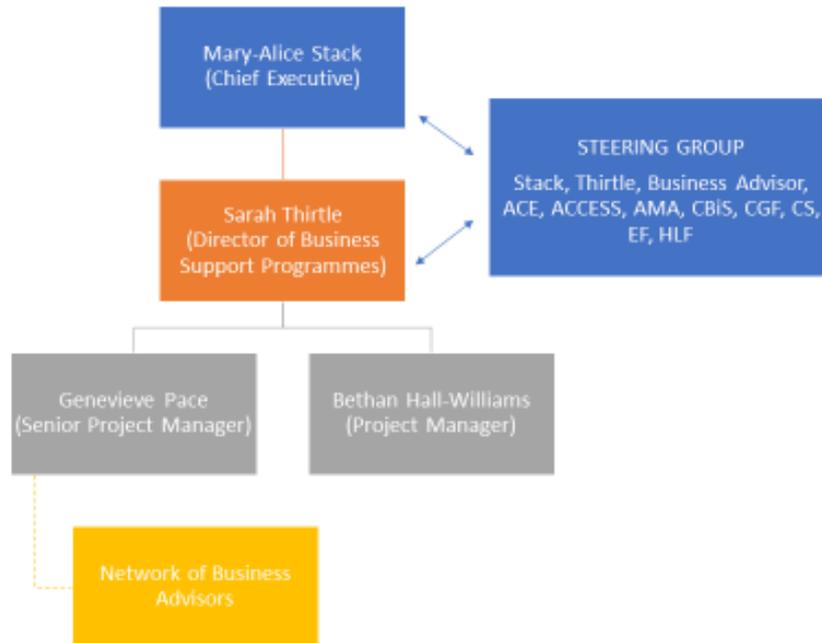
Creative United managed and delivered the project through a central Business Support Project Team and a network of Business Advisors. Oversight and advice were provided by a Steering Group (see Figure 2.1).

All of the Partners, and a Business Advisor involved in delivery, held a place on the Steering Group and which, in addition, included an ACE Relationship Manager.

The Steering Group was chaired by one of the Funders, Access, and met five times over the seventeen-month duration of the project. Agendas were pre-circulated along with Minutes and Actions generated.

Meetings included Inception, at cohort selection and at Final Evaluation reporting stage and which included an extended Policy and Recommendations Workshop.

Figure 2.1 Prosper Project Management Structure



2.3 The Prosper intervention logic

The description, aims, objectives, activities and expected outcomes of Prosper can be usefully set out using an intervention logic approach (Figure 2.2 overleaf).

An intervention logic describes the expected ‘theory of change’ implicit in any proposed policy and investment intervention, linking the use of policy resources with expected real-world changes in behaviour to achieve stated objectives. Intervention logics provide the basis of evaluation by defining a series of steps in the project which can both be monitored and guide assessment of project progress and achievements.

In the case of Prosper the intention is to use resources (‘inputs’) to support a cohort of cultural creative businesses (‘activities’) to progress (a range of) business development steps (‘outcomes’), in order to both support a more resilient sector and increase understanding of tailored business support as a policy tool (‘impact’).

Figure 2.2 Prosper project intervention logic

Rationale	Inputs	Activities /Outputs	Intermediate Outcomes	Final Outcomes	Impacts
<p>To provide bespoke business development advice to arts, creative and cultural organisations across England</p> <p>To provide (where appropriate) investment readiness support and access to finance and social investment to arts, creative and cultural organisations across England</p> <p>To strengthen the business development knowledge and commercial skills of key decision makers and leadership teams within the cultural creative sector</p> <p>To undertake research and evaluation to assess the business development needs, demand and journeys of the cultural creative sector in England and Scotland, including charities and social enterprises delivering social impact</p> <p>To gather, document and share information on the current provision of business support and funding</p>	<p>Grant of £400,000 from Arts Council England</p> <p>Match funding of £40,000 from CU and Partners</p> <p>Existing infrastructure created for the delivery of previous programmes (including online application management portal)</p> <p>Network of freelance business advisors with sub-sector expertise contracted by Creative United</p> <p>Experience and lessons from previous programme activities (CIF and CIF Pilot)</p> <p>Brand awareness and credentials established through previous programme activity</p> <p>Established relationships with Industry & Regional Partners across the creative sectors and country</p>	<p>Awareness raising of the launch of the new “PROSPER” programme (website, events, marketing)</p> <p>Applications from Arts/Cultural Organisations (over 2 months)</p> <p>Development and delivery of business support service designed to meet the resilience needs of arts and cultural organisations including museums and libraries across England (70 organisations receive 1:1 business advice - 14 organisations in London; 56 outside; 840 hours of business support from freelance business advisors; 9 free workshops across London and regions; 9 webinars)</p> <p>Desk research and consultation to document ‘what works’ and current provision of business support programmes open to organisations in the arts and cultural sector in England and Scotland (literature review; compendium; call for evidence)</p> <p>Evaluation of the Prosper programme pilot, with a focus on demand dynamics across the diversity of organisations</p> <p>Policy development and practice recommendations (policy review; workshops)</p>	<p>Increased awareness and understanding of the need for business support (including by signposted and supported organisations)</p> <p>Increased knowledge of current business support provision in England and Scotland (including by signposted and supported organisations)</p> <p>Supported organisations have a clear vision, mission and objectives for business development, and are committed to taking these forward</p> <p>Supported organisations exhibit higher levels of confidence and understanding in their approach to business planning and development</p> <p>Supported organisations exhibit higher levels of understanding of commercial potential and/or income generating opportunities</p>	<p>Increased uptake of business support by cultural and creative organisations</p> <p>Supported organisations report a high level of satisfaction in terms of the quality, relevance and appropriateness of advice received during the programme</p> <p>Supported organisations begin to implement newly developed income generation opportunities</p> <p>Supported organisations are deemed investment ready</p> <p>Supported organisations increase diversity of funding and income streams</p> <p>Policy, programme development and practice recommendations</p> <p>Enhanced resource base for the cultural and creative sector, including evaluation and learning</p>	<p>Enhanced access to high quality business support for the cultural and creative sector</p> <p>Enhanced business and commercial skills in the cultural and creative sector</p> <p>Increased awareness of alternatives to grant funding for organisations operating in the cultural and creative sector</p> <p>Enhanced sector partnerships and resource base</p> <p>ACE and other agencies have evidence base to support future investment decisions</p> <p>More sustainable and resilient cultural and creative enterprises.</p> <p>Growth in the contribution of cultural and creative sectors to the economy.</p>

<p>opportunities open to organisations in the cultural creative sector, including charities and social enterprises delivering social impact</p>	<p>Established relationships with Lending Partners made up of social, commercial and alternative finance providers</p> <p>Research and evaluation track record</p> <p>New consortium (Creative United, Coventry University; Arts Marketing Association; Access Foundation)</p>	<p>Collaboration: Prosper consortium and other agencies supporting (a) organisational development and (b) the cultural and creative sector</p> <p>Creation of a resource base to support information sharing and learning within organisational development and the cultural and creative sector (case studies; content; publications; reports)</p>	<p>Increased knowledge of routes to funding and finance, including social investment, by supported organisations</p>	<p>Increased understanding of 'what works' in business support for the cultural and creative sector</p>	
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3 Prosper: The provision of tailored business support to the cultural creative sector

3.1 Key findings

- Prosper was designed drawing from previous understanding of ‘what works’ in business support to the sector, alongside meeting the specification request for regional coverage across the diversity of the arts, museums and libraries sector
- Design included a credit system allowing clients to self-select from a suite of business support activities (Business Advisor and/or Group Learning Events as well as free to access Online Resources)
- Prosper was very successful in engaging the target sector, achieving 416 online registrations, and 208% of its contracted target
- Of the 416 organisations that registered, 259 completed and submitted the online Application Form with key information. This number comfortably exceeded the target of 150 applications from eligible organisations
- A total of 231 businesses and organisations completed both the application and Diagnostic Tool – a requirement to be considered for the final cohort of 70 Prosper clients
- Analysis of application data confirmed Prosper’s successful engagement and recruitment of the diverse target market - by art form, geography, size, business / organisational type, and life stage
- Two-thirds of applicants had not used business support in the previous two years. Those that had showed evidence of impact of increased confidence against a range of business development skills in comparison to the broader applicant population
- Applicants who were not selected for Prosper received an element of ‘business support signposting’, through a Diagnostic Tool Report, feedback on their application and signposting to business support resources. Prosper had limited success achieving ‘paid for’ business support beyond the cohort
- Over the nine-month project, Prosper achieved high levels of participation (87% of credits used, minimal client drop-out) and high levels of satisfaction (95% would recommend a Prosper project to peers)
- Usage was overwhelmingly through Business Advisors (91% of 715 Prosper hours used), with very high client satisfaction
- Group Learning Events, whilst still positively received, had more mixed client satisfaction related to matching breadth, depth and level of content across participants. The online resources of AMA CultureHive were underutilised
- Good Practise and lessons learned have been created. Three key areas are:
 - *market engagement* (sector, geography);
 - *client choice* within a support offer which, critically, includes 1:1 specialist Business Advisors;
 - *project management* which understands and actively manages an ‘intermediary and brokerage’ role between client businesses and Business Advisors (successfully matching need, demand and supply).

3.2 The Prosper delivery model

Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the Prosper project’s potential business support pathways: ranging from businesses engaged through to those clients accepted on to the project and their exit on project completion.

A number of key points in the journey can be identified which are described in the following sections.

Figure 3.1 Prosper business support pathways: from engagement to project completion

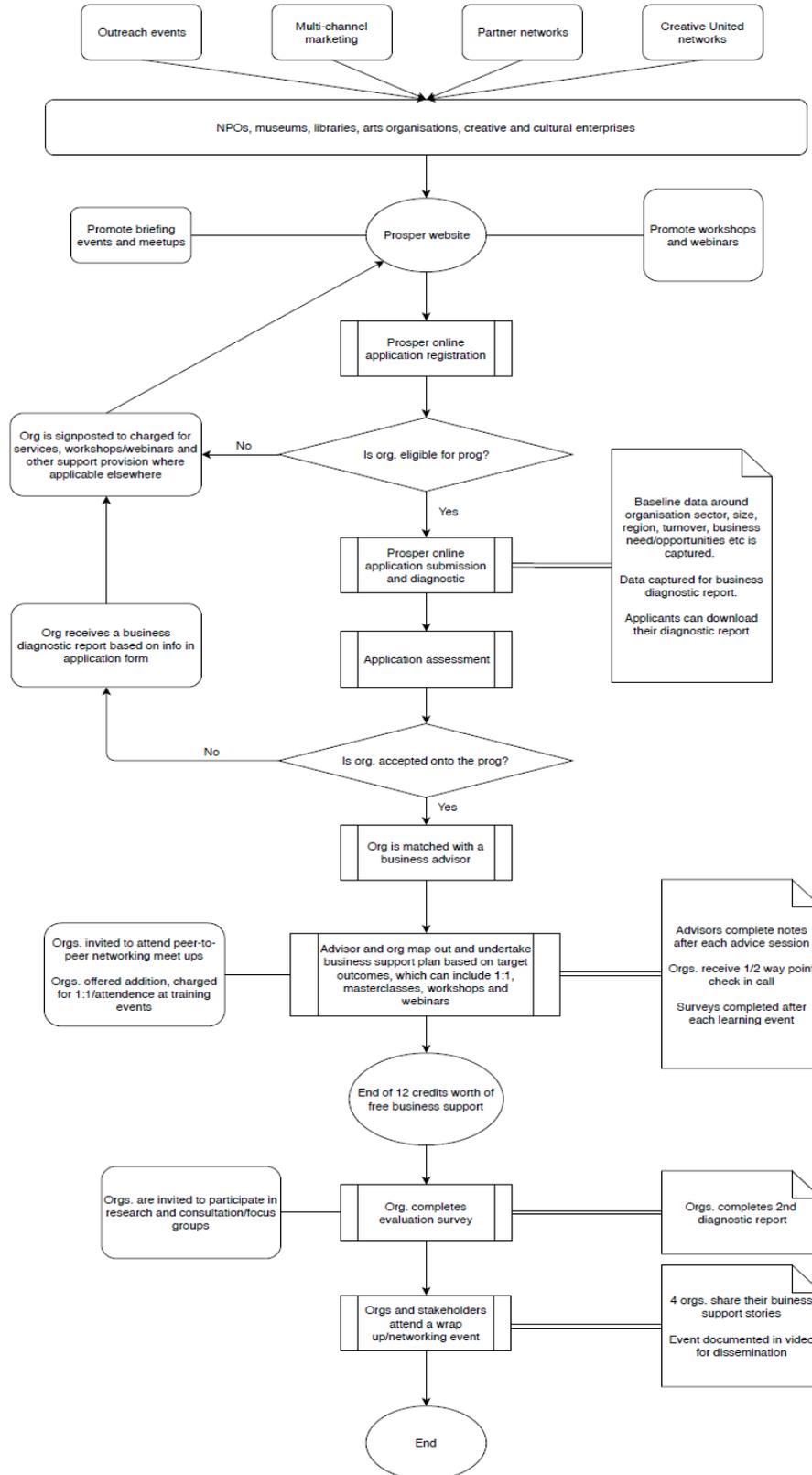
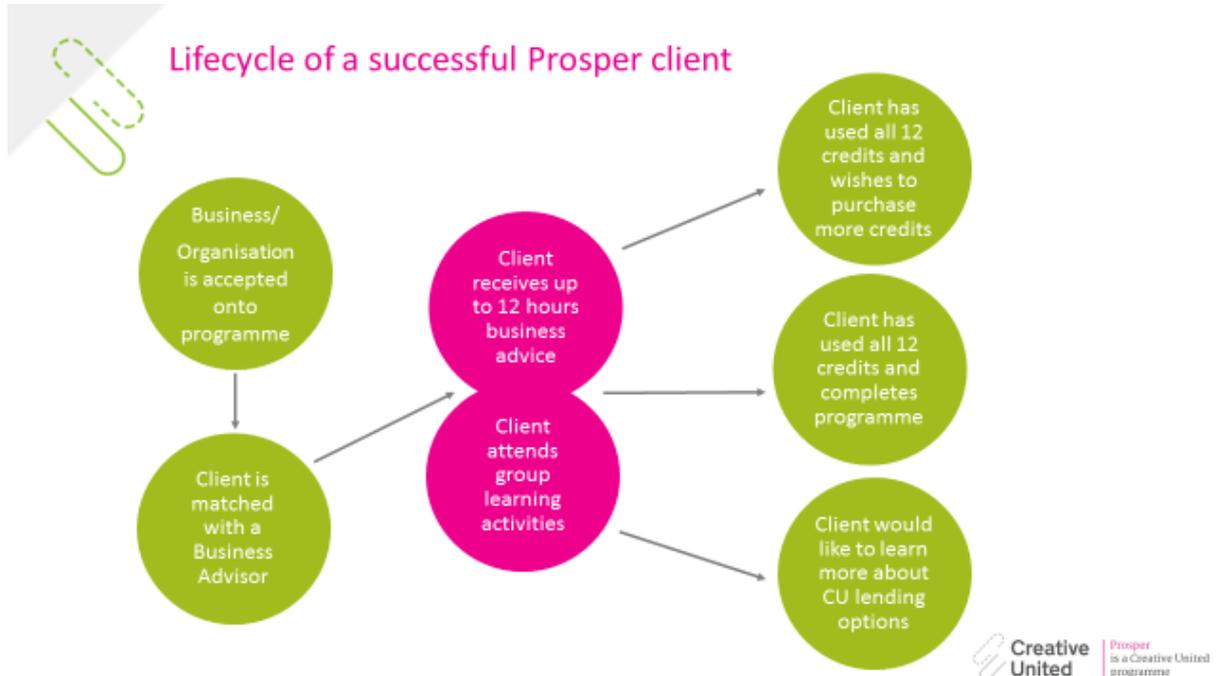


Figure 3.2 describes the business support journey for the 70 organisations accepted on to the project – the Prosper cohort. This entailed entry in to a credit-based system in which participants had 12 credits to spend against a menu of business support activities.

