



# Let's Do Boosting Business Solutions

## Independent Evaluation



# Benefits are clear to see

**Let's Do Boosting Business** is an important project, which the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce has successfully delivered to help businesses in Staffordshire network with one another, improve their supply chains and learn best practice through a Mentor.

The benefits can clearly be seen through the case studies featured in this report with companies not only having successfully grown but also creating valuable jobs in the area.

I have no doubts that such projects and initiatives will play integral roles in the development and delivery of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Strategic Economic Plan and the European Investment Strategy.

Building on the successes of the Let's Do Boosting Project we are also well placed to deliver the ambitious plans of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire's Growth Hub.

Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce will continue to support and deliver business support which assists social and economic regeneration in Staffordshire.

I am grateful to Wider Impact Consultancy for delivering such an innovative and informative report, which provides a useful insight to how businesses, local authorities, local universities and other key stakeholders can collaborate to achieve such amazing results, which all involved should be proud of and celebrate!



Sara Williams CEO, Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce.



Edwin Lewis, Director,  
Wider Impact Consultancy.

## Introduction

Wider Impact Consultancy has been commissioned to carry out an independent evaluation of the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce **'Let's Do Boosting Business'** project.

Rather than present a lengthy report, it has been agreed that findings will be delivered in this easy to read 'executive summary' style report, which features our innovative **Augmented Reality (AR)** images.

We are delighted to present such a positive report, and are grateful for the support provided by members of Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, stakeholders, partner agency members and most significantly those local companies, individuals and beneficiaries who have been actively involved in the delivery of such a worthwhile and successful project.

### Augmented Reality (AR)



Download our free app to your smartphone or tablet and bring this document to life using the power of a new technology called Augmented Reality (AR).

To access the bonus content follow these instructions:

- Download the ooh-AR app from the App Store (Apple) or Google Play (Android).
- Open the app and point your device at the photo above and wait for the surprise.
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Augmented Reality services by **ooh-AR.com**

# About Let's Do Boosting Business

**Let's Do Boosting Business** has been funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and matched by local stakeholders. It has been a 3-year project with aims to boost the **business performance** of SMEs (small/medium enterprises) in key sectors throughout North Staffordshire. Sectors have included manufacturing, medical technologies, business and professional services, such as ICT, tourism and leisure.

With an eye on meeting the needs of local business people, a number of innovative programmes have been developed and successfully delivered by the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce (formally known as NSCCI) Business Services team:

■ **Let's Do Mentoring** (ERDF/Stoke-on-Trent City Council funded) – matching successful and experienced business people with local business entrepreneurs who are ready to take their businesses to new levels of growth and profitable trading. Bringing in valuable experience and skills in key areas such as innovation, IT, marketing, finance, team building, personal and staff development and risk management.

Bi-monthly meetings are delivered, bringing senior and experienced business people together as a peer group to tackle common interests linked to local issues such as barriers to growth and opportunities to exploit emerging markets

■ **Let's Do Business** (ERDF funded) – The delivery of Inter-Trading Exhibitions, which successfully supported the delivery of local supply chains, which have been enabled by the creation of business networking, new and developing business opportunities and trading between local companies



## Let's Do Business Bridge

ERDF/local stakeholders funded events, such as:

- **Let's Do Technology** – match funded and delivered in partnership with Staffordshire University
- **Let's Do High Growth** – match funded and delivered in partnership with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Keele University and Staffordshire University
- **Let's Do Apprenticeships** – match funded by National Apprenticeships Service (NAS)
- **Let's Do Healthy Workplaces** – supported by the Department for Work & Pensions and match funded by the Beth Johnson Foundation

## Project aims

Aims of the project have been to work in partnership and collaborate with key local stakeholders to take on and tackle key challenges, which have played a part in holding back the development of the North Staffordshire business base. Challenges have included:

- Proportionately lower business start-up rates than in other areas of the UK

- A fragmented local economy
- Slow adaption to the 'knowledge economy'
- A negative external image
- Low inward investment
- Missed opportunities for businesses to grow and become significant local employers
- **20%** loss of private jobs over a decade of deprivation and the effects of the recession
- **1 in 5** people of working age not working
- **19.2%** of residents with no qualifications

