

Growth Hub Bi-Annual Report 2020-2021 (1st April 2020 – 30th September 2020)

LEP Accountable Body:	Shropshire Council
Local Enterprise Partnership:	Marches LEP
Growth Hub name:	Marches Growth Hub
Date of Report:	September 2020
Name of person completing report:	Yasmin Sulaman
Job Title:	Business Support Lead
Contact phone number:	07990 085204
Contact email address:	Yasmin.Sulaman@marches.org.uk
Deadline for return to BEIS:	Friday 30 October 2020

It has been agreed by BEIS that once again this year's Growth Hub Bi-Annual Report would be a shortened version of that used previously. With LEPs and Growth Hubs now playing an important role with regard engagement with companies and the wider business community, including delivering new schemes and services, working to provide business intelligence and working in partnership with government on Covid-19, EU Exit issues, etc, BEIS is keen to ease the reporting burden on Growth Hubs for this funding year. However, BEIS reserves the right to return to a more detailed or amended Bi-Annual Report in future years.

In line with the conditions of 2020/21 Grant Offer Letters the Bi-Annual Report template for 2020/2021 consists of five elements:

1. Overview of progress against Section 3 of Grant Offer Letter;
2. BEIS Grant Spend Data for the 6 months (Q1 & Q2 2020/21);
3. Key Performance Outcomes Q1 & Q2 2020/21;
4. Growth Hub Highlights, including if applicable any changes in the nature or scale of the Project including an assessment of any change in the prospects of technical success; If applicable, any change in the ownership of or beneficial interest in any asset provided for the Project; and
5. Positive news stories, case studies, testimonials.

BEIS requires this information to ensure consistency and transparency and to help demonstrate the impact to HM Treasury and others that the funding provided by BEIS in 2020-2021 has increased the level of take-up of business support and is helping to drive business growth in local places. This information is therefore critical in helping to inform the future development of Growth Hubs and in helping to shape future local growth and business support policy thinking.

LEPS are therefore requested to submit their Growth Hub Bi-Annual Report to BEIS in word format (**not as a pdf**). Reports should be submitted to

Growth.Hubs@beis.gov.uk no later than **Friday 30 October 2020** and copied to your CLGU Local Contact(s).

1. Progress of Growth Hub in 2020-21

The MGH partnership model includes a virtual growth hub and website www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk that is supported by three physical growth hubs situated in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Herefordshire. Since July 2018, telephone enquiries are handled by the Business Support Helpline (BSH).

High level overview of progress so far against Section 3 of the Grant Offer

Letter: (200-word limit)

- A total of **17,977 business** interactions took place through light touch, medium and high intensity growth hub support;
- A total **366** individuals have been helped to start a business;
- A total of **8,568** referrals were made to partners including EU programmes (grants and loans), local authority business support and, where appropriate, private sector providers;
- Across the three physical growth hubs, there was a total of **121** virtual growth hub events (growth hub led and those held in collaboration with partners) with a total of **2,238** attendees of which **2,227** were businesses;
- MGH SME businesses had access to **19** EU funded business support projects (including grants and consultancy support) with a total financial value of over £19.5million. A further £2m of investment in business support schemes is in the pipeline. Funding and support through the current and planned programmes will continue until June 2023. The four largest ERDF schemes (Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP), Business Growth Programme (BGP), Marches Buildings Investment Grant (MBIG) and Broadband Grants) awarded a combined **£1.3m** to Marches businesses between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020. The EU investment will lead to the anticipated creation of **75** jobs.
- MGH medium to high intensity data returns have identified that **£620,872.00** private sector match was secured;
- Customer satisfaction was **consistently high** (between 4.5 and 5 on a scale 1 to 5, where 1 is poor service and 5 is excellent) for support received;
- Light touch engagement with businesses continues to be provided through a user friendly and easy to navigate website www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk. During this period, the website featured **65** news releases and **47** pieces of online content related to business support on offer, information pages and case studies. This has resulted in a 11% increase in web visits on the previous 6 months. A link to all MGH case studies can be found here: <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/>
- The national Business Support Helpline (BSH) handled a total of 521 Marches calls of which 280 were COVID 19 related.
- The website received **21,794** website visits (**14,577** unique visitors) and **320** enquiries. **Eleven** digital newsletters were issued and sent to a mailing list of **2,018** each time. These newsletters were supplemented by regular joint local authority/partner/MGH e-shots promoting events, availability of advice and support and promotion of new grants and initiatives delivered to in excess of **7,000** businesses;
- PR and communication activity focussed on support available to flooding and Coronavirus hit businesses and how the MGH service can help them recover.
- Social media statistics show that both followers and reach for Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn have **increased** since 31 March 2020.