Figure 3.2 Prosper business support: the cohort pathway



Source: Prosper Business Advisor Training Presentation

3.3 Prosper: design principles

Prosper was framed around the aims of the Invitation to Tender specification (see Section 1.3). At high level, these included: to engage the cultural sector nationally around business support; deliver bespoke business support across the breadth of the cultural sector; and develop further understanding through research and evaluation.

Within this the Prosper project was built on a number of 'design principles'. These recognised the 'context challenge' of seeking to engage and attract a diverse set of cultural and creative organisations and businesses; potentially with very different positions in recognising the purpose, role and potential outcomes of 'business support'.

Design principles which framed Prosper included:

- *Learning from the past:* The previous ACE funded Creative Industry Finance (CIF) initiative was considered a successful model from which to draw some of the design principles for the Prosper programme.⁵ More broadly it was known that 1:1 Business Advisor engagement is highly valued by sector organisations;
- *The cultural creative sector:* The key need to understand and empathise with the target market, including the importance of delivering a positive experience that would meet expectations;
- *Curriculum design:* Client feedback from CIF highlighted that clients want 'choices', so the flexible 'credit system' was introduced. This offered a mixture of specific organisational support from dedicated Business Advisors along with a curriculum of 'Group Learning events'

⁵ <http://www.creativeunited.org.uk/about-us/news/creative-industry-finance-pilot-programme-evaluation-report/>

- *Relationship management (including online infrastructure)*: by Prosper project team as an ‘intermediary’ between the key client and advisor relationship; and
- *Sector engagement*: including a partnership with sector media partners, regional launches and online resources;

3.4 Awareness raising and the launch of Prosper

Awareness raising for Prosper began almost immediately after the decision award with a Press Release distributed on 7 December 2017.⁶ This began a process of outreach to partners, regional agencies and networks. Creative United utilised its own mailing lists, website and social media accounts as well as featuring in Arts Council England and ArtsAdmin newsletters.

Arts Professional was secured as a media partner to provide extensive access to the creative and cultural sector. Articles were placed on their website, a banner advert displayed, and a dedicated email sent out to their readers – resulting in 8,903 tracked ‘opens’.

Prosper opened for actual applications from 27 March to 31 May 2017, with a series of launch events organised across England during March/April 2017 (see Table 3.1). In total, 7 launch events took place at which Creative United staff explained the format of Prosper, who it was for, the programme curriculum and how to apply. Invited guest speakers such as business advisors and partners took part also and, for those who could not attend any of the regional events, a recording of the London briefing was uploaded online. Total attendance for the events was 235 attendees, ranging from 42 in Coventry to 18 in Hull.

Table 3.1 Prosper Launch Events

Location	Attendees
Coventry	42
Hull	18
Liverpool	33
London	36
Newcastle	32
Norwich	39
Southampton	35
TOTAL	235

Prosper received 416 online registrations, achieving 208% of its contracted target of 200 Registrants.

3.5 Applications to Prosper

Of the 416 organisations that registered, 259 completed and submitted the online Application Form with key information, including a question on their recent use of business support. This number also comfortably exceeded the target applications of 150 organisations.

To be selected for Prosper, applicant organisations needed to complete a further online Diagnostic Tool including greater information about their organisation’s business activities, performance, and business support needs. **A total of 231 businesses and organisations completed both the application and Diagnostic Tool.**

⁶ See, for example, <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/prosper-programme-give-arts-organisations-business-advice>

A full analysis of the applicant organisations is provided in Henry, N., Broughton, K., Hastie, C. and Barker, V. (2017) *Business Support and the Cultural and Creative Sector in England and Scotland: A Review*^{7,8}; a selection of data from this analysis is presented below.

3.5.1 Applicant range

An outcome sought by ACE was for Prosper to engage and support a range of organisations nationally across artform, geography and size.

Concerning artform, 70% of applicants were from ‘the arts’ (primarily ‘performing arts’ or ‘visual arts / photography’), 20% from the creative industries; 6% from museums (fully accredited⁹) and 4% from libraries (publicly funded). This contrasts substantially to the sectoral spread reported by Frontier Economics¹⁰ which sees almost half of the sector by business counts accounted for by IT, software and computer services.

Concerning geography, 53% were from the three regions of London, the South East and South West. This compares to NESTA’s mapping of ‘Creative Businesses’¹¹ in England which is substantially weighted to London and the South East, with an estimated 66% of all creative businesses in the three southern regions. Prosper’s applicant profile was less dominated by these southern regions, with higher shares of organisations across almost all other regions (see Table 3.2 below).

Table 3.2 The Geography of the Cultural and Creative Sector

Region	Prosper Applicants (%)	NESTA – Creative Business Population (%)
London	24.3	40.3
South East	14.7	17.9
South West	13.9	8.2
North West	10.8	7.4
Yorkshire & Humber	10.0	5.1
West Midlands	8.1	5.6
East of England	7.7	9.3
East Midlands	5.4	4.2

⁷ http://www.creativeunited.org.uk/resources/images/Business-Support-and-the-Cultural-and-Creative-Sector-in-England-and-Scotland_FINAL.pdf

⁸ A companion Survey Module was undertaken in Scotland alongside a Learning Workshop also; see Henry, N., Broughton, K. and Hastie, C. (2018) *Business Support and the Cultural and Creative Sector in England and Scotland Review: Scottish Survey Module. A Report to Creative Scotland*

⁹ Fully accredited museums in the UK are members of the Museum Accreditation Scheme, which sets nationally agreed standards for museums in the UK. It defines good practice and identifies agreed standards, thereby encouraging development. It is a baseline quality standard that helps guide museums to be the best they can be, for current and future users. See: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/accreditation-scheme/about-accreditation>

¹⁰ Frontier Economics 2016, *Absorptive Capacity: Boosting Productivity in the Creative Industries*, London: Exhibit 5

¹¹ Mateos-Garcia, J. and Bakhshi, H. 2016, *The Geography of Creativity in the UK*. London: Nesta.

North East	5.0	1.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Concerning size, nearly two-thirds (64%) of Prosper applicants employed between zero and five employees. A further 13% employed between six and ten employees, 11% between eleven and twenty-five employees, and 12% even more employees. The cohort had larger businesses by employment than that reported by Frontier Economics for the sector, but was closer to resembling the employment spread for Arts and Entertainment reported in the annual Small Business Survey.¹²

Other summary characteristics were that a third were charities, the share of sole traders and social enterprises was lower than sector norms and almost two-thirds had received grant funding in the previous three years. The median age of organisations across the cohort was seven years old.

Overall, 43% had an annual turnover of less than £50,000 per year, and 54% of less than £100,000 – similar to the 47% with less than £100,000 annual turnover for Arts and Entertainment reported in the Annual Small Business Survey. The median age of organisations across the cohort was 7 years old. Of the applicants providing data, 65% were able to forecast some level of turnover growth in the forthcoming financial year, whilst 35% expected contraction.

Libraries

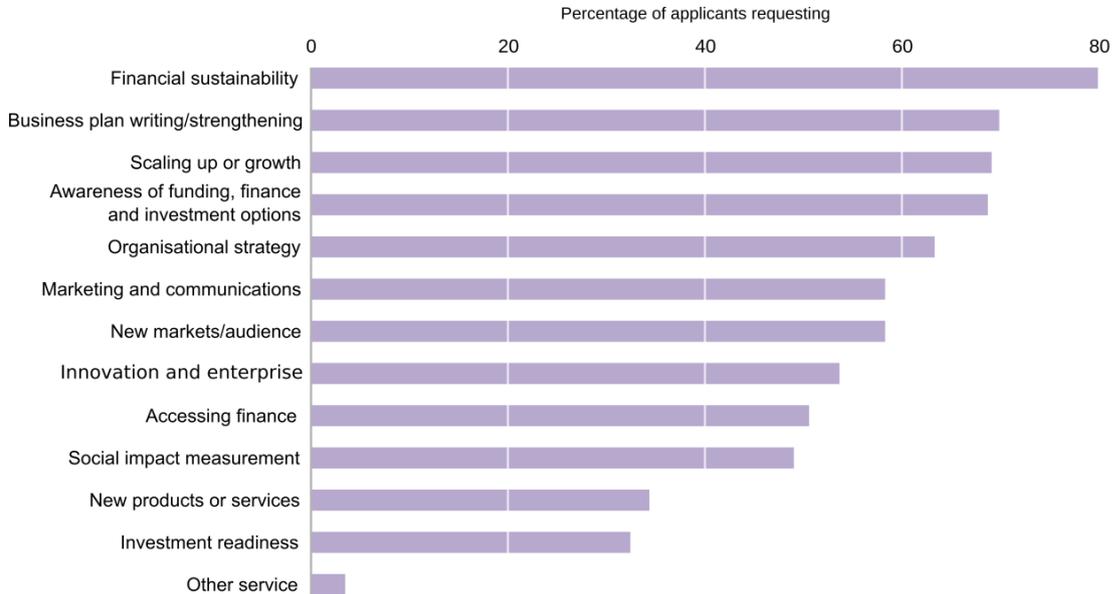
One aspect of the project was that it was successful in engaging libraries as part of the diversity of the sector. This did raise some early issues and ‘work-throughs’ given that invariably these were part of much larger organisational structures, including Local Authorities.

3.5.2 Business support needs and skills

When presented with a list of business support needs and asked to identify those with the most potential benefit (see Figure 3.3), respondents stated their top business support need was ‘financial sustainability’ (80%), followed by ‘business plan writing/strengthening’ (70%), ‘scaling up or growth’ (69%) and ‘awareness of funding/finance and investment options’ (69%).

¹² BIS (Department for Business Innovation and Skills) (2016) Longitudinal Small Business Survey Year 1 (2015): SME Employers. BIS Research Paper 289. London: BIS

Figure 3.3 Business Support: Stated Areas of Most Potential Benefit

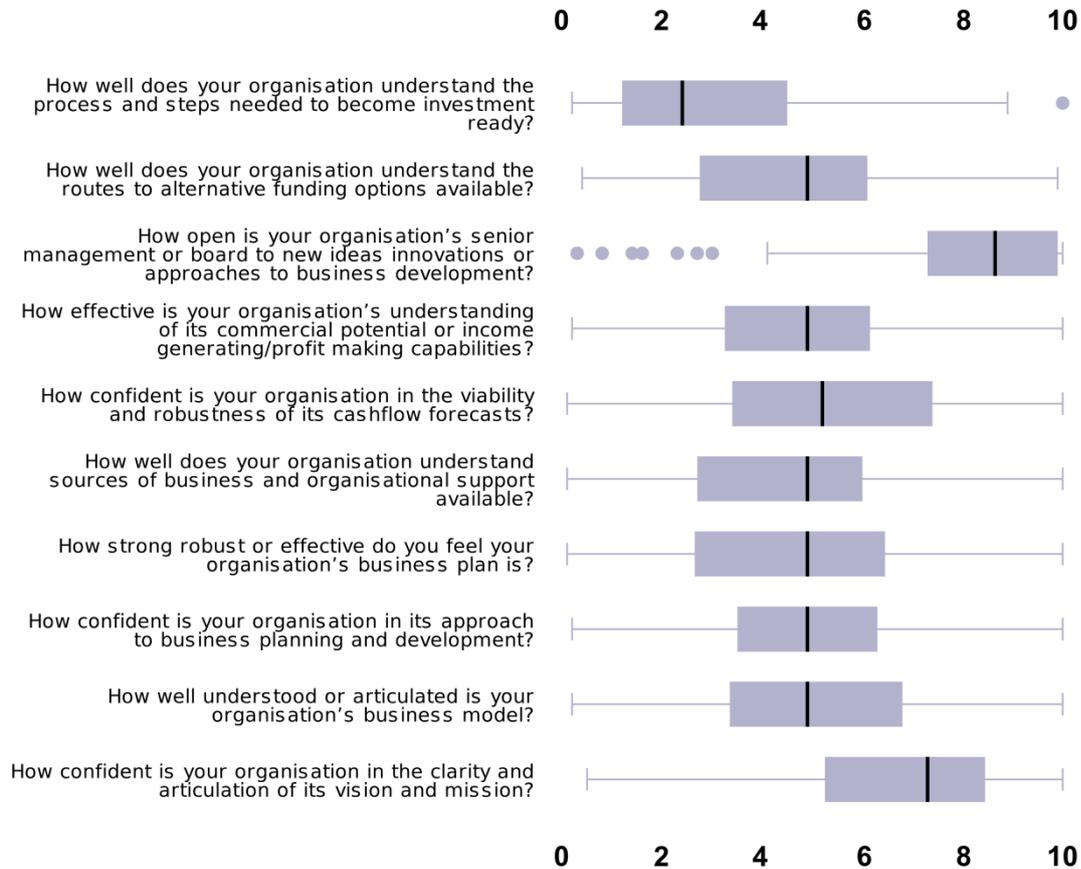


It was notable that the lowest rated support need required by organisations was ‘investment readiness’ support (32%), given that Prosper applicants stated they were least confident about understanding the process of becoming ‘investment ready’ (see Figure 3.4 below).

Applicants were asked to score (out of 10) their organisation’s strengths across a number of business planning and organisational development topics (see ‘box and whisker plot’¹³). Organisations were most confident about ‘openness of management to new ideas, innovations or approaches to business development’ and ‘articulation of their vision and mission’, but least confident about the ‘steps needed to become investment ready’.

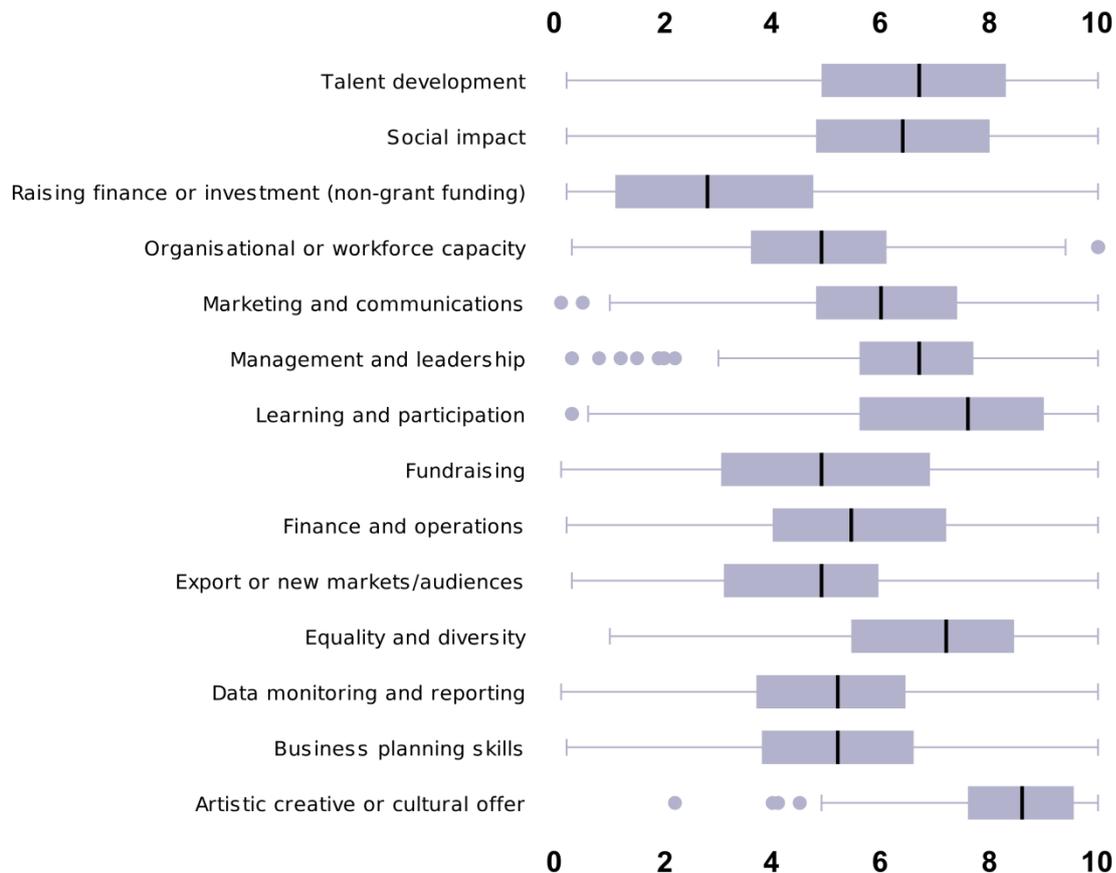
¹³ ‘Box and whisker’ plots provide an indication of the distribution of data. The black bar within the purple box represents the median, i.e. half the values are to the right of this line, and half to the left. The ends of the box represent the first and third quartiles, i.e. 50% of cases fall within the box, with 25% to the right and 25% to the left. The ‘whiskers’ extend for 1.5 times the length of the box (i.e. 1.5 times the interquartile range), or to the edge of distribution if that is less. Points beyond the whiskers represent individual outliers in the data. Where they are present, ‘extreme outliers’ (over three times the interquartile range beyond the box) are represented by asterisks.