## Objectives

Linked to a drive to provide more intensive support to local businesses, a number of objectives have been accepted by the Chamber's Business Services team, which include:

- Supporting a minimum of **189** local businesses
- The creation of at least **20** new jobs **10** safeguarded jobs
- Over **100** Mentor/Mentee relationships

## Stakeholder Support

*"We are delighted to support this project in terms of match funding and a commitment to work in partnership for the benefit of our local businesses and the many thousands of entrepreneurs who value and appreciate what such projects and initiatives offer and deliver."*

**Stoke-on Trent-City Council**

*"We are aware of the challenges faced by North Staffordshire and its businesses, and believe that this project will provide valuable support, through mentoring, events and inter-trading opportunities."*

**Staffordshire County Council, Economic Regeneration**

*"We support the objectives of this project and view the activities as complementary to the innovation and business support priorities of our organisation."*

**Staffordshire University,  
Enterprise & Commercial Development**

*"We strongly support this project... it is vital that we have strong routes to target and reach companies."*

**Keele University,  
Research & Enterprise Services**

*"I am aware of the current challenges faced by North Staffordshire and its businesses and believe that this project will provide valuable support."*

**Joan Walley MP** (pictured right)





# Stats & Facts

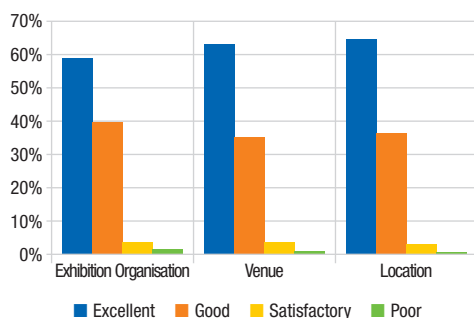
As this table demonstrates, right, there can be no doubt that the project has surpassed project objectives.

## Summary

- Over **800** businesses engaged in 'Let's Do' activities
- Of these **800** businesses, **197** received more than 12 hours' worth of support
- Of these **800** businesses, **135** received mentoring support
- The project was tasked with creating **20** jobs, and stopped counting when it had created **55** jobs
- The project was tasked with safeguarding **10** jobs, and stopped counting when it had safeguarded **33** jobs

## Let's Do Business

This graph demonstrates the high satisfaction levels of those attendees attending **Let's Do Business** events.



### Positive comments include:

- "First time here and excellent behind the scenes support. We will be back!"
- "Excellent opportunity to network."
- "Lots of good businesses here and many new contacts."
- "Excellent exhibition. Had a great time and really useful."
- "Well done to the Chamber for delivering another great event!"

## Let's Do Mentoring

Of those **Mentees** surveyed by Wider Impact, **100%** are extremely positive about the Mentoring Project, and **positive comments** include:

- "My business would still be a non-profit making hobby now if it were not for the help I had from my Mentor."  
**Pauline Woodcock, Woodie Ceramics**  
www.woodieceramics.co.uk
- "Benefits include the highest calibre of Mentors that we wouldn't normally have access to. Having such one to one input has helped ensure we concentrated specifically on our company needs."  
**Ron Jefferies, Jefferies Group**  
www.1stpb.co.uk

### Targets

- 189** businesses assisted (more than 12 hours of support)
- 20** jobs created
- 10** jobs safeguarded
- Over **100** Mentor/Mentee relationships

### Achievements

- 197** businesses assisted (more than 12 hours of support)
- 55+** jobs created
- 33+** jobs safeguarded
- 133** Mentor/Mentee relationships
- Worked with over **800** companies
- 37** Mentors recruited
- 2** Let's Do Business Events
- 90** exhibitors
- Over **600** attendees

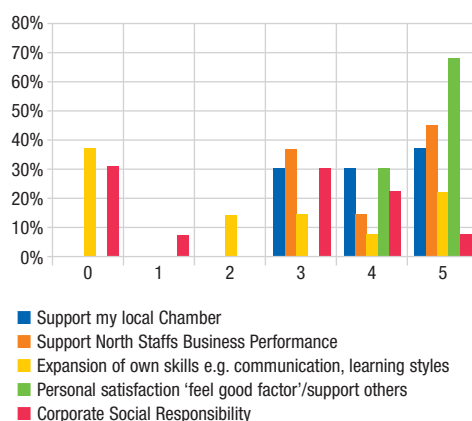
Source: Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce

- "It's good to have the chance to speak to other local business people. The free support is invaluable when businesses are starting up and budgets are very tight."