- There were more than **119** separate pieces of media coverage secured as a result of MGH PR campaigns, content and news releases.
- The MGH website Coronavirus advice page <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/coronavirus-information-for-businesses/> featured daily updates of the latest advice, government information and support as well as signposting to regional support via local authority partners and other business support networks. Information from this was also shared widely on social media platforms. The MGH became an essential part of the region's toolkit for tackling the pandemic and quickly became a focal point for businesses seeking a trusted source of information.
- More than 500 businesses responded to the Marches LEP survey in April 2020 with 98% saying they had been affected by the outbreak. Evidence has been used by the Marches LEP to support Government lobbying for targeted support for the region.
- In May 2020, the Marches LEP injected £1.58m into the regional economy to support tourism and businesses affected by February's terrible floods and the Covid-19 outbreak which followed shortly afterwards. The three local authorities devised innovative schemes to help businesses hardest hit in their areas. <https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/marches-lep-approves-1-58m-injection-to-support-crisis-hit-regional-economy/>

2. ,BEIS Growth Hub 2020-2021 Grant Spend Position

Please confirm details of the financial position in respect of your 2020-2021 BEIS grant.

Total BEIS grant for 2020-2021 awarded	£ 205,000
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Please state how much of your 2019-2020 grant has been spent by end of quarter 2

Funding spent in Q1 and Q2	
Q1 – 1 April to 30 June 2020	£52,858.21
Q2 – 1 July to 30 September 2020	£46,174.90
Total funding spent as of 30th September 2020	£ 99,033.11

Breakdown of monies spent to 30th September 2020 per activity

Note that this only relates to core BEIS Growth Hub funding and not any other locally accessed funding streams e.g. ERDF or in-kind contributions made by partners.

Activity as shown on your Schedule 1 form (e.g. marketing, advisor salaries etc)	Q1 and Q2 Spend £
Growth Hub Operation Costs	£26,477.83
Steering Group Ops	£0
Information Database Licences	£24,806.00
PR Marketing	£22,500.00
3 Physical Hub Allocation	£13,309.28
Growth Hub Website	£5,440.00
Virtual Hub Licence	£6,500.00
Total	£99,033.11
<u>Review of all activities in S1 form and the individual spend amount given the current COVID-19 working environment</u>	
<p>It would be helpful to understand any changes to activities such as staff costs, T&S spend, accommodation costs, Council flat fee charges, etc, given the current COVID-19 working environment. Therefore please detail any significant variations to your original S1 spend profile and the reasons for these.</p>	
<p>MGH Operational Costs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing Staff costs –An 2.57% increase on all pay points effective from April 2020 (National Joint Council for local government gaining agreement with the trade unions for 2020/21 awards). • Telephone Line Rental and Calls – The MGH telephone line was previously on divert to the BSH. This diversion was removed when the new BSH freephone telephone number was announced during Quarter 1. The office telephone line is now closed saving quarterly line rental and monthly telephone charges. Costs were incurred up until June 2020. • Legal costs - have not been incurred during Q1 and Q2 as we are still awaiting MOU/DSA Agreement templates from BEIS. 	
<p>MGH Hub Steering Group and MGH Operations Group Meetings- room hire & refreshments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been no spend to date due to virtual meetings. 	
<p>PR/Marketing Contract</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.5 extra days were agreed in May to cover COVID 19 Business Support activity. 	
<p>Physical Hub Allocation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MGH Shropshire and MGH Telford & Wrekin both submitted a quarter 2 claim but this will not appear as spend until period 7. • MGH Herefordshire did not submit a quarter 2 claim due to growth hub resource being tied up in delivering the LA Discretionary grant until September 2020. An interim claim will be submitted in due course. 	
Given any changes noted above, at this time are you estimating any underspend in your 2020-2021 funding award?	£0

ADDITIONAL NON-BEIS GRANT FUNDING SOURCES

Please confirm what sources of additional funding and/or resources have been leveraged in by the LEP and/or Growth Hub in 2020-2021 to add further value to your Growth Hub service? Where possible please provide top line detail on how this funding and/or resource is being used. What are the benefits of this to the Growth Hub and its customers?