Figure 3.4 Business Planning and Development Strengths and Weaknesses



Applicants were asked to score (out of 10) their organisation's business skill sets (see Figure 3.5 below). Organisations ranked their 'artistic, creative or cultural offer' and their 'learning and participation' offer highly, along with 'talent development' and 'social impact'. Organisations ranked their ability to 'raise finance or investment (non-grant funding)', 'fundraising', 'organisational and workforce capacity', and 'export or new markets/audiences' much lower.

Figure 3.5 Business Skill Sets



3.5.3 Previous use of business support

Of the 259 organisations that applied to Prosper, in the last two years, **35% (90) had received business support, whilst 65% (169) had not received business support in the last two years.**

Those previously using business support were:

- Neither more likely or less likely to be from any particular sub-sector (except in the case of 'Digital media and the web', where less business support was used);
- Somewhat more likely to be from regions other than London;
- More likely to have received Arts Council England funding in the previous three years, although there was no significant relationship between any particular scheme and use of support;
- More likely to be a 'not-for-profit' or 'social enterprise', rather than 'for profit';
- More likely to be a 'company limited by guarantee' (which might include incorporated charities), in terms of legal status;
- More likely to be a little older (11 year median rather than 7 year median); a large number of younger organisations had not used business support in the last two years;
- Most likely to have 6 to 25 employees, rather than smaller than this;
- More likely to have a mid-range (or very top range) turnover (£101k and upwards);

- Just as likely to ask for business support as non-users of previous business support; and,
- Neither more likely nor less likely to offer a positive growth forecast.

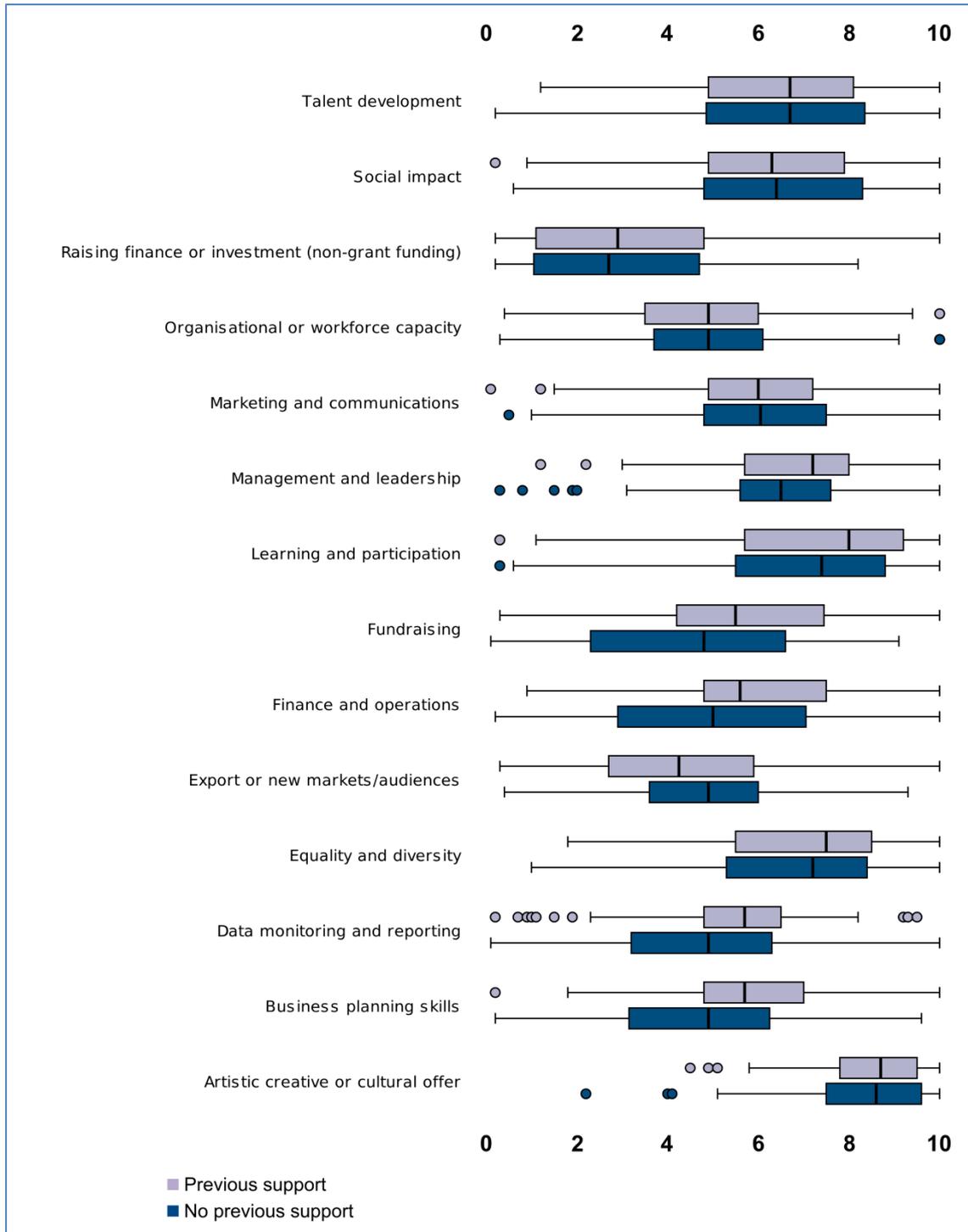
There were statistically significant differences between organisations receiving past business support and those which did not regarding *business planning and development*. Those that had received previous support reported greater ability regarding:

- Understanding their business model;
- Sources of business and organisational support;
- Data monitoring and reporting;
- Finance and operations; and,
- Fundraising.

There were also statistically significant differences between organisations receiving past business support and those which did not concerning *business skill sets* (see Figure 3.6 below). Those that had received support reported greater ability regarding:

- Business planning skills;
- Data monitoring and reporting;
- Finance and operations; and
- Fundraising.

Figure 3.6 Business Skill Sets, by Previous Business Support

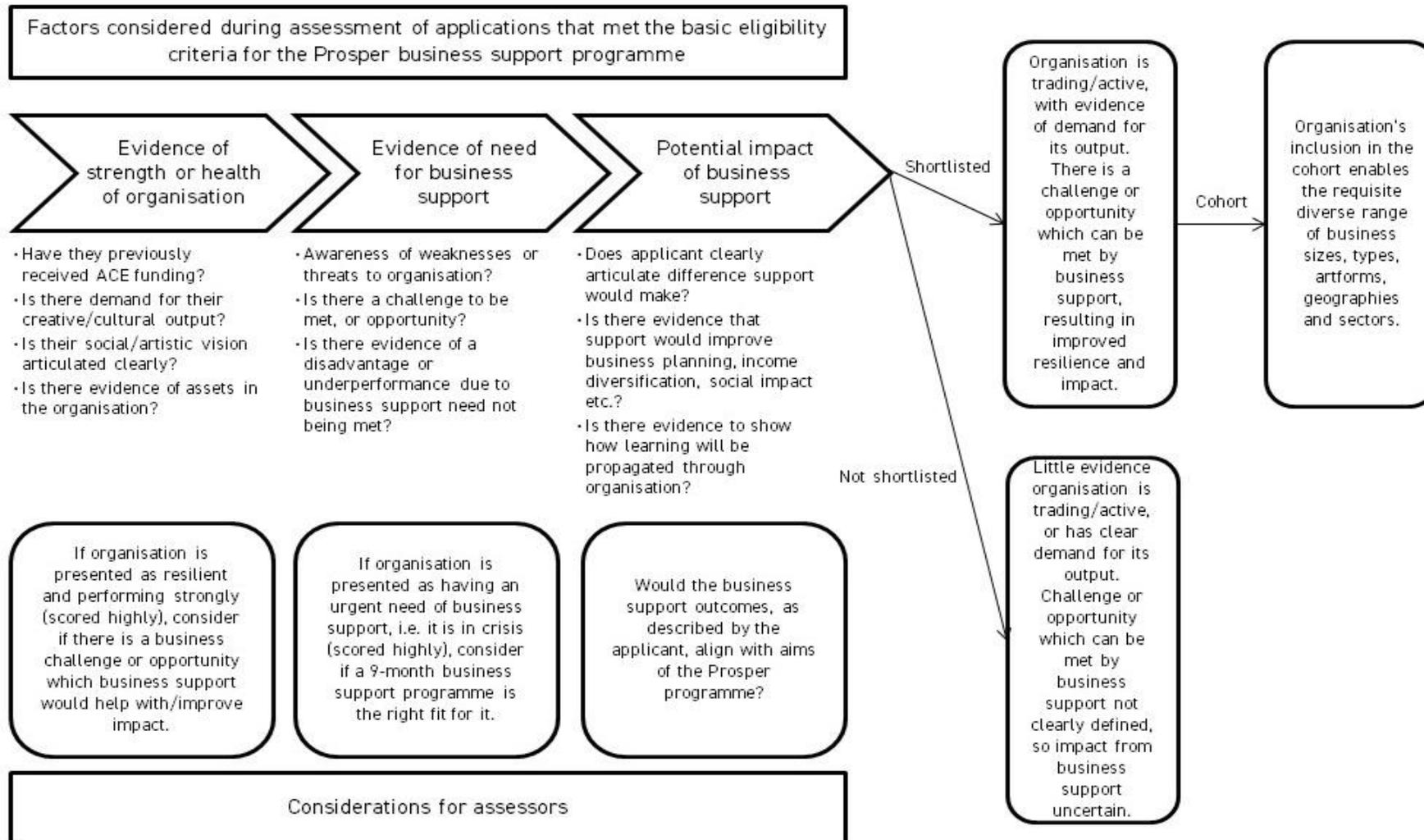


3.6 The Prosper cohort and its selection

A total of 231 organisations entered the selection process.

Figure 3.7 details the selection criteria and shortlisting process.

Figure 3.7 Selection of the Prosper cohort



An initial list of 70 organisations with 5 reserves was identified. On invitation, only 2 of the original choice decided not to go forward.

The final cohort reflected and matched the balance of the applicants as a whole.

3.7 Signposting and supporting unsuccessful applicants and alternative business support journeys

For each applicant, completion of the Diagnostic Tool created a summary Diagnostic Report.

This Report formed part of the decision process for each application, with a Summary paragraph generated for each applicant, including any analytical insight.

Unsuccessful applicants, then, received a Diagnostic Report, written (and if wanted, verbal) feedback on their application, and signposting to forthcoming 'paid for' Prosper business support or other applicable support provision elsewhere, such as ACE's Building Resilience programmes.

3.7.1 Instigating business support journeys

Whilst a high number of applicants were not able to be accommodated onto Prosper, the opportunity was taken to investigate 'possible business support journeys' given initial engagement had been achieved with registrants.

A total of 189 applicant organisations that did not make the final Prosper cohort of 70 were emailed a two question survey approximately 6 months after their original application to ascertain any subsequent business support journey. A total of 26 responses were received (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 Business support journeys by unsuccessful Prosper applicants

	No.	%	
Used business support in the last two years and did not access further support after Prosper decline	7	27	69% did not continue their business support journey
No use of business support in the last two years and did not access further support after Prosper decline	11	42	
Used business support in the last two years and did access further support after Prosper decline	3	12	31% continued their business support journey
No use of business support in the last two years and did access further support after Prosper decline	5	19	

Table 3.3 provides further insight in to business support and the sector:

- In total, 31% (8) of the respondents continued their business support journey after their unsuccessful application to Prosper - but 69% did not highlighting 'unmet demand'; and,
- Those who continued the business support journey included businesses that had not received business support in the previous two years (19% of all respondents).

3.7.2 Achieving ‘paid for’ business support through Prosper

A minor element of Prosper was to test the ‘paid for’ business support market using Prosper as a platform. This entailed a number of possibilities:

- Prosper clients paying for additional credits within the Prosper project;
- Non-Prosper clients paying to access Group Learning events where appropriate such as Webinars and Masterclasses;
- Prosper clients paying for additional business support services triggered by, but beyond, the Prosper offer.

In total, Prosper achieved almost £6k of ‘earned income’ based, principally, on selling Group Learning Event activities beyond the Prosper cohort and additional Business Advisor hours.

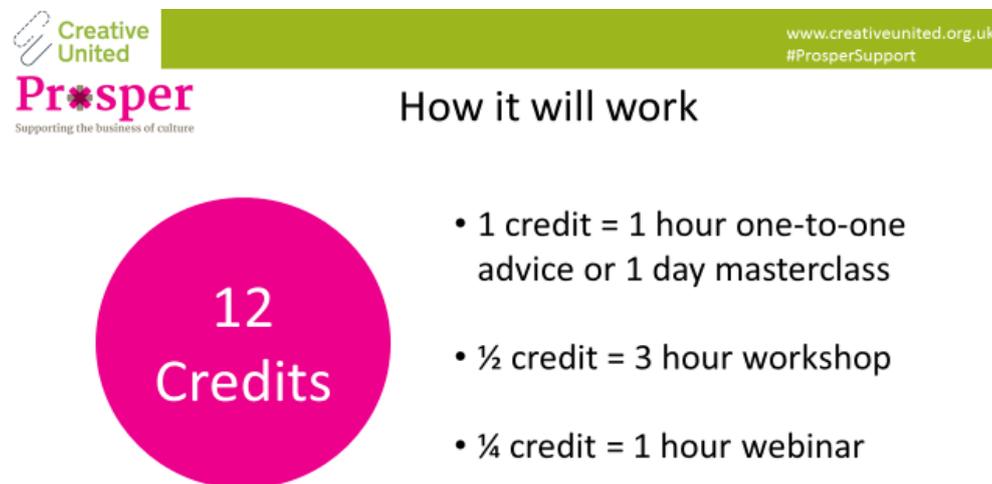
In addition, Prosper has triggered on-going advice relationships between some organisations and their Business Advisors. This activity sits outside of Prosper per se but is an example of how Prosper has triggered investment in business support beyond the life of the project by cultural creative businesses.

3.8 Prosper activities and client satisfaction

3.8.1 Activities delivered and overall satisfaction

Acceptance on to the Prosper programme provided entry for the organisation or business to 12 credits of business support. Credits could be ‘spent’ on a suite of support products, with different tariffs, ranging from face-to-face business advice with a matched Business Advisor to a range of Group Learning events (webinars, workshops, masterclasses, etc., Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8 Prosper Business Support



Source: Prosper Launch/Briefing Presentation

Of the 840 credits available under Prosper (70 x 12), a total of 731 or 87% were used. In total, 40 (57%) organisations used all their credits, 26 (37%) used between 6 and 12; and 4 used less than 6 credits suggesting, at worst, a drop-out rate of only 6%.

The project Exit Survey asked appropriate clients why all of the credits available had not been taken up. The following reasons, by group, were provided:

- Capacity (lack of time or staff available) (7 responses)
- Wanted to use with Advisor but time ran out (3)

- Nothing relevant on programme menu to use (3)
- Too selective / too many hours (1)
- Format required didn't match with remaining hours left (1)
- Was no business need at that later point in the programme (1)
- London-based events / sessions too far/expensive to get to (1)

Of the 715 hours of support time used by Prosper clients:

- 91% (652) were utilised with a *Business Advisor*, and
- 9% (63) on *Group Learning Events*, which entailed a mix of Masterclasses, Workshops and Webinars. In total, 81% of organisations engaged in a group event equating to 210 individuals.