**Adele Bryant, Design Bindings Ltd**  
www.designbindingsltd.co.uk

## What Motivates Mentors?

This graph highlights what motivates local business people to become Mentors (1 low/5 high/0 no views). Clearly personal satisfaction, and a will to support local business

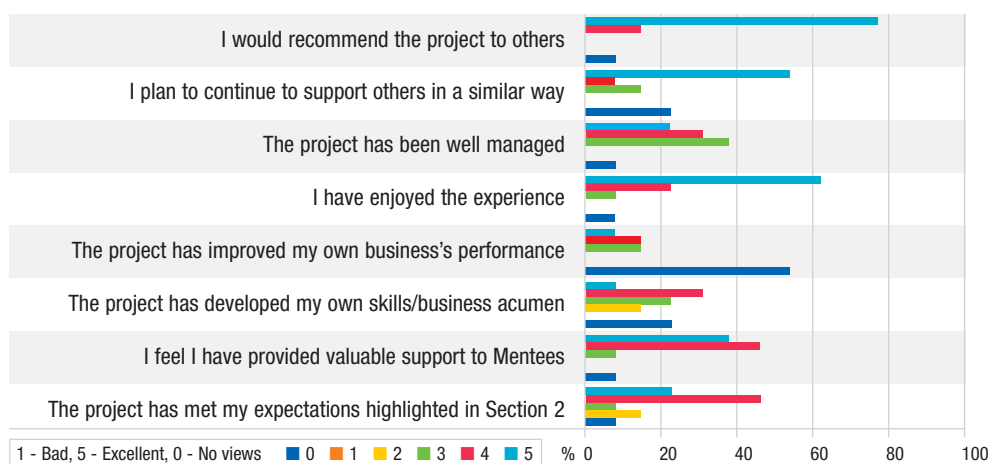


performance and the Chambers of Commerce are strong motivators.

Of those Mentors surveyed the following **positive comments** were received:

- "We are a big pool of experience and knowledge for promising businesses to access."
- "The project has helped companies to survive and in many cases prosper."
- "A key role has been to build confidence amongst local businesses so that they have the potential to grow and prosper."
- "A real strength of the project is the flexibility to get under the skin of a business and gain an in-depth understanding of what is needed to assist the businesses we support to succeed and prosper."
- "I cannot emphasise how important this project is to this area and the positive role it has to play in bringing new jobs to the area. Long may it continue."
- "I would advise any business person about to retire, or with some time on his or her hands to join the Mentor Project. It has been one of the most rewarding and satisfying things I have ever done in over 30 years of business life."

## This graph highlights Mentor's views about the Mentor Project



## Let's Do High Growth

Evaluation carried out by **Dr Rick Ball**, Emeritus Professor of Regeneration at Staffordshire University, points out: "It is clear that the project has been both transformational – as a catalyst for involvement and in demonstrating the benefits of engagement – and genuinely additional in delivering benefits that would not have occurred in the absence of the suite of activities supported."

"Businesses viewed the value of participation highly, especially in terms of the communication and connection, advice and resources, and referral support that it provided. Moreover, for some, raising the profile of small or new growth-minded businesses and building stronger inter-linkage at the local scale, was important. For most, participation provided an impetus in 'going for growth'."

## CASE STUDY 1: Prompt PC – [www.promptpc.co.uk](http://www.promptpc.co.uk)

### Keen to reach full potential

In operation since 1997 meeting customers' IT needs, **Prompt PC Director Andrew Eardley** is proud of his company's mission: 'Always go the extra mile to ensure customer success and our own success will follow'.