Funding and other resources:

The MGH includes a virtual hub which is supported by three physical growth hubs situated in Hereford, Shrewsbury and Telford & Wrekin.

Due to limited core funding and resources, we work in partnership with our three local authorities (Shropshire, Herefordshire and Telford & Wrekin), University of Wolverhampton and University Centre Shrewsbury who provide excellent facilities for meetings/workshops/drop-ins and Business Support/Economic Development staff (total of 5 FTE) to support the operation of the three growth hubs. These partnership contributions significantly enhance the scope and breadth of growth hub services offered. The MGH operating model is designed to maximise leverage of public and private sector funds and enable effective referrals to wider economic growth initiatives.

Local authority contributions to the MGH are estimated as below: -

- Shropshire Council – heat, light and operating costs related to Marches Growth Hub – Shropshire premises and dedicated staff resource (estimated £130k per year)
- Telford and Wrekin Council – dedicated staff resource at Marches Growth Hub – Telford & Wrekin (estimated £242k per year)
- Herefordshire Council – dedicated staff resource at Marches Growth Hub – Herefordshire estimated £70k per year)

Our Higher Education (HE) partners contributions are estimated below:

- University of Wolverhampton provides premises, equipment and covers all rent, heat and lighting costs at Marches Growth Hub – Telford & Wrekin and Marches Growth Hub – Herefordshire – estimated to be £35K per year.
- University Centre Shrewsbury provides rooms for events and conferences – this is estimated to be £2k per year. At present this support is not being utilised due to virtual events.

EU Funding

- MGH SME businesses had access to 19 EU funded business support projects (including grants and consultancy support) with a total financial value of over £19.5million. A further £2m of investment in business support schemes is in the pipeline. Funding and support through the current and planned programmes will continue until June 2023.
- An information sharing event is held each financial year to support referrals. Events are yet to be scheduled in 2020/21. The event brings EU project managers, growth hub staff, local authority economic development officers and other business support together to support relationship building and alignment of the business and enterprise support landscape. The event provides an opportunity to find out more about new projects as well as providing a refresher on some of the more established projects.

Marches LEP Funding and Resources:

- **Marches Investment Fund** - In May 2020, the Marches LEP injected £1.58m into the regional economy to support tourism and businesses affected by flooding and the coronavirus. The money was allocated across the region to help with the recovery from February's terrible

floods and the Covid-19 outbreak which followed shortly afterwards. The three local authorities devised innovative schemes to help businesses hardest hit in their areas. <https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/marches-lep-approves-1-58m-injection-to-support-crisis-hit-regional-economy/>

- **Getting Building Fund (GBF)** - The Government has made £900 million available through the new GBF for investment in local, shovel-ready infrastructure projects to stimulate jobs and support economic recovery across the country. In August 2020, The Marches LEP was allocated £14m from the GBF for a wide-ranging package of projects that will deliver a much-needed boost to the local economy. The funded projects are expected to deliver new zero carbon housing and unlock housing at key sites in Herefordshire and Telford & Wrekin; support enabling works for redevelopment of Pride Hill shopping centre in Shrewsbury; accelerate building work for New Model Institute for Engineering and Technology in Hereford; and provide new investment in the streetscape of Hereford, supporting active travel and increasing air quality. More than 800 new jobs and 1,600 homes could be created. These six projects align with the LEP's key priorities and will support the LEP area's recovery from Covid-19. A briefing sheet with more information projects can be found [here](#).