Three *Meet Ups* were organised also, with varying attendance success, and a well-attended *Prosper Wrap Up* event in Coventry.¹⁴

AMA CultureHive provides an online repository of learning materials, toolkits, videos and other resources that were promoted to and open to all clients, as well as the sector at large.

Concerning Prosper specifically, 58 pieces of content were generated for the repository during the project – ranging from business advice topics to client interviews and experiences. Over 4,000 unique page views were generated by Prosper content with, for example, topics such as business planning¹⁵ and growing your audience¹⁶ being of particular interest. Over 600 resource downloads were achieved.

Overall, the Prosper cohort expressed a high level of satisfaction with 95% (57 out of 60 respondents) rating the client service as 'good' or 'excellent' and none as 'poor'. Similarly, 95% (57 out of 60) stated that they would recommend a business support programme like Prosper to a peer, suggesting valuation of business support into the future.

3.8.2 Satisfaction by activity

Table 3.4 presents the results of the Exit Survey on client satisfaction across the various activities delivered under Prosper.

¹⁴ <http://www.creativeunited.org.uk/about-us/news/prosper-715-hours-of-support-70-organisations-25000-miles/>

¹⁵ <http://www.culturehive.co.uk/resources/creating-business-plans-to-get-excited-about/>

¹⁶ <http://www.culturehive.co.uk/resources/knowning-and-growing-your-audience/>

Table 3.4 Prosper client satisfaction by activity

Please score the usefulness of the different elements of the programme (1 = not useful, 5 = extremely useful). If you didn't attend or use certain resources, you don't need to complete that specific line.

RANKING	1	2	3	4	5	Responses
1:1 support	0.0% (0)	3.4% (2)	10.2% (6)	22.0% (13)	64.4% (38)	59
Masterclasses	8.8% (3)	5.9% (2)	29.4% (10)	23.5% (8)	32.4% (11)	34
Workshops	12.9% (4)	9.7% (3)	16.1% (5)	41.9% (13)	19.4% (6)	31
Webinars	4.7% (2)	25.6% (11)	20.9% (9)	39.5% (17)	9.3% (4)	43
CultureHive	11.1% (2)	16.7% (3)	27.8% (5)	33.3% (6)	11.1% (2)	18
Meet ups	12.5% (3)	12.5% (3)	33.3% (8)	20.8% (5)	20.8% (5)	24

Overall, there was a very high level of satisfaction expressed with **1:1 Business Advisor** support. In total, 64% of clients gave it the highest ranking of 'extremely useful' and 86% gave it the top two rankings.

Only two clients reported any problems with Business Advisors in the Exit Survey, noting:

- Distance for the Business Advisor to travel to see client;
- Not knowing how to use or make the best of a Business Advisor;
- Advisor not knowing enough about the business to ask the 'right' questions; and
- The temptation to 'save' hours with the Advisor for later, when they felt they might need them more (as developments took place, for example).

The second most highly ranked activity was **Workshops**, with 61% of clients giving them the top two ranking, but 23% giving them one of the lowest two scores.

There were two Workshops: (a) 'Articulating your vision, mission and values' and (b) 'Gearing up for growth'. A total of six half-day Workshops were delivered. The most popular Workshop was 'Articulating your vision, mission and values' with 75% (or 12 out of 16 clients) ranking it as very beneficial or quite beneficial. The other Workshop ('Gearing up for growth'), saw 50% (or 5 out of 10 clients) ranking it as very beneficial or quite beneficial.

Six one day **Masterclasses** were delivered on two topics - 'The Business Model Canvas' and 'Identifying and monetising your assets and IP' – with 56% of clients giving them one of the top two satisfaction scores.

The most popular Masterclass was 'The Business Model with 75% (or 12 out of 16 clients) ranking it as very beneficial or quite beneficial. The other Masterclass ('Identifying and monetising your assets and IP'), saw 50% (or 10 out of 20 clients) ranking it as very beneficial or quite beneficial.

One-hour **Webinars**, covering nine topics, were generally given middle ranking satisfaction scores. They covered nine different topics: Knowing and growing your audience, Writing a business plan, Social impact and investment, Introduction to 'Theory of change', Community and the potential of the crowd, Understanding your USP, The funding and finance matrix, Encouraging innovation, and Marketing for sales.

The most popular Webinar was 'Understanding your USP' with 75% (or 9 out of 12 clients) ranking it as very beneficial or quite beneficial. The least popular Webinar was 'Social impact and investment', which saw 29% (or 2 out of 7 clients) ranking it as very beneficial or quite beneficial.

AMA CultureHive provided an online repository of learning materials, toolkits, videos and other resources that were open to all clients. Client survey rankings were generally positive, but it is noticeable that, whilst a free to access resource, only 18 of the 60 respondents answered this question. In addition, in the end of the project Business Advisor Survey, a third of Advisors reported that they were unaware of these resources and their availability.

There were three **Meet Ups** throughout the Prosper programme (Hull, London and Sheffield) with a total of 20 attendees. A Wrap Up event was also delivered at the end of the programme. Ranking of Meet Ups was 'mixed' and influenced by very poor attendance at one of the events.

In conclusion, Business Advisor support was overwhelmingly the support of choice and highly valued.

Group Learning events were generally strongly valued but with some evidence of problems of 'match' in terms of expectations, prior knowledge and content level. CultureHive was under-utilised despite its open (non-credit) access.

Box 3.1 provides a range of examples of client opinion on the Prosper project expressed in the Exit Survey (and see Annex 1).

Box 3.1: Prosper and client satisfaction

The Prosper cohort comprised seventy organisations. Only 6% failed to use more than half of their business support credits offered and the substantial majority used all of their credits.

Sixty organisations completed the Exit Survey. Of those, 57 (95%) said they would recommend a project like Prosper to their peers.

Client responses (no. in brackets) to an open question on ‘thoughts, feedback or suggestions’ about Prosper, when grouped by common response, included:

Prosper programme has been <u>very</u> well received / appreciated	14
Business Advisor especially was <u>very</u> helpful indeed	12
Would like to have more influence on choice of Advisor, not just ‘matched’	6
It’s been very challenging, but also very insightful	5
Had an initially disappointing experience with our ‘first’ Advisor	4
Used all credits on Advisor (wish we had more credits for Group Learning too!)	4
We struggled with capacity to make the most of Prosper (in its timescale)	4
Group Learning events were not physically accessible / too basic at times	4
We would not have been able to afford such support without Prosper	3
Lost our key org’l lead for Prosper programme (they left etc), so was difficult	2
Our organisation faced major issues, so we couldn’t exploit Prosper fully	2
Group Learning Events were very helpful	1
Perhaps Meet Ups to be made ‘mandatory’ for improved attendance?	1
Cost of travel to events was a barrier sometimes	1
We have actually ‘contracted’ the Advisor for more work	1
Thank you for understanding when we couldn’t continue	1
Great business plan advice	1
Good advice on developing audience marketing / targeting	1
Perhaps support fewer organisations but with more depth of support?	1
Perhaps using more than one Business Advisor, for specific areas of work?	1
Perhaps a specific support package for self-employed / zero-employee orgs?	1
Flexible end date to programme – development doesn’t stop at tax year end!	1
A follow-up / review point w Advisor at 6 mths/1 year after programme end?	1
Being able to ‘contract’ the Business Advisor for more work was not simple	1
Too much emphasis on commercialising arts (campaign for more funding)	1
More face-to-face contact would have been good	1
Make it ‘mandatory’ to engage more than one person from the client org?	1
More organised facilitation of networking at the Wrap Up event?	1

3.8.3 Other business support topics

The Exit Survey asked what topics clients would have liked for the Masterclasses, Workshops or Webinars. The following suggestions, by group, were provided: (see Table 3.5).

Table 3.5 Other potential business support topics listed by Prosper clients

Topic	Mentions
Diversifying income streams; sponsorship; philanthropy; donations	5
Digital Marketing / social marketing / e-commerce platforms etc	4
Managing organisational change / change management	4
Pricing / pricing strategies	3
Governance and board development issues	3
Support specifically tailored to self-employed sole traders	3
Basic financial management / accounting skills	2
HR / managing people / 'managing upwards'	2
Influencing and building partnerships (e.g. for campaigning)	2
Diversity / examples of BME-led organisations	2
Identifying / segmenting / targeting diverse audiences or markets	2
Examples of innovative business models	2
GDPR / Data Protection	1
Non-commercial / non-loan funding sources / using Crowdfunder tool	1
Stakeholder analysis / value chains	1
Examples of successful investment or loan finance	1
KPIs and performance reporting	1
Writing a Business Plan (i.e. beyond the business model canvas one)	1
Strategy development and implementation into reality	1
Social enterprise	1
Where to get more (ideally free) business support	1
Motivating a dispersed team	1

3.9 Delivering Prosper: Good practice and lessons learned

Interviews across stakeholders, the delivery team and clients highlighted several characteristics of good practice and learning.

3.9.1 Market engagement

Prosper was designed and delivered to attract and engage with the broadly defined and diverse 'cultural creative sector'. Within this, an understanding of sub-sectors was incorporated, including sub-sector Business Advisor experience.

Awareness raising through industry partnerships and specialist networks was extensive, including 'feet on the ground' launch events across all the regions in partnership with regional stakeholders and networks. This was driven by Creative United's and AMA's existing presence and embeddedness in the cultural creative sector.

Combined with a free and flexible project offer, substantial, wide-ranging applications were achieved – including from organisations new to business support – which fully reflected the diversity of the cultural creative sector (including sub-sector, organisational form, size and geography).

A subsequent ‘funnel’ process including Diagnostic Tool completion and cohort selection raised thresholds, requirements and client understanding of the commitment required, but this built from the initial success of market engagement.

3.9.2 Client choice

Client choice and flexibility, principally around the ‘spending’ of credits across advice and Group Learning events, was core to Prosper. This was highly appreciated by client organisations but on a number of occasions the ‘act of choosing’ was raised, such as Business Advisors reporting ‘early days hesitation’ to commit too many of the 12 credits or ‘choice leading to some client frustration at the limitations to the breadth, level and content of Group Learning Events offered’.

These instances also highlighted broader comments made by some clients and Advisors, and experienced by the project team – that there was a need to support clients in ‘how to use business support (or in this case Prosper and/or their Advisor)’ given that client choice was a design feature.

This need also became evident precisely because of the success of Prosper in its market engagement and drawing ‘first time’ organisations and businesses in to the business support system.

3.9.3 Project management

Beyond the usual project management practices was the need to manage the ‘intermediary/brokerage role’. The success of the delivery model was critically reliant on the Client-Business Advisor relationship and throughout Prosper and in numerous instances the active management of this role was key.

Staged key points such as ‘matching’, ‘Six-month check’ and ‘Exit’ were strongly managed. Additionally, all parties to the relationship (client, project manager, Advisor) reported the importance of constant managing of the relationship – in positive and negative instances – to ensure value of outcome in a limited time window and with a finite free resource.

“The co-ordination was incredible and a credit to you all”

“Creative United are fantastic programme managers. Where there were bumps or concerns in the programme they worked incredibly well smoothing things out”

(Business Advisor Exit Survey)

Further attention was given also to managing the Business Advisor relationship to ensure quality of delivery (see Box: Prosper and the Role of Business Advisors).

Prosper and the Role of Business Advisors

Building on learning, what works and the infrastructure generated from Creative United's earlier business development programmes (Creative Industry Finance), Prosper was designed around the core offer of 1:1 support from Business Advisors. Creative United recognised that the delivery model adopted by Prosper implied:

- A key project management role of 'brokerage' between client and Business Advisor by Creative United; and
- That the quality and success of Prosper would be strongly determined by the service offered through the Business Advisors.

Twelve Business Advisors were recruited through a process of advertisement, application and interview. This expanded the *sector-based pool* already developed by Creative United, bringing this number up to thirty-seven. Key characteristics of the pool generated included 'sub-sector coverage' with specialisms covering arts, museums and libraries, the particular business drivers of the sector (for example, audience) and coverage of all regions.

Business Advisors were brought together for an Induction Webinar and provided with support materials introducing Prosper, as well as a Business Advisor Handbook and FAQs. Induction included introduction to the digital Advisor Portal for reporting and project management, including tracking client hours and client notes. A Business Advisor sat on the Prosper Steering Group and Advisors were actively involved in evaluation (reporting outcomes, exit survey and interviews).

Key points in the brokerage process were:

- 'Matching' Advisor and Prosper Client based on the completed Diagnostic, with 79% of Advisors reporting they were 'well-matched' with clients. In a handful of instances, subsequent re-matching was managed successfully;
- Six-month check-up (with client and Advisor);
- 'The final push' given only a nine-month project and to ensure full usage of client credits;
- Exit: including reporting, evaluation and on-going relationships; and
- Day-to-day management with support queries raised by email and telephone.

Clients rated Business Advisor support highly, with 86% of responses being in the top two rankings (out of 5) – see Annex 1. Business Advisors rated the level of support received from Creative United highly, 86% suggesting it was 'excellent' and 14% as 'good'.

Business Advisors would have liked a further (paid) event where they could have come together to learn, reflect and network.

4 Prosper business support: outcomes and impacts

4.1 Key findings

- Prosper generated a range of data, from a number of different methods, that detailed the outcomes and impacts of its support on clients. This data is both quantitative and qualitative, pre-and post-project in some cases, by clients and the delivery team
- Overall, following Prosper business support, and across different data collection methods, there was an increase in confidence expressed consistently by the cohort as a whole for all of the business development outcomes
- Generally, there was greatest uplift in confidence for the weakest business development areas prior to the project. In some instances, reduced individual scores reflected organisational learning and a recognition of a 'misconception' of the level of understanding and skill of a business function prior to support
- Evidence for a sub-set of 'key' outcomes demonstrates the Prosper cohort moving towards greater commerciality and/or diversity of funding and/or resilience. Concerning:
 - new products or services, 18% of clients had launched such an outcome and a further 50% planned to do so;
 - 17% had diversified their funding and a further 67% planned to do so;
 - a relatively high 27% of respondents were implementing investment readiness steps, but only 25% planned to do so, and almost half had decided not to.
- A range of evidence provides examples and illustrations of a possibly more profound and deeper sense of organisational and business development, reflecting potentially longer-term impacts on future development and resilience
- On exit from Prosper the cohort reported an understanding of the value of business support:
 - 95% stated that they would recommend a programme like Prosper to their peers; and
 - 82% stated they would you invest in more business support in the future.
- In slight contradiction, only 62% stated that they would 'very likely' or 'definitely' use business support in the future, and 37% 'somewhat likely'. Some evidence suggests that this contradiction may reflect a continued aversion to the term 'business support' and its connotations, given the dual concepts of cultural and commercial value that exist within the target sector.

4.2 Business development outcomes

Prosper measured outcomes through a number of related data collection processes, including longitudinal measurement. These methods involved a range of quantitative and qualitative activities including self-completion of surveys and tools, joint completion, interviews generating written and video material, and both numerical ranking and open question comments.

This range of material is presented below to present a picture of the business development outcomes achieved by Prosper.

4.2.1 Post support Diagnostic Tool outcomes

As part of the application process, each organisation completed a Diagnostic Tool. This Tool included each respondent ranking their confidence on a range of business development outcomes.

The Prosper cohort of 70 was asked to complete the Diagnostic Tool at the end of the project also, including re-scoring their confidence on a range of business development outcomes.

The Diagnostic asked questions on business performance such as turnover and employment and repeated completion allowed some insight on changes over the intervening period. It should be noted, however, that these outcomes should be reviewed with substantial caution.