The company is ambitious, and despite an overall economic downturn, is keen to grow and reach its full potential. Andrew says, "Like most business owners, I risk being too pre-occupied with running my business on a day to day basis, rather than focussing on key strategic issues. I have been a Chamber member for years and have always benefitted from excellent networking events such as 'Let's Do Networking'.

"It was at one of these events that I heard about the Mentoring programme, and was interested to learn more. We haven't looked back since. I was initially 'matched' to a Mentor and he instantly proved an asset to me and my business. As a successful business person he brought with him considerable experience and an ability to support me to work on my business, rather than in it."

Andrew is keen to point out key elements of the Mentoring programme, "The first thing is, the Mentors are not paid for their support. They are volunteers, and clearly really enjoy what they do. They are without doubt keen to help me to make my business a success. The second is the support from the Chamber.

"The Coordinator keeps an eye on things and maintains a register of Mentors, ensuring companies such as mine receive the right support at the right time. I feel we are part of a team, from which, my business is clearly benefitting.

"We have employed new people now, at senior and junior levels, which is enabling me to successfully carry out my role of growing a successful and profitable company."



**Prompt PC Director Andrew Eardley, left, with Prompt PC's current Mentor, John Capper.**

Prompt PC's current Mentor, **John Capper** says, "It is a pleasure to support companies such as Prompt PC. I do this because I care about North Staffordshire and this Region as a whole. Most of all I am keen to utilise my wide skills and experience to support entrepreneurs such as Andrew.

"It is extremely satisfying to see their companies grow and achieve their full potential. North Staffordshire has a bright future, and we need to support innovative employers such as Prompt PC to provide the jobs for our brightest young people."

## CASE STUDY 3: Ayudante – [www.ayudante.co.uk](http://www.ayudante.co.uk)

### Skills and experience

Recently launched as a Community Interest Company (CIC) by Director **David Wells**, a former Remploy Manager, **Ayudante's** mission statement is: "To create opportunities for local disadvantaged people, by offering in-house employment, work placements, training and development to help individuals progress into the future job market."

Contracts are coming in and services in demand include electro/mechanical assembly, component knitting, packing/re-branding, re-working activities and a wide range of bespoke business support services.

David says, "I felt that the closure of the local Remploy factory was tragic for local disadvantaged people, and I was determined to open a successful new company that could meet the needs and requirements of those who most need employment support."

He is full of praise for his Mentor **Adrian Allen**, "Adrian has been so useful to me and this company. He has brought with him a basket of skills and experience that I would find it difficult to source elsewhere. He has taken the time to get to the heart of what we are looking to achieve and really understands our potential. He also understands the challenges we are constantly facing, and will be facing in the future. It is so useful for me to have him there. What he says is not always easy to accept, but we take the time to carefully discuss options and work through the solutions. I cannot praise Adrian enough or the Mentor programme, and would recommend any person who is in a similar position to me to take full advantage of what is on offer."

Adrian says, "My role is not always to tell those I am supporting what they necessarily want to hear, rather what they need to hear at



**Director David Wells, centre, with Mentor Adrian Allen, left.**

a given time. The key is to be objective and empathise with the risks they are taking and the effort they are putting in. It is always a pleasure to support new start companies, and people such as David, who are true entrepreneurs. They are part of the future of this Region. I gain a great deal of satisfaction from being a Mentor. No company or challenge is the same, and the best rewards are when you see companies grow and prosper as a result of your skills, experience and efforts."



## CASE STUDY 2: **Fantastict** – [www.fantastict.co.uk](http://www.fantastict.co.uk)

### Aspirations for success

Established in 2007, **Fantastict** is a successful Staffordshire based, independent provider of technology related consultancy, training, CPD, support and E-learning services to education, business and government sectors.

Supported by a team of over 50 accredited trainers working across the United Kingdom, Fantastict has grown from Joe Basketts being a sole trader, into a significant sized company creating employment, with impressive aspirations to develop and become even more successful.

Joe says, "I have been on a steep personal learning curve, which most business people will recognise and understand. It can be challenging to think strategically when you need to run your company on a day to day basis.

"I have received coaching support in the past, but I came to realise that what I needed most were business tools, rather than 'off the shelf' business solutions. The best people to provide such tools are successful business people, who have travelled the same journey I am currently on."