Additional Department for International Trade (DIT) Resource

DIT was awarded additional funding through the Chancellor's Budget Statement earlier this year to support more International Trade Adviser (ITA) resources within the Northern Powerhouse, Midlands Engine and Western Gateway super-regions. The funding is part of the Government's wider 'Levelling Up' agenda. Essentially, DIT was awarded budgets for recruiting more people in three key areas of activity: -

- **An Enhanced ITA service** that will flow through the DIT Regional teams and recruit 12 additional ITAs that will bolster current regional arrangements (e.g. focusing on cross regional sector priorities or gaps in current provision for example in services exporting or in customs or logistics)
- **A Regional Growth Service** that will provide a one to many services to work intensively with exporters that require a significant level of direction in order to fulfil their export potential and who then graduate to other more concentrated DIT or wider trade services
- **LEP Level Trade Advisory Resource** that is designed to help support the implementation of Regional Growth Service by utilising the local targeting arrangements by being a dedicated resource to support LEP priorities.

Marches LEP DIT additional resource progress to date is detailed below: -

- **ERDF Enhanced Export Growth Project - Marches LEP Channel Manager** is working directly with the three growth hubs to provide knowledge transfer and capacity building to enable effective handling of low level SME export enquiries, ensuring that non-export ready businesses are meaningfully supported through a range of triage activities developed in collaboration with the growth hub. The Channel Manager also supports the EU Project Manager in delivering other elements of support including organisation of events, workshops and marketing activities. To date a number of clinics have been delivered in the Marches and programme of webinar events are being shaped.
<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/new-expert-help-on-hand-to-boost-export-sales-for-the-marches/> <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/blog/new-1-2-1-export-clinics-for-businesses/>
- **Marches LEP Specialist Cluster Adviser for Food and Drink** – David Caine was appointed on 7th October and is due to start with the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce week commencing 12th October. David will be required to produce: -
 - 1 cluster campaign plan
 - 4 cluster opportunity awareness events

- A minimum of 20 service deliveries after engaging with a minimum of 50 businesses and recording those engagements as Interactions
- At least two case studies per cluster (before 31st March 2021).

In addition to the above, there is an expectation that David will: -

- Complement the work of 'core contract' ITAs
- Support in delivering Export Wins, by referring account ready clients to 'Core ITAs' and with referrals to both UK Export Finance and DIT's Enhanced International Support Service and ESIF networks as they become live.

Skills Related Funding Secured by the Marches LEP:

Marches LEP was successful in their bid for £75K funding from Department for Education to support the development of the analytical toolkit for Skills Advisory Panels. This funding is enabling us to have a better understanding of current and future skills and employment priorities that will impact on our area. This will result in an evidence-based approach to skills development programmes and may provide further opportunities for integration of business support and skills interventions, particularly in our strategically important sectors.

Work with Careers and Enterprise Company funded Enterprise Co-ordinators has continued in order to highlight the importance of links between businesses and schools as part of careers education and guidance. **Marches Careers Hub** – The Marches LEP was chosen to be part of a new wave of Careers Hub expansion announced by the Department for Education and The Careers & Enterprise Company, extending coverage in local communities across England. Becoming a Careers Hub under the Careers and Enterprise Company project enables the Marches LEP to access additional resource (1 x Careers Hub Lead and 1 x Enterprise Coordinator) to support careers guidance in schools and colleges and to increase business engagement activities.

The Marches Careers Hub will be made up of local schools and colleges working together with local employers, universities and training providers. It will be the one of only 11 hubs in the UK to include all schools in its LEP region. There are also plans to develop a network of cornerstone employers who can demonstrate best practise in school/college engagement.

European Social Fund funding has been allocated to the following projects:

- **IN2 Youth Support Partnership** works with young people aged 15-24 not in education, employment or training (NEET) or at risk of becoming NEET to support them into further learning or work.
- **Skills Support for the Workforce** provides training for employees in businesses with less than 250 employees. The training is fully funded and flexible to develop their skills, improve their prospects and support the growth plans of the business. The project also supports people affected by redundancy with upskilling and reskilling.
- **Building Better Opportunities** works with some of the most disadvantaged people in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin aged 19+ to help them overcome barriers to social and economic inclusion.
- **Building Skills and Growth Capacity** is improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems. The project supports the growth of SMEs and microbusinesses by ensuring they can identify and access skills development options that align with and unlock their growth plans.
- **Life Ready, Work Ready** engages SMEs, young people and schools and colleges to ensure there are easy ways for business and education to come together to share information on skills that employers look for, enable employers to influence activities in schools and to give people a better understanding about the jobs and skills needed in the local area.