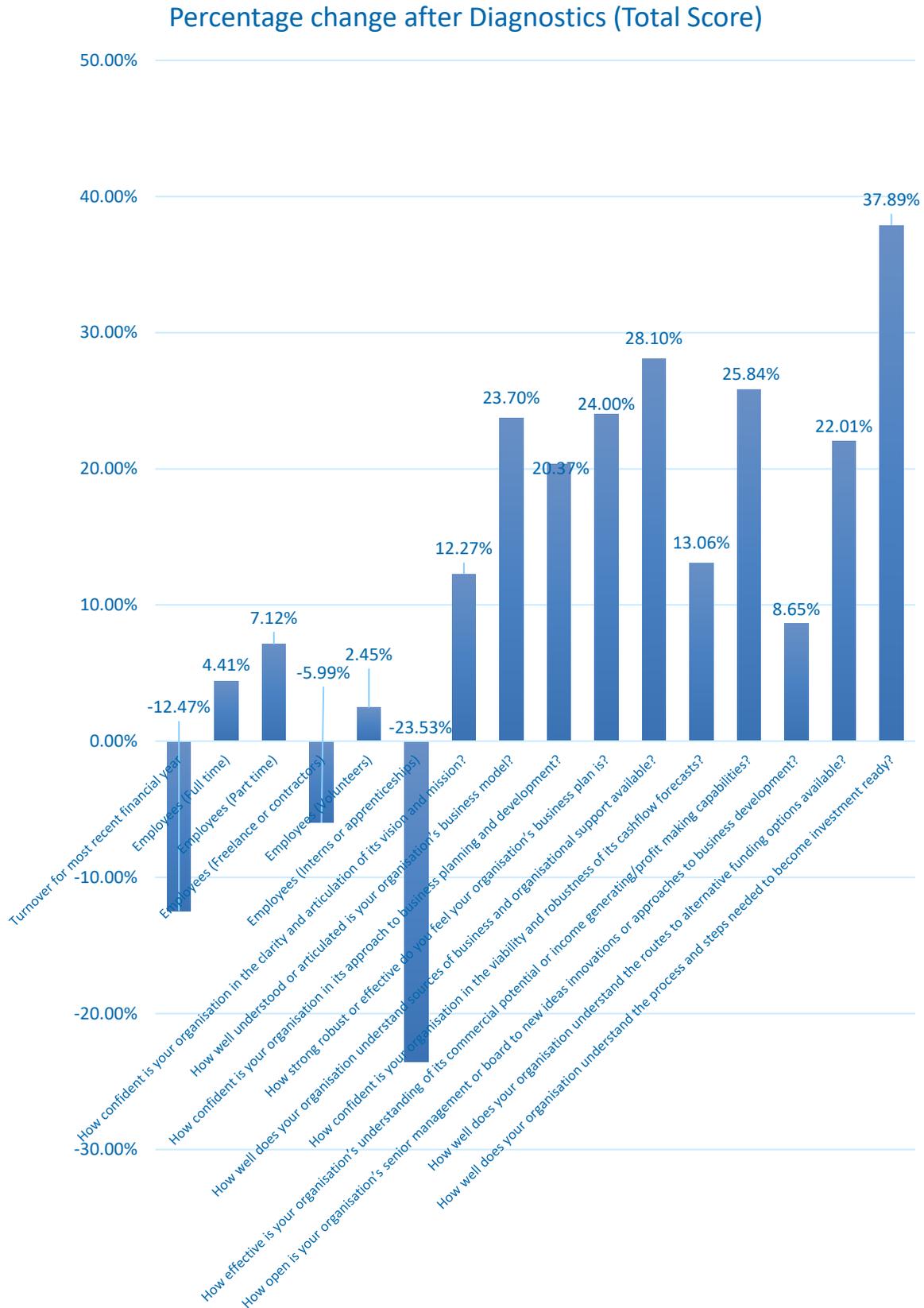
Fundamentally, the project period occurred over a nine-month period i.e. within a financial year and Year End Accounts were unlikely to have been completed at the time of post-project completion. Turnover especially was potentially 'guesstimated' at both Tool completion dates (pre and post). The issue of attribution of outcome is pertinent also; any change in headline business performance *may* be attributable to around a dozen hours of business support but this was not expected (see Section 2 Logic Model) and any change is likely to have been influenced by a number of other factors inside and outside of the business.

The project did expect to influence intermediate outcomes such as confidence around a number of business development activities as reported further below.

It should be noted also that the Diagnostic Tool was a self-completion task, including that only 47 (67%) of the cohort of 70 completed the Diagnostic Tool post project.

Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1 present the outcomes achieved as recorded through the Diagnostic Tool.

Figure 4.1 Prosper Business Support Outcomes, by Diagnostic Tool



Overall, it can be seen that, following business support, there was an increase in confidence expressed by organisations across all of the business development outcomes. In most cases this increase was in the order of around a 25% increase.

Notably, the least increase (9%) was in 'How open is your organisation's senior management or board to new ideas innovations or approaches to business development' but this was the most highly scored in terms of pre-existing confidence by businesses on entering Prosper (see Section 3, Figure 3.4). Similarly, most increase (38%) was in 'How well does your organisation understand the process and steps needed to become investment ready?', which was the lowest scored confidence score when entering Prosper.

On economic outcomes, reported turnover has seemingly decreased by 13%. In contrast, full, part and volunteer employment has increased whilst use of interns and freelancers reduced. We note, again, the need to treat these outcomes with some caution.

Table 4.1 provides further insight in to outcomes by breaking these down across the Prosper cohort.

Table 4.1 Breakdown of Prosper business support outcomes, by Diagnostic Tool

Outcomes (N = 47)	Turnover for most recent financial year	Employees (Full time)	Employees (Part time)	Employees (Freelance or contractors)	Employees (Volunteers)	Employees (Interns or apprenticeships)	How confident is your organisation in the clarity and articulation of its vision and mission?	How well understood or articulated is your organisation's business model?	How confident is your organisation in its approach to business planning and development?	How strong or robust or effective do you feel your organisation's business plan is?	How well does your organisation understand sources of business and organisational support available?	How confident is your organisation in the viability and robustness of its cashflow forecasts?	How effective is your organisation's understanding of its commercial potential or income generating / profit making capabilities?	How open is your organisation's senior management or board to new ideas or innovations or approaches to business development?	How well does your organisation understand the routes to alternative funding options available?	How well does your organisation understand the process and steps needed to become investment ready?
Score went up (N)	13 (28%)	8 (17%)	8 (17%)	8 (17%)	7 (15%)	3 (6%)	24 (51%)	27 (57%)	30 (64%)	29 (62%)	31 (66%)	18 (38%)	28 (60%)	14 (30%)	24 (51%)	15 (32%)
Score went down (N)	11 (23%)	4 (9%)	7 (15%)	7 (15%)	3 (6%)	4 (9%)	3 (6%)	4 (9%)	3 (6%)	6 (13%)	2 (4%)	7 (15%)	5 (11%)	6 (13%)	2 (4%)	11 (23%)
No. of Same (in 47)	23 (49%)	35 (74%)	32 (68%)	32 (68%)	37 (79%)	40 (85%)	20 (43%)	16 (34%)	14 (30%)	12 (26%)	14 (30%)	22 (47%)	14 (30%)	27 (57%)	21 (45%)	21 (45%)

Concerning business development outcomes, the majority of organisations reported an increased score across almost all business development indicators, with the highest increase in score being for understanding of sources of business support (31 of 47 organisations increased their score, or 66%).

In all outcomes a core of 30 – 45% of organisations ‘stayed the same’ but, in several instances, scores went down?

These instances included for confidence in cashflow forecasts, Board’s openness to innovation, and understanding investment readiness. In qualitative comments and interviews with business advisors and the delivery team, this reflected ‘learning’ whereby the support process had seen organisations recognise that they had been ‘over-confident’ in their initial assessment of skills and areas of support need; Prosper had uncovered this misconception.

4.2.2 Business Advisor Outcome Monitoring Form

These forms were completed by Business Advisors, on the commencement of their activity with organisations, and at the end. In many, but not all, cases these were completed jointly by Advisor and business. A total of 60 (86%) were returned against the cohort.

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 set out the outcomes achieved.

Table 4.2 Prosper business support outcomes, by Business Advisor Outcome Monitoring Form

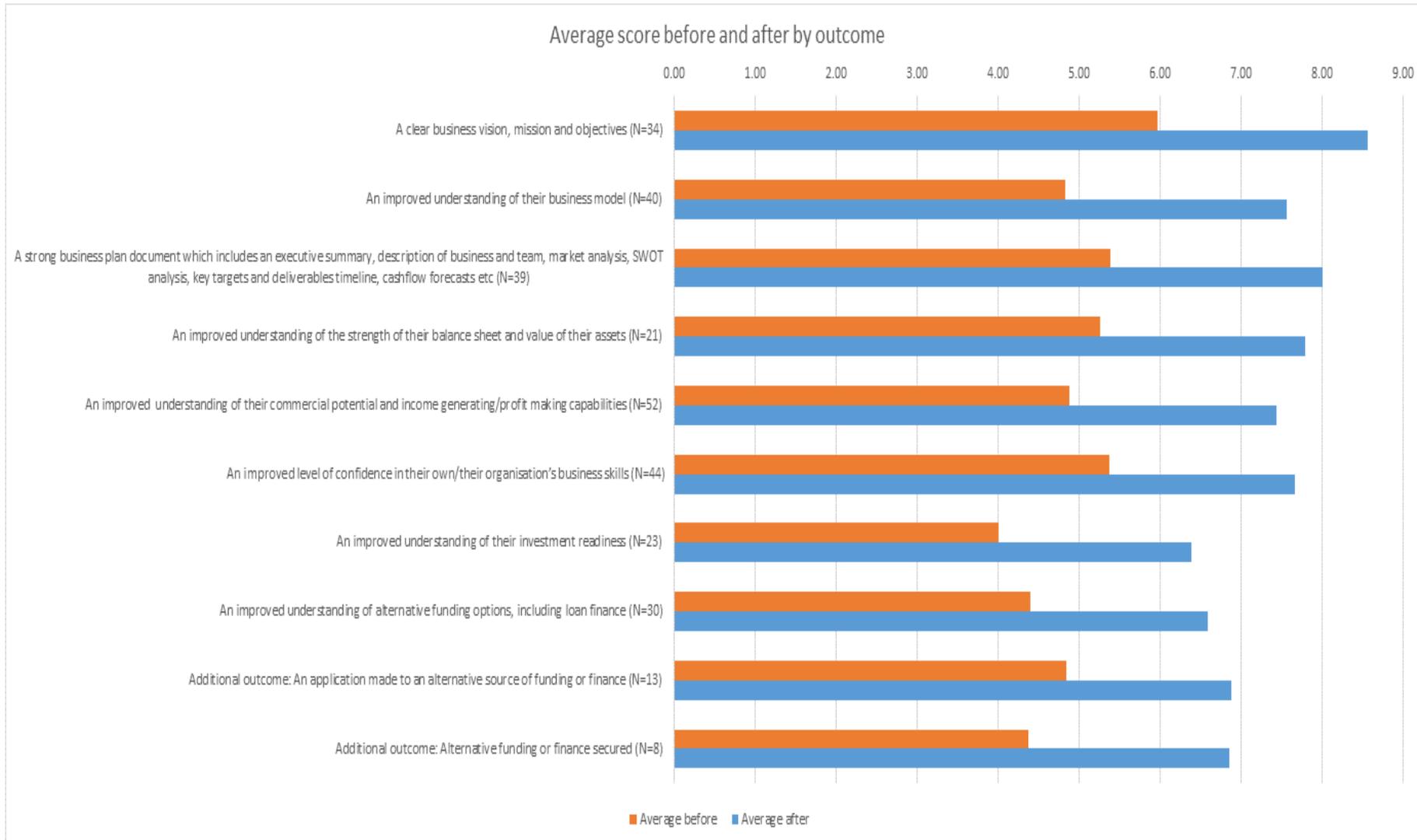
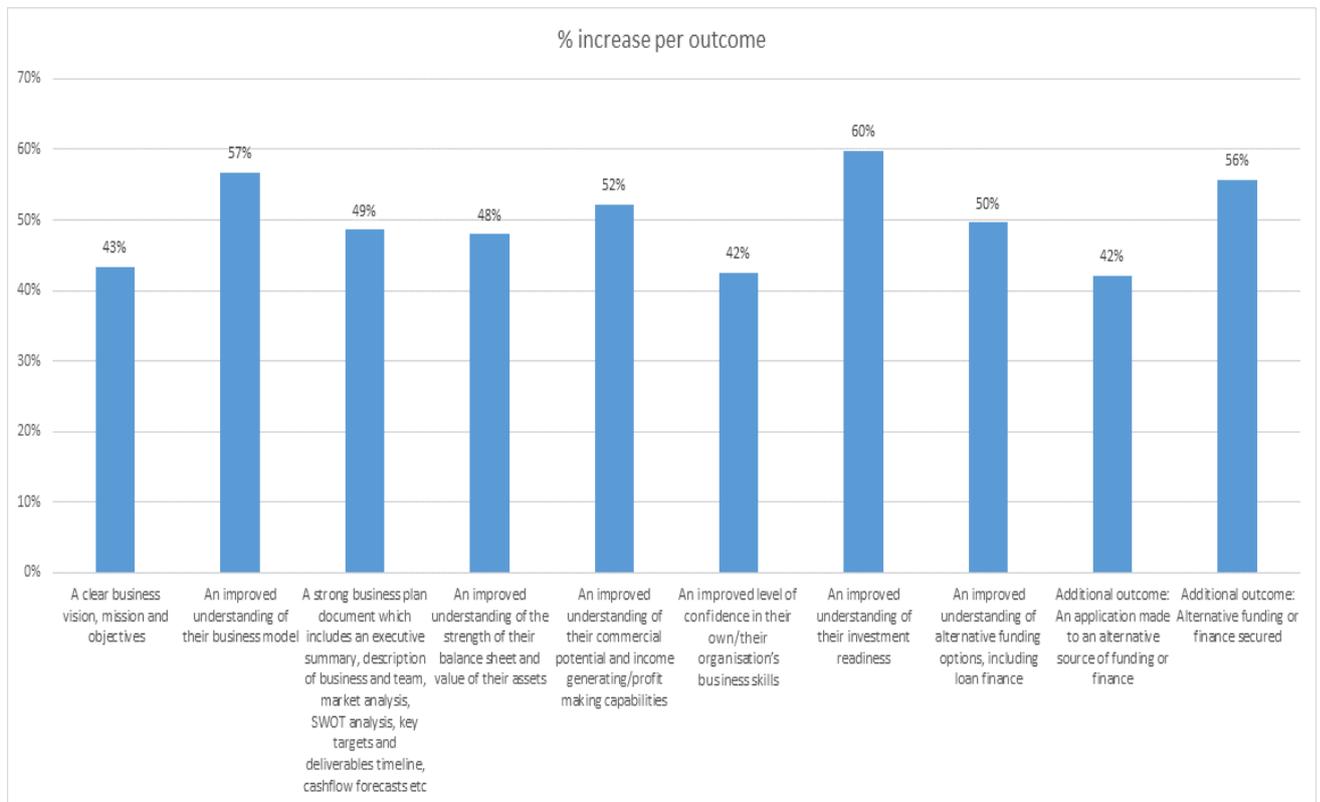


Table 4.3 % increase in Prosper business support outcomes, by Business Advisor Outcome Monitoring Form



Tables 4.2 and 4.3 show a strong and consistent increase in reported confidence for all business outcome indicators following Prosper. Notable, also, is that the rank of level of confidence for each outcome stayed the same before and after Prosper.

These forms were self-completed, including an element of self-evaluation, and a small group of ten clients did not complete the forms post-Prosper.

4.2.3 Post Support Exit Survey Outcomes

Clients further reported on a smaller set of 'key' outcomes as part of the Prosper Exit Survey (Table 4.4). This survey was completed only post-support but with a high response rate, 84% or 59 of the cohort.

Table 4.4 Prosper business support outcomes, by Exit Survey

	Launched new product or service (%)?	Increased diversity of funding streams (%)?	Implemented steps to become investment ready (%)?
Yes	18	17	27
No	32	17	48
Not yet, but plan to	50	67	25

Each of these ‘key’ outcomes demonstrate a business development process towards greater commerciality and/or diversity of funding and/or resilience.

Concerning new products or services, 18% of clients had launched such an outcome and a further 50% planned to. Similarly, 17% had diversified their funding and a further 67% planned to do so.

Interestingly, whilst a relatively high 27% of respondents were implementing investment readiness steps, almost half had decided not to, compared to a smaller remainder planning to do so.