Joe is complimentary about the Mentor programme, "With the support of my Mentor, I am building on existing skills to think strategically, making objective decisions at the right time. It's useful to have someone to talk to, who is empathetic, and understands how I am feeling at any given time – an ability to put things into perspective – with the skills to assist me to make the decisions I need to make.

"It is also useful to have access to any of the broad team of Mentors, which the Chamber is building, who I can draw on to assist me in tackling specific issues, such as routes to market, equity, finance, employment and staff development."



**Joe Basketts, left, and Managing Director David Hay, centre, with Fantastict's current Mentor Mike Bird, right.**

Fantastict's current Mentor Mike Bird (pictured right), says, "I have a 'lifetime' of business experience at senior levels at my disposal, which I am keen to share with innovative companies such as Fantastict. Our aim is to become a partnership, with each contributing to the arrangement.

"My key roles include listening and objectively assisting those I support; with outcomes that include helping Mentees to avoid making costly mistakes. I am here to provide a second opinion, to be probing and responsive. To assist in assimilating options, and moving productively forward.

"I gain a great deal of pleasure from being a Mentor. It is extremely rewarding to see what you have learnt over the years being passed onto companies such as Fantastict, recognising you have played a key role in their successes."

## CASE STUDY 4: **Khromaworks** – [www.khromaworks.co.uk](http://www.khromaworks.co.uk)

### Working through concerns

The one guarantee of meeting with **Andrea Siegertsz** is a smile, because much of what she creates through her developing company **Khromaworks** are artworks and images that never fail to make her growing portfolio of satisfied clients extremely happy!

Building on impressive credentials, which include a Design Degree and being the Footwear Designer for POD Ltd, Andrea has made a lifestyle choice to become her 'own boss'.

Understanding her limitations, and a need to quickly gain the acumen required to set up and run her own business, her first port of call was the local Chamber of Commerce.

She says, "Whilst I was confident about my 'product', I knew I really needed support and advice in areas such as promotion, advertising and most crucially pricing. I also found that it could be lonely setting up a new business, and I needed someone to act as a sounding board, pointing me to the answers I was looking for."

Following an initial interview with a Mentor Broker, Andrea was 'matched' to her Mentor **Jayne Phillips**. She says, "Jayne has been wonderful! In addition to helping me work through my key concerns, she has made it clear she is there for me. She understands where I am, and what I need at any given time. It is so useful to have someone 'there', who is on **my** side."

Jayne says, "Andrea is really typical of so many new start-ups. Whilst they are full of ideas and have really exciting products on offer, it is also important to ensure that they are learning and retaining the skills required to successfully sustain their business idea. My key role is to listen, and help Andrea to work through the challenges she is facing, and of course will likely to be facing on her business journey."



**Andrea Siegertsz, centre, and Mentor Jayne Phillips, left, with customer Becky Oosthuizen.**

Jayne is clear on what she gains from being a Mentor, "It is so rewarding to pass on what you know, and to pass on what you have learnt over the years to such willing and innovative people like Andrea. It is not about doing things for them, it is about working alongside them to enable them to **help themselves**. Times are extremely hard at the moment, and such support is essential to companies like Khromaworks."

# Summary of findings

There can be no doubts that the **Let's Do Boosting Business** project has been a success in terms of the positive and innovative role it has played in:

- Achieving project objectives – **and more!**
- Local stakeholder involvement
- The role played in the development and delivery of effective partnerships and collaborations
- Recruiting the **'best of the best'** – with particular regard to the Business Mentors
- Delivering what local businesses need and value:
  - Practical and knowledgeable business related support and experience
  - Confidence
  - Skills
  - Focus
  - Networking
  - The development and delivery of local Supply Chains
- Development and growth
- Sustainable local businesses
- New local jobs

## Supporting High Business Growth

According to Stoke-on-Trent City Council Economic Development, Culture & Sport/City Renewal Services:

- An area where the City is performing much better than previously is in terms of business start-ups. In 2012, the City bucked national trends by increasing its start-up rate, compared with the national



rate, which saw a decrease. It is also moving up the **'Centre for Cities'** ranking, improving from a very poor 60th out of 64 in 2011 to an improved **55 out of 64** in 2012