- **Marches Centre of Manufacturing & Technology (MCMT) Skills for Growth** is improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems. The project supports SMEs in the manufacturing and engineering sector by assessing and delivering skills solutions essential to help them grow.

Each of the ESF Project Managers has met with the MGH teams in order to encourage referrals to their schemes and to better understand issues affecting the local business community

Skill & Training On-line Support - The Marches LEP are in the process of developing a new microsite to help visitors to quickly and easily find the training and skills support which is right for them, so that we can help everybody to make the most of their talents in the new world of work.

3. Overview of Key Performance Outcomes

Key Performance Outcomes. Provide information on the key outcomes of your Growth Hub linked to the requirements of the 2020-2021 'Metrics and Evaluation Framework'. **Please note that aggregated cumulative performance figures are no longer required.**

Indicator	Local KPIs (where set by the LEP)	Six Month Total (1 April 2020 – 30 September 2020)
Number of businesses that have received 'light touch' triage, information and/or signposting support (excluding website traffic)		17,713
Number of individuals ¹ that have received 'light touch' triage, information and/or signposting support (excluding website traffic)		17,770
Total number of unique visitors to Growth Hub website		14,577
Number of businesses receiving 'medium intensity' information, diagnostic and brokerage support		248
Combined turnover (amount £) of businesses receiving 'Medium intensity' information, diagnostic and brokerage support.		£29,354,796.00
Combined employee numbers (FTE) of businesses receiving 'Medium intensity' information, diagnostic and brokerage support.		13,729
Number of businesses receiving 'high intensity' support e.g. account management / intensive support directly provided by the Hub or partner organisation	77 agreed with BEIS	16
Combined turnover (amount £) of businesses receiving 'High intensity' support i.e. sustained support and using significant Growth Hub resource.		£3,031,000.00

¹ Number of businesses and individuals are both required as (for example) several individuals from the same business may attend an event.

Combined employee numbers (FTE) of businesses receiving 'High intensity' support i.e. sustained support and using significant Growth Hub resource.		80
Number of businesses receiving 'Medium' and 'High intensity' support that, have the opportunity, ambition and greatest potential to grow (including Scale-Ups)		83
Total number of individuals who been helped to start a business		366
Number of businesses referred to a mentoring programme (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only)		12
Number of businesses referred to a skills or training programme (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only)		14
Number of businesses referred to a finance and/or funding programme (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only)	38 agreed with BEIS (high Intensity)	127 (16 high intensity)
Number of businesses referred to an innovation and/or R&D programme (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only).		5
£Private sector match secured (where linked to Growth Hub)		£620,872.00

Notes:

Measures such as “combined turnover” or “combined employee numbers” should only include the local business office receiving support (in the case of multi-site businesses). They will be calculated by aggregating the values recorded at firm-level. They should be the most recent values held by the LEP/Growth Hub at the point of reporting.

Measures such as “total number of businesses referred” do not need to reflect whether (or not) the referral was taken up.

Customer Satisfaction

In line with the requirements of the 2020-2021 'Metrics and Evaluation Framework' for 'medium' and 'high' intensity interventions only, please provide the tabulated responses to the satisfaction question set out below:

“How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of this service?” rated on a five-point scale.

1/5	2/5	3/5	4/5	5/5	Total
0	0	0	6	55	61

For 'light-touch' interventions, a survey approach is sufficient. Questions that could be included based on standard questions asked of customers by all Growth Hubs.

“How satisfied were you with the service received?”, rated on a standard five-point scale?

1/5	2/5	3/5	4/5	5/5	Total
1	2	6	35	256	300

Note: (1 Very Dissatisfied- very poor, 2 Somewhat Dissatisfied - poor, 3 Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied- average, 4 Somewhat Satisfied - good, 5 Very Satisfied – excellent)

“In the absence of Growth Hub support, how likely would you be to undertake the same activity?”, rated on a standard five-point scale?