In addition, the Exit Survey asked an open question on ‘Going forward how do you plan to implement learning?’. The question achieved a 100% response rate by survey respondents and **statements on a clear range of business development outcomes** (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Implementing Prosper Learning – Client Comments

Comment	Mentions
Development and re-development of a Business Plan / Business Model	26
Diversifying funding or revenue streams / applying for (new) funding	15
Reconfigure staffing structure or roles, sharing, supporting, mentoring staff	11
Enhancing understanding of budgets / cashflow forecasts (inc pres'n to funders)	6
Enhance our Board (capacity, expertise, engagement, knowledge sharing)	6
Grow our audience / visitors (through a range of tools)	4
Launch and/or grow sales (online or physically via greater exploitation)	4
Implementation of Business Plan (and associated ‘tools’, Matrix, SMART etc)	4
Piloting of new commercial / enterprise initiatives and their evaluation	4
Digital marketing / promotion development	3
Evaluation of ideas / projects	2
Develop the Business Canvas and Plan (within the organisation)	2
‘Audience Value Proposition Tool’ shared/used to evaluate all services	1
Actions to obtain data to better understand our audience	1
Implement a new pricing structure (based on intelligence)	1
Securing investment readiness support (in order to get social investment)	1
Ability to communicate in new markets and for promoting social impact	1
Undertaken a feasibility study (e.g. for new facilities / premises)	1
Enhancing our capacity to deliver contracts/services	1
Stopping doing things that are not commercially viable	1
Regular reflection on core business (and staff)	1
Collaboration / partnership development	1

4.3 Business outcome Case Studies

Three **Case Studies** were undertaken by the Evaluation Team, chosen to reflect a key business outcome reported in the Exit Survey, and where the business agreed to a further interview.

Case Study: 64 Million Artists

64 Million Artists is an organisation that undertakes ‘a national campaign to unlock the potential of everyone in the UK through creativity’. They use a simple, fun and free process: ‘Do, Think and Share’, which supports people to be creative, express themselves, become more confident and connect with others. The organisation works in a number of areas:

- With the arts and cultural sector (including the BBC on Get Creative) to ensure everyday creativity is encouraged and celebrated across the UK.
- With employers to bring fun and regular creativity to the workplace.
- With towns/cities to see what happens when you catalyse larger numbers of people to unleash their potential.
- And with people affected by stress, depression, anxiety or other well-being issues to explore how everyday creativity can make a positive contribution to individual lives across the UK. (Source: <http://64millionartists.com/about/>)

Use of Prosper: 64 Million Artists used all of their allocated 12 credits of the Prosper programme – virtually all on a Business Advisor because it ‘felt so useful’, but this meant missing out on more Group Learning Events and the wider network. However, they did dial-in to the Webinar ‘Knowing and Growing Your Audience’ and attended one of the ‘Meet-Ups’.

Key Business Outcomes: 64 Million Artists reported the following business outcomes from using Prosper:

- They had originally discussed launching a new product, but advice received suggested this goal was further down the line. Instead, Prosper was fundamental in helping to launch a **new digital service** – a digital version of their ‘Do, Think, Share’ activity – and to model the steps needed in the development and delivery of this service.
- This ‘prototype’ free, web-based service supports 64 Million Artists’ mission to be a catalyst for the creativity of everyone in the UK, and contains materials and tutorials intended to enable people to run creative activities and ‘sessions’.
- Prosper support identified that much of the organisation’s activity was taking place in isolation on a commission-by-commission basis. Prosper support drove the organisation to ensure that all of their services were integrated into a more cohesive business model.
- Support included examining how different strands of activity were interlinked, and how they could better commercially develop some existing offers – for example, reviewing how leadership training currently delivered to one client could be repackaged and delivered to other clients in the same sector, essentially expanding their services to other markets.
- The process of thinking more strategically about what they did has **opened up larger scale grant funding streams** outside of their normal commercial, commission-based business model. This has enabled them to ‘roadmap’ a set of activities that will leave them well-placed to secure such investment in the medium term.

Prosper’s support has allowed 64 Million Artists to continue to develop iteratively and via experimentation, but within a realistic framework that crystallises and supports activity geared towards achieving the organisation’s longer-term ambitions for broader sustainable impact.

Case Study: Coney Limited

Coney Ltd are ‘interactive theatre-makers who create games, adventures and play where people can choose to take a meaningful part’:

- Their work takes place anywhere that people gather: theatres, schools, museums, on the streets and online, following the principles of ‘adventure, curiosity and loveliness’.
- The organisation makes ‘play’ with ideas that resonate in the world around us: ‘from the everyday to the extraordinary’.
- Their work is ‘inspired by the belief that the world can be magical place where ordinary people can do extraordinary things’.
- ‘Collaboration and dialogue are at the heart of how we make work: with audiences, peers, partners, and a network of makers’. (Source: <http://coneyhq.org/about-us/>)

Use of Prosper: Coney Ltd used 10.5 of their 12 credits of the Prosper programme – virtually all on a Business Advisor, and accessed the Webinar ‘Introduction to Theory of Change’.

Key business outcomes: Coney Ltd reported the following business outcomes of Prosper regarding *new and diversified funding streams* and *investment readiness*:

- Coney received support from NESTA’s ‘Arts Impact Fund’ (<https://artsimpactfund.org/>) as a (necessary) social investor supporter for Coney to apply **for ‘Reach’ grant funding (£15,000)** from the ‘Access’ foundation (<https://access-socialinvestment.org.uk/enterprise-development/the-reach-fund/>). This application was successful, **and Coney received £15,000 to assist them in becoming ‘investment ready’**.
- Coney’s plan is that types of repayable finance will fund arts-based support activity (the already-existing Coney ‘game’ model) for ex-offenders who are on probation. Coney Ltd aim to be a service provider for local authorities, and funding from these local authorities will be used to repay the repayable finance, on the condition that ex-offenders are prevented from going back into custody (amongst other performance targets). Such preventative outcomes save money for the local authority, police, courts and other agencies, and thus local authorities ‘invest to save’ through funding the work of Coney Ltd.
- The funding arrangements for Coney Ltd are also an innovative step because ‘the arts’ is not commonly engaged in social investment involving repayable finance. In most cases, repayable finance is used for capital investment projects such as new buildings/facilities (where finance is repaid by income generated from the hire/use of such buildings). Coney’s case is innovative in that the repayable finance is founded on a *revenue-based project* with social outcome indicators.
- For Coney Ltd, such funding streams are new with social impact / social investment funds now being sought *in addition to* existing arts funding.
- For Coney, Prosper was a major success:
 - “So it [Prosper] has done absolutely everything we hoped it would do”
 - “The worth of [the Business Advisor] is in the many thousands.”

Case Study: Salford Community Leisure Trust

Salford Community Leisure Trust (SCLT) manages and delivers sports, lifestyle, library and cultural services across 40 venues in Salford, Greater Manchester:

- Their aim is to enhance the physical and cultural well-being of the community.
- They are 'passionate about delivering value for money, we reinvest our profits because we believe that leisure and culture should be at the heart of every community'.

In 12 months across 2016/17, the Trust's work hosted 3 million visits to their venues. (Source: <http://www.salfordcommunityleisure.co.uk/about-us>)

Use of Prosper: SCLT used Prosper in the following ways:

- Their 'Museums' strand of work was the area that utilised the support from Prosper.
- The organisation utilised all of their allocated 12 credits – primarily on a Business Advisor but also on two Masterclasses ('The Business Model Canvas' and 'Identifying and Monetising Your Assets and Intellectual Property').
- They also utilised AMA's online 'CultureHive' resources.

Key business outcomes: SCLT reported the following business outcomes of Prosper around taking steps to become *investment ready* and *launching new products/services*:

- SCLT have now implemented steps to become more 'investment ready', partly because of the learning taken from 'The Business Model Canvas' Masterclass. The Masterclass inspired three members of staff to radically change the way they planned arts events for their eighteen-month programming periods. Previously, arts events were planned without any strategic over-arching themes; approval of applications for funding from artists and groups were done on a case by case basis. This resulted in the SCLT's arts offer being somewhat incoherent as a very eclectic set of events, which only attracted small pots of funding.
- The Masterclass resulted in the planning of key guiding themes being more curatorial-led for each eighteen-month programme of events/activities, resulting in better articulation of the programme and requiring far greater coherence of applications from artists and groups. This **thematic coherence has resulted in SCLT being able to make a much better 'ask' of new funders** and sponsors of the programme and is thus enabling the potential for **social investment** in the near future for the same reason.
- The Business Advisor support was focused on generating more commercial revenue from venue hire and events – in particular expanding the potential for more weddings. Much work was undertaken around identifying the true costs of events to identify where surpluses could be made, as well as an assessment of the local market in venue hire and, in response, a review of pricing structures.
- The Masterclass 'Identifying and Monetising Your Assets and Intellectual Property' also inspired staff to **launch a new product/service** – utilising images of paintings/exhibits in the SCLT's collection, the licencing of these images online (for sale) has been piloted in order to generate more **commercial revenue**.

- The SCLT interviewee highlighted also the importance of the networking events for sharing innovations and ideas with similar organisations facing similar challenges.

4.4 Other business outcomes and impacts material

As part of the learning and dissemination activity of Prosper, a number of other channels were used to demonstrate outcomes and possible longer run business impacts. These included:

- Arts Professional interviews with clients;¹⁷
- CultureHive Case Studies;¹⁸ and
- Client Vox-Pops.¹⁹

Whilst this material includes evidence for more immediate and direct business outcomes, in addition it does provide examples and illustrations of a more profound and deeper sense of organisational and business development, reflecting potentially greater impacts on future development and resilience.

Whilst they represent tentative statements of impact, these can be set alongside strong future implementation statements made by the Prosper cohort also (see Table 4.5 above, Annex 2)

Arguably such stronger statements of outcomes, impacts to come and future implementation may be assessed with a greater level of confidence also given the managerial level of survey respondents and those individuals who participated in Prosper. Generally, participants were from the highest levels of the organisation (CEO, Chair, Board Member, Trustee, Director, Head of Unit, Founder, Owner); with a cascading to other levels, including technical, seen when reviewing participation in specialist Group Learning events.

In addition, a 'greatest impact' question was asked in the Exit Survey (see Table 4.6 overleaf).

¹⁷ <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/article/big-changes-following-business-support> and <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/article/benefits-business-support>

¹⁸ <http://www.culturehive.co.uk/prosper/>

¹⁹ See videos at: <http://www.creativeunited.org.uk/about-us/news/prosper-715-hours-of-support-70-organisations-25000-miles/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7Nkrbx1X5w>

Table 4.6 'The greatest impact of Prosper' – Client Comments

Comment	Mentions
Developing a business plan / a better business plan ('owned' by all)	14
Re-evaluation and development of vision, mission, objectives	10
Identified how to (commercially) exploit USP assets/products/ services	7
To <i>make space</i> to step back and strategically reflect/review/evaluate	6
Re-evaluation and development of business model	5
Better understand our audience / re-visiting our audience profiles	5
1:1 advisor to guide team, bounce ideas off, get feedback from, vent to	5
Generally feel better equipped to run a profitable business	4
Feasibility evaluation of ideas / innovations	4
New products/services launched (new online commercial revenue)	3
Build team capacity / capability	3
<u>Gained</u> new source of income (grant funding, corporate sponsors)	2
Clarity on the fundamentals of growth	1
Ways to evaluate our services	1
Development of (digital) marketing strategy	1
Learning / confidence to apply for funding (did apply)	1
Journey of becoming investment ready and <u>gaining</u> that investment	1
Reviewed pricing strategy (e.g. consultancy rates)	1
Expanded our networks	1
To take risks with innovations / ideas	1

4.5 Recognising the value of business support

A key aspect of Prosper was to make its target group aware of business support, test demand and generate greater understanding of demand and supply.

Put another way, Prosper was seeking to further test and understand business support journeys within the cultural and creative sector, including recognition by the sector of the value of business support.

Section 3.7 outlined Prosper's impact on the business support journeys of those businesses and organisations that were not selected for project support; the Client Exit Survey tested future journeys for those who had been selected for Prosper through a number of questions.

First, 95% of the survey respondents stated that they would recommend a programme like Prosper to their peers – suggesting that they recognised its value and the value of business support. Only a third had previously used business support in the last two years.

In the three instances where respondents answered negatively to this question, two were interviewed (see Case Studies below). In both instances, they recognised the value of business support, and how Prosper helped in their development, with their answers raising more fundamental questions about the (cultural) assumptions inherent in the statement 'business support for the cultural and creative sector'.

Case Study: Virtual Migrants

Virtual Migrants connects art, digital media and performance with new aesthetics and perspectives exploring race, migration and global justice. They create, exhibit, perform and distribute work that can be installed in galleries, performance venues, public or community spaces. They aim to add new aesthetics, artistic responses and perspectives to themes of race, migration and globalisation ... to draw attention to expressions of migrants whose existence is held in question; and to artistically explore and respond to the causes of racialised political issues which continually make headline news. (Source: <http://virtualmigrants.net/>)

The organisation's interviewee stated that the organisation was, broadly, very satisfied with the support from Prosper, but their mission, values, audiences and peer network were not considered appropriate to some business support advice offered – for example:

- Most suggestions on how to improve and diversify income streams were considered inappropriate. The organisation worked with marginalised groups (e.g. migrants, BME groups, disadvantaged communities) – such groups usually had very low incomes and were unable to respond to requests for donations, sponsorship or crowd-funding. The nature of the organisation's mission and values – being critical of the status quo – also meant that corporate sponsorship or philanthropy was extremely unlikely.
- They felt that some 'Group Learning Events' needed to be better tailored to smaller, less developed and/or BME-led organisations, as some Events seemed to be aimed at organisations with substantial assets (income, facilities and/or property). As the organisation had five volunteers and an 'informal' associational structure, mechanisms like IP and exploiting assets were not considered to be especially relevant.
- The interviewee also stated that there was insufficient critical debate on the cuts in funding for arts (and more broadly), funding inequalities across the country, and particularly how this was turning the climate towards promoting market-based models as the solution.
- The organisation had utilised two Business Advisors – their matched advisor and an expert in legal structures. They also attended three Group Learning events. They did not use all of their credits due to capacity and the timescales of the programme.

- The interviewee stated that they worked very productively with their Business Advisors and were supported very well by the team. They were now utilising the advice on legal structures to potentially turn the organisation into a Community Interest Company.

Case Study: Geese Theatre Company

Geese Theatre Company is a team of theatre practitioners who present a continually developing portfolio of interactive theatre and facilitate drama-based group work, staff training and consultation for the probation service, prisons, young offender institutions, youth offending teams, secure hospitals and related agencies throughout the UK and abroad. They provide performances for criminal justice and social welfare conferences and they work internationally with: people in prison, on probation, or in mental health settings; young people who are seen to be at risk of offending and who have offended; and professionals who work with these client groups. (Source: <http://www.geese.co.uk/>)

The organisation's interviewee said that though the organisation was relatively small, it had existed for 30 years and was well-developed and professionalised. It was an 'NPO' (National Portfolio Organisation) and had just had its NPO Accreditation renewed for another 4 years.

The main reason for the organisation not wishing to recommend Prosper to peers revolved around issues with accessing an appropriate Business Advisor in good time:

- The organisation wanted to use a Business Advisor over summer 2017, to support them to develop their growth plans – a necessary part of the NPO Accreditation renewal process.
- The interviewee stated that their application to Prosper was approved in June 2017, but they heard little from Prosper about their Business Advisor for some time. By this time, they had largely done the developmental work for NPO Accreditation by themselves, to ensure the deadline was met. So, when the Business Advisor came to support the organisation, the timing was considered too late. The organisation then struggled to understand how else to 'make the most' of their Business Advisor. They

said there ought to have been guidance on this – i.e. ‘support on how to use business support’.

- They also found that the Group Learning Events attended were more for ‘emerging’ organisations than well-developed organisations such as theirs (for example, on business plans).
- The interviewee did not wish to criticise the Prosper programme *per se* – it was simply that, in this particular case, there had been issues with the timing between the approval of the application and the availability of the Business Advisor. The interviewee also stated that they were treated very respectfully by Creative United’s Prosper team.

The Exit Survey asked a further question on future use of business support (Table 4.7), although it is notable that responses were more equivocal.