- In terms of business numbers, there are currently **5,828** business in Stoke-on-Trent. This is **3.5%** increase on the previous year
- There are over **3,600** small businesses in Stoke-on-Trent, which accounts for **64%** of the business base
- In the first six months of 2012 independent consultants Duport described the City as having **'The best six months for start-ups in Stoke-on-Trent ever'**
- Not only are start-ups increasing, but so are survival rates. Since 2011 the three-year survival rate has increased from 57.8% to **61.4%**

## Inward investment

Inward investment is increasing from areas such as the USA, Canada, Asia and Europe, with a subsequent **5,754** new jobs estimated across Staffordshire since 2010 (Source: Make it Stoke & Staffordshire).

## Keys to the success of the project

Based on research findings, which includes numerous meetings and interviews with key stakeholders and quantitative findings it is apparent that keys to the success of the project include the roles played by:

- The Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce Business Services Team in terms of key skills such as communicating, managing, leading, enabling and innovating
- Stakeholders such as Stoke on Trent City Council, Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire University, Keele University, the Business Support Sector, Mentors, business leaders, and **most importantly** members of the wider business community

### Key ingredients include:

- Listening
- Communicating
- Networking
- Collaborating
- Enjoying
- Delivering
- Monitoring
- Adapting

# The way forward

Understanding the role of the Staffordshire LEP and proposed strategies, we feel it is appropriate for local business people to have the last word in highlighting the **way forward**:

- *"The area has come a long way in terms of partnership working and collaboration. The role played by the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce in delivering this should not be underestimated, with a particular emphasis on the Business Services Team.*

*"The Chamber has a key and pivotal role to play in the future development and delivery of the business economy, and should continue to deliver such innovative and exciting projects and initiatives."*

**Mike Cole, Michelin**

- *It is important the Business Sector is listened to, and projects and initiatives such as **Let's Do Boosting Business** and Mentoring are properly funded and supported by all levels of government. We need to build the confidence of local business people and develop a 'feel good factor'.*

*We need to bring individual businesses together and look to sharing goals. Most importantly we have to spread the message that this area is on the way up, and this is a place to invest and trade in.*

*We are here to play our role, and would encourage others to join us.*

**Mentors**

- *Whilst it is not easy creating and developing a new business, there are lots of people in the area doing just that. It is a joy to have schemes such as the Mentor Project and the Chamber networking events available. They are incredibly important and can often be the difference between failure and success, stagnation and growth. We cannot thank our Mentors enough for the continued support they provide us.*

*The future is all about collaborations and partnerships – businesses, local authorities, local universities, colleges, schools and organisations such as the Chamber pulling together in the same direction. Delivering what **we** need – the skills, resources, information and confidence to grow, employ and prosper.*

**Mentees**



## Comments



*The ERDF funding has allowed us to extend the service and market it to businesses county wide. Let's Do Mentoring is increasing in size and strength, and with its growth comes the growth of local businesses and Staffordshire's economy.*

*The key value of the programme is the calibre of the Mentors; all volunteers are experienced entrepreneurs or a member of a large corporation's management team. These successful professionals can offer extensive knowledge, and have a genuine philanthropic desire to give something back to the business community that they have prospered in.*

*We are always on the lookout for new Mentors to join our team and ask that you do not hesitate to contact us if you feel you have something to offer to the many thousands of growing businesses who will without doubt value what you have to offer.*

*Most of all we can assure you that you are likely to enjoy the experience and will be able to look back and say, "I did that. I made a real difference to the economic prosperity of our area."*



John Thompson, Mentor Broker



*Let's Do Boosting Business has given North Staffordshire businesses the opportunity to access much needed business support in the form of sector specific events, a large scale inter-trading exhibition and business-to-business mentoring under the Let's Do strapline.*

*We take pride in the fact that both stakeholders and businesses see us as a successful way to achieve independent and impartial business engagement in social and economic regeneration. In fact we have been described as having the 'Heineken effect' of being able to reach companies that other agencies can't.*



Adele Cope, Project Manager for  
Let's Do Boosting Business



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