1/5	2/5	3/5	4/5	5/5	Total
21	33	97	78	69	298

Note: (1 Very Likely, 2 Somewhat Likely, 3 Neither Likely nor Unlikely, 4 Somewhat Unlikely, 5 Very Likely)

4. Growth Hub Highlights

Summary of Growth Hub Highlights;

- Please provide details of any governance changes, changes to delivery mechanisms, high profile activities, new services offered, any new engagements/partnerships etc:

2020/21 MGH Governance

The Marches LEP can confirm that Governance arrangements remain the same since the submission of the 2020/21 Schedule 3 and that all appropriate LEP governance, transparency and accountability arrangements are in place and compliant with the national LEP Local Growth Assurance Framework.

The Marches LEP have appointed Iliia Bowles as the new Director of Corporate Services for the LEP. Iliia started in October and will be leading on corporate governance, including the role of the LEP’s sub-groups, accountability and assurance framework and meeting government requirements on transparency.

The MLEP Board oversees the setting of the strategic direction for the MGH and Shropshire Council acts as the Accountable Body. The LEP Board receive a progress updates at each LEP Board meeting, the last of which was on 29th September 2020.

The MGH Steering Group is a sub-group of the LEP Board and meets quarterly. On joining the MGH Steering Group, each member (excluding local authority partners) are asked to complete the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government template of the Register of Members’ Interest Form and this is reviewed on an annual basis by the LEP Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in line with the LEP Conflicts of Interest Policy. In addition to this, members are asked to declare any interests at the start of all meetings for any relevant agenda items. The group has a very important role to play with regards to governance and provides guidance on key issues such as policy, objectives, budgetary control, marketing strategy and resource allocation.

The MGH governance is outlined in the Accountability & Assurance Framework <https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/download/transparency/Accountability-and-Assurance-Framework-2019-final.pdf> including the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the group.

The TOR are reviewed annually, and the election of the Chair takes place every two years. Steering Group agendas and minutes are prepared in line with the TOR. To note, the MGH Chair resigned from his position with immediate effect on the 26th June 2020. The Marches LEP Business Support Lead has acted as an interim Chair. A new private-sector Steering Group Chair will be recruited through open advertisement in due course. This (non-remunerated) role will help increase capacity to champion entrepreneurship, new ways of doing business and new approaches to business support in line with additional funding received from BEIS. The previous MGH Steering Group Chair is still acting as the Small Business Champion on the MLEP Board.

The MGH Operations Group is an officer level working group which meets every two months to ensure that activities are co-ordinated effectively across the Marches LEP managed virtual hub and the partner-led three physical hubs in Shrewsbury, Telford & Wrekin and Hereford. The Marches LEP Business Support Lead has acted as Chair since the MGH Steering Group Chair stepped down in June 2020. The group reviews business support services from all partners in order to manage referrals, monitor outputs and share information.

The Marches LEP team meets with the Accountable Body (finance team) monthly to review spend against profile and to discuss any concerns. The information from this meeting is used to update the Performance Risk and Monitoring Committee (PRMC) which meet every 2 months and is a sub-group of the LEP Board comprising 3 LEP Board members, three Section 151 Officers and the LEP CEO.

BEIS quarterly claim deadline dates are noted at the beginning of the financial year. Internal deadline dates are agreed with the finance team to ensure that quarterly claims are checked and submitted on time with the appropriate evidence.

The MGH Audit report is carried out by Shropshire Council and the audit team are given sufficient notice to carry out the work required. This helps ensure the year-end reporting deadline is met. The audit service provided by Shropshire Council is a chargeable service.

The Marches LEP continue to work with the contracted PR & Marketing consultants to ensure that the MGH meets the minimum requirements as laid out in the Growth Hub Network Branding/Communications Guidelines and Media Toolkit.

The MGH website will continue to be reviewed at the LEP/MGH monthly website review meetings. At present, the website is being upgraded and re-designed with a completion date of December 2020.

MGH Delivery Update

Quarter one was a very difficult time for Marches businesses in particular those that were impacted by flooding in February and then COVID 19. The increased demand for the growth hub service during this period was reported to BEIS in May (Covid19 Impact Survey) and is reflected in Section 3 of this report (light touch interactions).

During Q1 and Q2, growth hub teams have been extremely busy in continuing to deliver the growth hub service (from home to date and until further notice) as well as supporting businesses to access COVID 19 business support information as well as supporting their wider economic development teams/business rates teams with the delivery of government funding in response to COVID 19 and Marches LEP funding in response to both flooding and COVID 19.