Table 4.7 Future use of business support by Prosper clients

Following the support you received on the Prosper programme, how likely is it that your business/organisation would use business support in the future?		
Not likely	1	2%
Somewhat likely	22	37%
Very likely	27	45%
Definitely	10	17%

A final key question asked the Prosper cohort ‘Would you invest in more business support for your business/organisation in the future?’; 82% responded ‘yes’.

This result was somewhat contradictory to that outlined in Table 4.7. One explanation may be that the sector recognises the value and benefits of activities akin to business support, including the need to invest in such activities, but retain a continued wariness to the term ‘business support’ given its usual connection to the industrial and commercial economy.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Prosper: meeting the aims of ACE Business Support Call

Table 5.1 provides a high-level assessment of Prosper against the aims of the Business Support Call, and as set out in the Prosper partnership agreement with ACE.

Table 5.1 Prosper - Meeting the aims of the ACE Business Support Call

ACE Aim	Prosper	Evidence base
<p>AIM 1: Improve the resilience of the arts, museums and libraries across the cultural sector nationally by investing in bespoke business / investment readiness support</p>	<p>Business support programme offering free 1:1 advice, workshops, masterclasses and webinars and online resources for an estimated 70 organisations across the arts, museums and libraries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 70 arts, museum and libraries businesses and organisations supported nationally (80% from outside London) - Additional investment leveraged from high profile partners and funders - High utilisation rate and high levels of client satisfaction - Wide range of strong evidence of business development outcomes across the cohort - Range of evidence of organisational steps to resilience (cultural change, learning and actions; recognition of value of business support)
<p>AIM 2: Improve understanding of building financial resilience in the sector and what resources are needed in this area, providing evidence to support decision making on longer term national business support investment</p>	<p>Research and evaluation activities to assess the business development needs, demand and journeys of the cultural creative sector in England and Scotland, particularly through Prosper</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Business Support and the Cultural and Creative Sector in England and Scotland: A Review</i> (2017) - <i>Business Support and the Cultural and Creative Sector in England and Scotland Review: Scottish Survey Module</i> (2018) - Learning Workshops (London and Edinburgh) and Policy Workshop (London) - <i>Evaluation of, and Learning from, Prosper Business Support Project</i> (2018)
<p>AIM 3: Engage with partners nationally to promote co-ordination and provide information more widely on current activities in these areas.</p>	<p>Engagement and Dissemination of knowledge and information on support available to the wider arts/cultural sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prosper Partners, Funders, Steering Group and Learning Workshops (London and Edinburgh); Policy Workshop - Prosper engagement, recruitment and launch activity - <i>Compendium of Business Support for the Cultural and Creative Sector</i> (completed 3 times, March 2017 to March 2018) - Addition of resources to <i>AMA CultureHive</i> website

- Arts Professional articles; newsletter; social media; presentations

5.2 Prosper: supporting understanding of cultural creative business support and investment

There is particular interest in the experience of Prosper and the generation of evidence to support decision making on longer term national business support investment to the cultural and creative sector.

Earlier sections have demonstrated the success of Prosper and its experiences, and sought to outline good practice and lessons learned.

Table 5.2 below places the evidence and learning from Prosper within the conceptual policy framework of the 'business support journey'; in other words, the process of successfully matching business need/demand with business support supply to achieve maximum economic, social, and in this case cultural, benefits to society.

Table 5.2 Learning from Prosper: the business support journey and the cultural creative sector

The Business Support Journey	Conclusion to draw from Prosper experience
<i>Businesses made aware of business support provision and its value</i>	Demonstrated the existence of a high level of national demand for bespoke business support from (the full diversity of) the cultural creative sector
<i>Businesses engage with business support system</i>	Latent demand was accessed by Prosper – only a third of applicants had used business support in the previous two years. Prosper overcame information failure in the business support system
<i>Businesses access business support</i>	A cohort of 70 organisations participated in Prosper Of those who responded, only a third of the unsuccessful Prosper applicants undertook business support activity subsequently within six months of their application Signposting not strong enough and/or other supply not attractive enough? 'Missed opportunity'?
<i>Supply is appropriate and matches need/demand</i>	Participation in and utilisation of Prosper was very high Very small tail of low use due to 'capacity' issues or 'content matching', both of which could be at least partially addressed through lessons learnt
<i>Client satisfaction</i>	At project level, very high satisfaction (demand/need and supply successfully matched) 1:1 Business Advice very highly regarded. Confirms 'what works' for clients Group Learning activities medium satisfaction (partially address through lessons learnt)

<i>Business outcomes</i>	<p>Strong increase in confidence across components of business development (vision, business model, plan, income generation, etc.)</p> <p>Evidence from entrants that previous support delivered business outcomes</p> <p>Small number of 'key' outcomes on new products, funding diversity, investment readiness</p> <p>Variety of evidence of moving towards greater commerciality and/or diversity of funding and/or resilience.</p>
<i>Impacts</i>	<p>Exiting businesses understand the value of business support, recognise appropriate supply, and willing to invest in supply</p> <p>'Backlash?' against 'investment readiness' and continued evidence of cultural aversion to 'language of business support', but not to its activities</p>

5.2.1 Prosper and the scale of support offered

Table 5.2 also outlines the range of outcomes and impacts that organisations and businesses have achieved through business development with Prosper.

More broadly, it is recognised that the process is about a development journey with clients receiving a relatively small injection of specialist support in a short period of time, followed by immediate evaluation of outcomes and impact.

Aside from free online resources, these development outcomes were achieved through, roughly, 12 hours of business support activity.

Usage data has shown that the vast majority of the client cohort used all or nearly all of their free resource, with very little drop-out or non-usage. There was a small amount of buying of additional resource by Prosper clients to go beyond their allocated hours.

The diversity of client base is reflected in their development position, needs and demands on entering Prosper but, to give some order of magnitude, Table 5.3 provides Business Advisors responses to the scale of support offered under Prosper.

Table 5.3 Credit allocation and meeting business development objectives (Business Advisor Exit Survey)

28 responses	Did you feel the allocation of 12 credits was enough to sufficiently address the objectives set out at your initial client meeting? (%)
Yes	25%
Somewhat	43%
No	32%

Additional written comments signify two major reflections:

- The allocation was fine for a group of clients, but definitely too little for others; and
- That objectives and actions were matched to resource in the initial Advisor-Client meeting ('cut to fit the cloth').

5.3 Business support policy and the cultural creative sector

As part of the learning process under Prosper, and to support conclusions and recommendations, a Policy Workshop was held in London in May 2018 for Prosper partners and funders.

A short review of recent strategy and policy documents pertinent to business support and the sector was undertaken as the basis for an introductory presentation prior to discussion of Prosper findings and the context for next steps. Documents reviewed drew from cultural creative industry stakeholders, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and social enterprise and charity sector bodies given the business diversity within the cultural creative sector.²⁰

It was noted, for example: how the term business support was less prevalent; whilst government business support products were more directional; the on-going development of devolved delivery systems; the rise of the language of creative clusters and place-based development, and an increased questioning of 'investment readiness' as a business development process.

Discussions at the Policy Workshop and the Evaluation Findings have formed the basis for proposed Recommendations

5.4 Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Prosper has been a successful national investment in business support to improve the resilience of the arts, museums and libraries.

Prosper was over-subscribed, highly utilised, delivered to high client satisfaction, achieved a range of business development outcomes and clients have demonstrated organisational steps towards resilience.

Conclusion 2: Prosper has demonstrated aspects of 'what works' and good practice in business support to the arts, museum and libraries sector, based upon the 'managed brokerage' of 1:1 business advice.

Key to Prosper achievement of client satisfaction and outcomes has been the *active matching and relationship management* of a network of sector advisors with clients, as part of a flexible support offer of a suite of activities (1:1, group, online).

Conclusion 3: Prosper has confirmed (Arts Council England) evidence of national demand for tailored business support for cultural creative organisations.

Applications for Prosper from across the diversity of the sector exceeded places available several times over, with even greater registered interest expressed. Two thirds of applicants had not used business support in the previous two years.

Conclusion 4: Evidence from Prosper suggests gaps in, and under-utilisation of, business support provision to the cultural creative sector.

Prosper outcomes included substantially increased knowledge about sources of business support by clients but under-utilisation of online resources. On exiting Prosper, clients expressed the value of appropriate business support and a willingness to invest in future

²⁰ Examples include: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-sector-deal>; <http://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/creative-nation>; <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-new-strategy-have-your-say/experimental-culture-horizon-scan>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-the-creative-industries>; <http://www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk/media/367095/final-version-july-5.pdf>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/the-uks-industrial-strategy>; <https://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/geography-creativity-uk>; <http://www.greatbusiness.gov.uk/>; <https://access-socialinvestment.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Strategic-Plan-2018-23-final.pdf>; <http://numbersforgood.com/2015/10/investment-readiness-one-size-doesnt-fit-all/>

support. In contrast, the limited evidence available on unsuccessful applicants suggested that, in the main, they had not gone on to access other provision.

Conclusion 5: The cultural creative sector continues to demonstrate an aversion to the 'language of business support', but not to its activities.

Prosper demonstrated strong commitment to business development, enterprise and innovation that is driven and shaped by the histories, missions, value systems and 'hybrid' business models of the cultural creative sector. These drivers are only partially reflected by much of the language of business support, and even discouraged by others (such as 'investment readiness').

5.5 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Invest in tailored business support to the cultural creative sector to fully access latent and expressed demand and maximise the development of a culture of enterprise, innovation and sector resilience.

Recommendation 2: Future business support programmes should recognise the continued evidence base for the effectiveness of tailored business advice through sector-based advisors.

Recommendation 3: Continue to reflect the culture, values, organisational diversity and languages of the cultural creative sector to ensure the delivery of efficient and effective business support.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 Exit Survey Comments on Prosper project

The Prosper cohort was 70 organisations, with 60 completing the Exit Survey.

Of those 60, 57 (95%) said they would recommend a project like Prosper to their peers.

Below provides 41 Prosper client responses to an open question on 'thoughts, feedback or suggestions' about Prosper. Answers are provided verbatim

A minor process of 'edits' has taken place to ensure anonymity (for example, 'Business Advisor' replaces a name). In no instances has the message or the tenor of the comment been altered.

Responses from cohort to request for any thoughts, feedback or suggestions about the Prosper programme.
1. We're glad we were part of the programme, it was just unfortunate it fell at a very busy time for the company.
2. This has been very beneficial to us. The advice we received has been clear, relevant and actionable. Thank you
3. All the help has been very much appreciated. It's easy to feel clueless, alone and unsure where to start in these situations. But the Prosper programme has definitely been a springboard to greater things.
4. It was a very good experience, thank you. Having a business advisor to help me refine and shape what I do was invaluable. The meeting mid-way was good, peer learning is often good for getting ideas and different perspectives on our own methods.
5. I think our circumstances were quite unusual: we used all credits in just one area and that was in using the support of Prosper [<i>Business Advisor</i>] to help us write the business plan. We were very focused and used all the credits quickly, which meant we didn't really engage with the full Prosper offer as fully as we might have envisaged at the outset. That doesn't matter because we did what was necessary at the time. The other unusual element were the hours of extra support [<i>the Business Advisor</i>] offered staff 'behind the scenes' due to the unconventional nature of our company. At times this was hard, [<i>the Business Advisor</i>] asked some very searching questions, and we are still grappling with some of the things that [<i>the Business Advisor</i>] flagged up. That is not a criticism, but all in all, it's been quite a journey!
6. It was extremely useful to have access to experienced consultants at this stage of the development of our online shop, rather than at a later stage. We found the programme easy to access, communicate with and this evaluation survey has been a delight to complete. Many thanks for this fantastic opportunity and all your support. PS if you want a more in-depth interview with us I recommend speaking to [<i>staff member of the client organisation</i>], who has had the majority of contact with the Prosper consultants.
7. It would have been great to have more hours to be able to utilise the workshops and masterclasses across our team. However, we used all of our support on 1-1 advice - as we needed this the most.
8. We have found the process useful in that it has forced us to think closely about the sort of organisation we are and what we want to achieve. It has also made us realise that our original ambitions were unrealistic given who and where we are.

<p>It would have been good to have had some sort of influence in the decision about the adviser that we were allocated. I am not sure that <i>[the Business Advisor]</i> had the most appropriate skills set plus, while I established a very good personal and professional rapport (I think!), <i>[the Business Advisor's]</i> approach was not welcomed by all the staff members which did cause some tensions.</p> <p>The programme did not fully exploit the network potential of the whole group - we did make some very good contacts with other organisations through the workshops/classes - and are actively pursuing some collaborative developments - but attendance at the regional get together was poor. I think some element of requirement to attend (we were after all getting free support) might have been useful but also appreciate that it could have alienating some participants.</p>
<p>9. Just a huge thank you.</p>
<p>10. It was not possible to attend as many workshops as I would have liked to. Main barrier was cost of travel to venues.</p>
<p>11. Our allocated business advisor was great, and we have already contracted <i>[the Business Advisor]</i> for additional support going forward.</p>
<p>12. Thank you for your understanding when we couldn't continue.</p>
<p>13. It was very disappointing that the initial work with our first <i>[Business Advisor]</i> didn't come to anything. We lost impetus and had to find new direction. I feel this could have been better managed at an earlier point in the programme with Creative United (we had an initial meeting with this <i>[Business Advisor]</i> in August 2017 and were not assigned a replacement until January 2018). The work we ultimately did with our final <i>[Business Advisor]</i> was of a very high quality and made the programme very positive, but this initial experience does mean we did not have as good an experience as we could have and we missed the opportunity to take part in a lot of the webinars etc.</p>
<p>14. I would like to thank you for all your hard work and support in making this a useful programme. I do feel that we under-used our <i>[Business Advisor]</i>, and perhaps at a time of 'less upheaval' <i>[the Business Advisor]</i> could have contributed more.</p>
<p>15. The programme went very quickly and it was much more difficult to find the time to participate than I expected.</p>
<p>16. Thank you</p> <p>This has been really useful for us. Initial business plan advice provided a template for us to develop a much more focused, practical business plan.</p> <p>Audience research work has been invaluable in directing our future audience research methodologies and understanding.</p>
<p>17. The scheme has been incredibly beneficial and I feel that more time with our Advisor and more credits to use at Masterclasses/workshops would have had a greater impact on the organisation.</p> <p>Perhaps working with fewer organisations but in more depth would be better for future years. I know we would have felt a more profound impact had we been able to participate in more sessions/one on one sessions with our business adviser.</p> <p>Perhaps also being able to choose our business adviser rather than being matched. We thought our adviser was great, but it would maybe have been good to be able to pick from a pool of people for specific reasons - i.e. a specialist to help with development of that area of the business - and to work with different advisers throughout the process.</p>
<p>18. Really helpful though a strand or network for self-employed people or partnerships would have been really good. We can learn a lot from one another if we get chance to meet up and chat!</p>

<p>19. Ideally, this programme would have a flexible end date. I understand that funding doesn't necessarily work that way, however, developing and implementing and reviewing "products" doesn't always fit neatly into a year.</p>
<p>20. I think there should be a 6 month/1 year session with our business advisor to look at how we have implemented and moved forward and where we might need to consider more focus, etc.</p>
<p>21. When we applied for Prosper we very much anticipated it would support us to develop a particular strand of work. What emerged is that we needed a more holistic appraisal of our work to enable us to make structural and strategic changes to the organisation to address the changes we were experiencing. The freedom to change course has been extremely valuable, and in some ways it takes being on a programme like prosper to work out what you really need, so we are immensely grateful for this.</p> <p>There was a little confusion around securing further sessions from our business advisor, and the brokerage fee to Creative United. While I completely understand the need for Creative United to profit from services provided, this is a little hard to reconcile with something like business advice, where a very personal relationship has been built with an advisor and the relationship beyond prosper really needs to be managed between the advisor and business. In future I'd recommend charging for additional workshops etc. but having a different policy for advice.</p>
<p>22. I found the programme very hit and miss. I was only able to attend one masterclass due to our location and the programming of the masterclasses, and no workshops for the same reason. The webinars were far too short and simplistic to have an impact.</p> <p>The only real benefit we gained was from the work that we did with our <i>[Business Advisor]</i>, however even this was quite difficult to begin with as they came from a completely different part of the sector to ourselves. They didn't really have an understanding of our world, however their business advice was very good and by the end we had done some very useful work with them.</p>
<p>23. Generally: well done!</p> <p>I hope you have another cohort starting soon. I've certainly been mentioning the programme to many friends who I think would sign up in a flash.</p>
<p>24. The programme helped me personally to think much more carefully and with greater understanding about how to proceed at a time when our management agreement with <i>[a funding organisation]</i> is being renegotiated and there are some very great changes taking place in the area. The Workshops with our business adviser were excellent but it was difficult to get all the trustees together and attendance was not good. For those who did attend they were stimulating and thought provoking and those together with a couple of 1:1 Skype calls I had with our adviser have provided plenty of ideas and ideas for our masterplan which is now getting underway now some delay due to now the priority as we prepare to negotiate with developers and other stakeholders.</p>
<p>25. This was a great programme, thank you. It is the sort of business advice that, as a charity, we would not be able to afford to pay for. It was difficult to travel to some of the events from <i>[location]</i> but there was a good range of topics covered and locations. Offering a travel bursary would also have made it easier to attend some events. Our business advisor was fantastic and very helpful and knowledgeable.</p>
<p>26. Overall I have had a positive experience on Prosper and I am in a much better position now in terms of business planning than I was at the start of the process. It is hard for me to disentangle exactly which parts of this are down to Prosper or other influences. But I think that overall the effect of consciously deciding to engage in business development time is in itself a positive.</p>