All face to face events were cancelled and where possible moved on-line including Business Advisor 121 sessions, seminars and workshops, all of which have and are continuing to be very well received.

All planned outreach activity (Growth Hub on the Move and Let's do Business in ...), drop-in sessions in public places such as libraries, pop in shop initiatives have been put on hold and will be picked-up when it is safe to do so.

In addition to the above, the growth hub teams have been very busy planning and procuring additional business/specialist advisor resource (to be funded by growth hub additional funding) and help shape the ERDF COVID 19 Kick Start Programme (due to be launched 14 October) and Marches Step Up Programme (mentoring scheme and due to be launched in November) by Telford & Wrekin Council.

MGH Events

Across the three physical growth hubs, there was a total of **121** virtual growth hub events (growth hub led and those held in collaboration with partners) with a total of **2,238** attendees of which **2,227** were businesses. There are examples where this has enabled engagement with businesses that have not accessed Growth Hub support previously. These events are attracting very good numbers and receiving very positive feedback. Growth hubs are offering free virtual 1:1 business advisor sessions, webinars and live streaming workshops.

The MGH are working with partners, including the Chambers, FSB and other business representative organisations to avoid duplication and to promote all scheduled on-line events.

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/calendar/>.

The MGH teams have been delivering suites of events rather than one off events and have created hubs with various themes/sectors in response to business demands and trends (start-up and business recovery/resilience). The teams are very mindful of webinar fatigue and have and are continuing to carefully plan themes/topics and timings of events to ensure events are not being duplicated and remain interesting/relevant with good attendance.

In addition to the national and regional COVID 19 on-line business support activity, below is a list of some of the MGH events delivered from April to September inclusive. A full list of events can be found here <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/calendar/>: -

- Creativity Bootcamp <https://www.innovationbeehive.co.uk/creativity-bootcamp-registration/>
- The Friday Hub (every Friday)
https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/calendar/view/2872_Friday_Hub_-_Shropshire_Business_Zoom_Room
- The Business Health and Vitality Hub <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-business-health-vitality-hub-tickets-105400297126?aff=ebapi#>
- 21 Days to Start-Up
https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/calendar/view/2801_21_Days_To_Business_Start-up_Success
- Returning to Work Safely and securely <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/returning-to-work-securely-safely-compliantly-tickets-111149354712?aff=ebapi#>
- Bouncing Bank Why your Supply Chain needs to adapt
- Marketing Your Business during COVID 19
- Buy From <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-buy-from-marketing-surgery-tickets-110679802268?aff=ebapi#>
- The Bitesize Digital Academy (Digital Marketing Strategy)
https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/calendar/view/2893_WEBINAR_Bitesize_Digital_Academy
- The Art of Brilliance and Shropshire HR - Bounce Back Ability

- Special Forces Mindset - Resilience During Periods of Transition
- Small Business Commissioner Webinar - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-small-business-commissioner-webinar-tickets-114544449532#>
- Boost your business in Hereford in partnership with NatWest - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/business-support-clinic-hereford-natwestboost-tickets-89040240757?aff=ebapi#>
- Funding Business Growth in partnership with Business Growth Programme 2 - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/business-growth-programme-2-funding-business-growth-tickets-96972091135?aff=ebapi#>
- Telford Women's Networking Meeting - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/april-2020-telford-womens-networking-meeting-tickets-100420384072?aff=ebapi#>
- Business Survival Workshop, Ideas and Government Response <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/business-survival-workshop-ideas-and-government-response-tickets-101704316348?aff=ebapi#>
- Hereford Means Business Expo 2020 - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/hereford-means-business-expo-2020-visitor-ticket-tickets-90953052027?aff=ebapi#>
- Herefordshire Economic Development Forum - Talk Community Business - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/herefordshire-economic-development-forum-talk-community-business-wellbeing-and-future-developments-tickets-103504883894?aff=ebapi>
- Financial Hot topics during COVID 19 - <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/calendar/view/2774> Financial Hot Topics during Covid-19
- Building Strengths that Build Resilience - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/building-strengths-that-build-resilience-tickets-114243826360>
- Grants for Growth in partnership <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/calendar/view/2960> WEBINAR Grants for Growth

MGH High Profile Events

All MGH high-profile events scheduled in the first 6 months of the financial year have been cancelled. Some events will look to be rescheduled later in the financial year including the successful Leadership Conference which has been rescheduled to 4th November.