27. It would be a shame if programmes like this are only ever one-off activities... life-long learning for the life or organisations is needed!
28. Prosper was very stimulating for us, including bringing external thinking in and challenging some of our ways of working. My team - especially the managers - were engaged and interested in it, and it's helped stimulate not just new ideas but a new approach to idea generation.
29. More careful matching of advisor to recipient would have been worth doing. We needed a different skill set from our initial match.
30. The general feedback from colleagues that took part in the Webinars was that they were too basic for us. It would be helpful to have clear 'advanced' webinars perhaps for cultural organisations that are further ahead than those just starting out.
31. The programme accepts the status quo too much. There is too much emphasis on monetarising assets and broadening funding to frankly unlikely or impossible goals such as philanthropy capital, and not enough discussion of changes in arts funding, or the issues around campaigning for changes in arts policy, and a more equitable distribution of arts funding resources.
32. More face-to-face contact would have been good.
33. Happy to provide feedback via interview...
34. Answer above was 'no' because it is difficult to help with further evaluation given the departure of our organisation's lead in the Prosper Programme. However, all who worked with <i>[the Business Advisor]</i> , were struck by how helpful the sessions with <i>[the Business Advisor]</i> were and we would like to be able to continue the work with <i>[the Business Advisor]</i> and would be delighted if further funds were available to enable this. It was somewhat of a frustration to all that, because <i>[the Business Advisor]</i> was working with the organisation at a low point in terms of team morale and when all staff were somewhat stymied by difficulties in the management of organisational change, more progress was not able to be made and the process became more limited than originally intended.
35. I think, from the meet-up, that the benefit of Prosper was very much related to the skills and quality of the business advisor. I didn't feel ours really got to grips with us as an organisation.
36. We recognise the good that external business advice has provided, yet although I've ticked 'yes' that we would invest in more business support - the financial reality of that wouldn't be possible immediately. I think it is something we ought to try and put a little aside for, maybe every 3- 6 months to touch base and get support. A fresh pair of knowledgeable eyes and ears on a situation, plan, problem, or piece of work are always useful. Suggestion... maybe some way of insisting that more than one person in the company has to be actively involved - and gives feedback on their experience. By having more than one person at sessions etc. is more likely to create discussions within the team and generate ideas on change. It's been manageable to get the artistic director to attend just a couple of 1:1 advice sessions locally - but that's been it. It's difficult to encourage others to watch/ read the saved resources, when they are already feeling time is precious.

It should be seen as an investment to train - yet it's hard to spare time to attend training between the day to day etc., especially if the sessions are far and wide and their a few people in the business - small team, no spare people.

... it's even been hard to get people to view the information second hand (it always gets put off)

the 1:1 sessions have been best received by the other member of the team.

The board have not been involved.

A session aimed at board members would be good.

I've enjoyed it, and found it all really useful and if we had more credits - I would like to see the webinars we missed - we thought 1:1 support would be our focus so that [was] the way we went.

It's backed up my thoughts and given me confidence, as well as given me new perspective on problems that I could share with others as possible solutions.

I especially liked hearing 4 case studies at the Wrap-Up - even though they were short it was interesting, also the article with [*a Prosper client*] who are similar to us.

The networking at the Wrap-Up was a little difficult - I hoped to chat with similar orgs to us - if there were any - but it wasn't easy to know who was who and not be rude to anyone who wanted to chat with you by wondering around the room.

If that could've been facilitated that would've been useful.

37. Overall our experience of Prosper has been great and a big help to our business, thank you! The only thing I feel we missed out on was some of the meet-ups/networking with other Prosper organisations. The majority of these seemed to be further south than we were able to travel (due to time/expense) and it would have been nice to have more opportunities to meet other organisations face to face. Having said that, we fully understand why this was the case and not sure there is a solution given that the majority of participants are likely to be further south than us.

It was great to have a [*Business Advisor*] over a period of several months as it gave us support at a crucial time in our business when we made significant changes and steps towards our future growth.

Many thanks to all - particularly our [*Business Advisor*]

38. We were placed with a business advisor in the first instance which I felt was not useful as the level of business advice and organisational awareness was lacking. However we were then placed with another advisor who was very effective so this evaluation has been completed with the new advisor in mind.

39. It's totally my own fault, but I do wish I'd taken the opportunity to take part in a webinar or a meet-up or 2. It was just an extremely busy time for me this year, with moving the business and so on.

40. None.

41. I would just like to say that my 1:1 sessions with [*the Business Advisor*] were absolutely invaluable. [*The Business Advisor*] is a highly skilled coach and business advisor who has helped me to transform my approach to my life and business.

Annex 2 Exit Survey Comments on Prosper outcomes and impacts

Sixty clients answered the Exit Survey.

All chose to answer this question; answers are provided below verbatim.

A minor process of 'edits' has taken place to ensure anonymity (for example, 'Business Advisor' replaces a name). In no instances has the message or tenor of the comment been altered.

Responses from cohort to the question 'What has been the greatest impact (business outcome) the Prosper programme has had on your organisation/business?'
1. Clarity on the fundamentals of growth.
2. Advice has given us a framework to better understand our audience, a way to evaluate our services and a more robust, measurable business plan.
3. Giving us a firmer foundation in every department. We now feel better equipped to run a profitable business.
4. Encouraged us to step back and evaluate our business model.
5. Support and advice to plan and submit an Arts Council funding application, even though unsuccessful I learnt an enormous amount and the project is going ahead in a modified form with assembly funding. It gave me the confidence to see through the project. In the future I'll be able to confidently apply for funding. Support and advice to make a business plan. I learnt how to put together a business plan, how to research for my business and write a business plan.
6. A really solid business plan that runs 2018-2022, which we wrote in-house. Consequently, the staff team can claim full ownership and understanding. Previously consultants had helped write business plans, which meant they resonated less with individual staff members.
7. We are soon (May 2018) to launch an online shop selling high quality limited edition prints of our artists' work. This venture into retail/commercial activity is completely new to us and the consultants we have accessed via Prosper have been brilliant at focusing on getting our retail site and commercial systems in place to ensure the best possible launch. As a result of Prosper [<i>Business Advisors</i>] we hope to have a smooth-running system and rapidly growing online sales business that will bring in a new income stream for both ourselves and our artists.
8. The company is going through a major transition and is essentially starting again from scratch. Clarifying our new vision, mission and objectives has enabled me to work towards a focused and detailed business plan, which supports sustainability.
9. Creating a 5-year Business Plan that we are internally happy with and that external stakeholders support.
10. Concrete tools such as the runway budget and a reminder that we set out to want to innovate the business model as well, not just artistically.
11. The greatest impact has been in helping us to make a step change in our business planning, enabling us to write a comprehensive business plan that will facilitate the [<i>organisation</i>] making a step change in size (50% growth) and scope (outreach, new funding streams, digital engagement) over the next 4 years

<p>12. The process of exploring the viability and feasibility of our ideas and thinking through our potential for growth has been extremely productive - but in a somewhat negative way! It has made me realise how we need to reconfigure our business model and working practices and, most importantly, the barriers that are preventing this from happening (and have prevented it from happening in the past)</p> <p>We have therefore taken a step backwards from our initial innovation ideas and have focused on the change that needs to take place before we can realistically expect to implement, and profit from, our ambitions. These changes will involve tackling some entrenched attitudes, working practices and a structure that does not provide or contain the resources we need to successfully deliver on our future ambitions.</p>
<p>13. The greatest impact has been having time to spend with the business advisor and have somebody to brainstorm with, to coach and mentor me and vent to!</p>
<p>14. Our <i>[Business Advisor]</i> working with us to develop our case for support, linking us with sponsors and advocates, leading us through a funding process for investment readiness and that funding being successful.</p>
<p>15. Refining / redefining our mission.</p>
<p>16. Development of a robust feasibility study and business plan for new premises.</p>
<p>17. The programme helped us in the early stages of identifying ideas that we then didn't develop because they weren't viable. This has been really useful.</p>
<p>18. The experience encouraged us to revisit our audience profiles, which has been valuable.</p>
<p>19. The Prosper programme provided excellent, high quality support to a very specific piece of work we are just beginning - to redevelop our <i>[name]</i> service. The support helped to crystalize our mission, vision and values and the importance of agreeing this at an early point. It was also very helpful in supporting audience development work we need to undertake, and in giving us a much clearer understanding of how to conduct evaluation.</p>
<p>20. Advisor support directly influenced the production of a couple of the organisation's key strategic documents and a financial plan that we are implementing.</p>
<p>21. None. Unfortunately, it all happened about 6 months too late for us to really gain any insight or benefit from the programme.</p>
<p>22. Making us think outside of the box - thinking about our assets 'our pool of young artists' and how we can utilize them in a way that works for us and them.</p>
<p>23. Recognising the commercial value of one area of our work.</p>
<p>24. The Prosper programme aligned with a period of great change at the theatre, and was one of a number of initiatives that staff were engaged with as part of this process.</p> <p>Although I can point to clear improvements in our business planning etc from the start of the project, to the end, I wouldn't say that this was entirely due to the Prosper process.</p>
<p>25. Clearer understanding of Marketing Strategy going forward, priorities and experimenting with new digital channels.</p>
<p>26. Greater understanding of audiences - tools to develop audience research and a practical method to apply audience learning to our products and services.</p>

<p>27. The opportunity to discuss with an expert the model of our business and to take the time to explore how we work and if there is a more efficient and productive way of looking at our business. Just the time to do these things within the framework of the Prosper programme has been the greatest impact, even if it hasn't led to great changes or developments.</p>
<p>28. A fresh pair of (expert) eyes from our business adviser who was able to be objective and to help us take a close look at our business and evaluate why we are doing what we are doing and for whom.</p> <p>It has really helped us to develop our business and stop doing things just because we have always done them.</p>
<p>29. I have increased my rates for consultancy work and have started developing new resources for this area of my work.</p>
<p>30. We have managed to attract corporate support and funding for one of our projects.</p>
<p>31. Devising an <i>[name]</i> Programme that we sell to schools. This money helps to fund our projects. Identifying the value of our international projects for schools e.g. authentic learning, sharing global issues in a child friendly way, links to curriculum.</p>
<p>32. - Focusing the organisation - expanding our networks - clarity of purpose</p>
<p>33. The excellent advice and support delivered by our <i>[Business Advisor]</i>. Her support came at a time of great change for the organisation, and at a time when I ... needed personal support to address the changes and prepare for growth. <i>[The Business Advisor]</i> has helped to pave the way for a new and more effective way of working.</p>
<p>34. An awareness of what elements we have to put in place to start our enterprise initiative.</p>
<p>35. Helping me understand what I'm trying to do and how to identify and appeal to the clients I want, not just the clients I have.</p>
<p>36. A clear plan for the future and a good financial model to help us get there.</p>
<p>37. Greater awareness of how we need to market our USPs and to build up new audiences.</p>
<p>38. It has helped us identify our aims and evaluate which areas of work and potential income streams fit best with our mission and objectives. We have been introduced to some useful analysis tools and now know how to weigh up and assess our ideas. And have been encouraged to just 'give things a go!' and that it's all a learning experience, even if a new venture doesn't have the outcomes we hoped for.</p>
<p>39. Support through the process of developing a business plan and articulating our value.</p>
<p>40. It got us to sit down together to think about our direction and how to get there.</p>
<p>41. Clarity and focus on our vision, mission, outcomes and measures.</p>
<p>42. Greater business readiness including ability to evaluate business ideas for feasibility/prospects.</p>
<p>43. Supporting the business planning process and the appointment of a brand agency to rebrand the organisation.</p>

44. The <i>[Business Advisor]</i> aspect; it has helped us focus and given us useful frameworks for prioritising.
45. The <i>[Business Advisor]</i> support we received from two different people, which was extremely helpful and very well matched to our needs.
46. We had a very useful Strategy Day that helped to really focus our minds - both Board members and senior management.
47. Team development through the <i>[Business Advisor]</i> support.
48. Focus around business planning and decision around charity transition. The Prosper programme has pulled a few things back into focus.
49. We have received grant funding for a 3-year programme of business development. These plans were directly informed by our work with Prosper. We have appointed an Associate to help us to develop and deliver these plans. This has significantly moved the organisation towards a position where an increasing proportion of our turnover will include earned income, and we have a much better organisational knowledge of key business skills and processes.
50. The Programme occurred at a time of great change within the organisation; a previously very stable organisation well-placed to assess where it was creating value and using that knowledge to capitalise on developing its income generation resources, found itself in a period of instability and uncertainty following a change in [...] leadership [...]. This meant that the focus in the Prosper programme was centred on re-visiting the company's values and re-negotiating the company's vision and mission statement. This has been incredibly useful and helped shape the company's 2018-22 business plan, but ideally the work would be continued with the [...] team in place from Autumn 2018.
51. thinking about our future proofing.
52. Re. question 12 - we already use some on the list (grants, ACE, individual giving) so I've only ticked 'new' streams. the other members of the team have listened to the Business Advisor and appreciated <i>[their]</i> advice, although many things are similar to what I've said we need to do, the fact it has come from an outside source seems to have been respected more - the weight of having a professional, experienced business advisor connected to chamber of commerce, seems to have helped, and ideas have been taken on board more than internal ideas, advice and views are.
53. Support with diversifying our business offer. We ended up setting up a new business during the programme and we hope that this is more commercially viable and gives us access to different finance/funding streams. Our <i>[Business Advisor]</i> was very supportive, but at the same time, gave us honest advice about the risks to our business and ways to minimise these/options for growth. <i>[The Business Advisor]</i> also gave us contacts, advice on sponsorship, loans, business planning, wholesale, operating a more commercial venture amongst other things - areas that are invaluable to the growth of our new business and our existing business [...]. <i>[The Business Advisor]</i> also gave us advice on how the two businesses work concurrently.
54. A reassurance that we are largely on the right track and the confidence to pursue our strategy to a successful conclusion.
55. Making us stop in our tracks and realise we were going along the wrong path.

56. Developing a funding strategy to focus our work and developing a sponsorship package.
57. We have written a clear Business Plan to refer to and direct the next years' activities.
58. We are diversifying but can't say this was as a result of the Prosper programme. Feel we lost our way a bit. I can't recommend the programme on the back of our experience - some of the resources could have been more accessible. The credit values weren't particularly well explained at the outset so we focused on using our business advisor.
59. Feeling supported and having time with my <i>[Business Advisor]</i> to talk about more strategic thinking.
60. I have had the opportunity to really reflect on my business practice and to redesign my business and processes so that they are beginning to work for me and to really reflect what I want, and what I am passionate about. This has been of immense value and has had ramifications across all aspects of my business, from financial management to negotiating sales to how I deliver my work. This process has brought me closer to really defining my identity in the marketplace and has reinvigorated my passion for what I do. Alongside this, the Masterclass on Intellectual Property has transformed my negotiations with clients and put me in a much stronger, more knowledgeable position. Thank you.