Marches LEP Recovery Week - The Marches LEP will be delivering a virtual Recovery week during 12th – 16th October 2020. The MLEP have organised the week working with partners across Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin to focus on action needed to rebuild the regional economy as it begins to emerge from the shadow of the virus.

The Virtual Recovery week will include: -

- Launch of Marches LEP Annual Report and the 'Your LEP in Action' event to showcase progress on the partnership's key projects in the last year, which includes millions of pounds of investment into infrastructure and business support to help recovery in the Marches. The event is also a chance to meet the Marches LEP Board, with members of the public invited to submit questions in advance of the meeting to be answered during the online event. LEP Chair Mandy Thorn MBE will launch the LEP's Annual Report and outline activity taking place during the week. <https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/marches-lep-launches-annual-report/>
- Marches LEP Digital Strategy launch to highlight include the need for investment in digital infrastructure to support businesses, the digital skills agenda and the importance of high-speed broadband to rural areas. <https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/marches-to-be-national-leader-in-digital-technology-report/>
- Skills day to highlight ESF-funded activities, apprenticeships and workforce development.
- Marches Economic Recovery Summit - The week will finish with a Marches Economic Recovery Summit which will examine how the business community can be helped to thrive in the new post-

Covid world. Partners will include the membership of the current Marches Economic Impact Group (Chambers of Commerce, FSB, NFU, LEP Board private sector and third sector champion and local authorities). <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-marches-economic-recovery-summit-tickets-124096444807>

Increasing Awareness & Engagement

The impact of Coronavirus on the region's businesses is reflected in the both the swift retargeting of communications via the MGH and the use of its media channels during this period.

The strategy to align more closely the communications of the Marches LEP and its business support service has resulted in an increased awareness of the work the LEP delivers to help business growth, evidenced through increased engagement on both organisations' social media channels.

The successful £10m Growth Challenge campaign to encourage uptake of EU grant support was temporarily halted during the months of March-July so as to not be tone-deaf to the wider situation and the challenges facing our businesses. Marketing of this has geared up in September with inquiries coming in through the dedicated landing page.

Communications during this period have focused on: -

- Dedicated Covid-19 resources online and signposting of government communication to support employers and partners
- Availability of coronavirus related grants and business support measures to help businesses via gov.uk and through funding available through the Marche LEP
- Working with finance and funding partners, including the British Business Bank, to signpost to loan and grants
- Latterly, a move towards support for EU Exit and the end of transition as well as new measures introduced to support economic recovery.

Media relations, PR & press online and offline coverage

More than **119** separate pieces of media coverage was secured as a result of MGH PR campaigns, content and news releases.

These have appeared in the key print titles for the region, including the daily Shropshire Star newspaper, the Midlands News Association weekly titles and other Shropshire and Herefordshire weekly titles, including the Hereford Times.

Regular features have appeared in both Shropshire Business magazine, Hereford Business Magazine, the Business Matters magazine of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Business Direction, the magazine for Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce.

BBC local radio headline, breakfast and drivetime shows have covered the work of the MGH Coronavirus support with Marches LEP chair, Mandy Thorn being interviewed.

Campaigns

The PR & communications activity during this period has continued to focus on support available for coronavirus hit businesses and how the MGH services can help them recover.

As well as launching new funding programmes, MGH communications have supported Government messaging on track and trace, help for employers with risk assessments ahead of getting staff back to work and sharing best practice, case study and webinar content to help businesses get back to work.

The Covid related pages on www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk have been revamped to focus on recovery support and work has continued with partners to support a range of online events hosted by hub teams and advisors, Chambers of Commerce and the FSB.

In July, the Government requested support for its Transition campaign, issuing new messaging and a social media toolkit urging businesses to get ready for the end of the transition year. The MGH communications approach to this has been to share Government owned channels and relevant events supporting businesses to prepare with plans to increase this activity in the coming weeks.

Website

In the last six months, **65** news releases and **47** pieces of online content related to business support on offer, plus information pages and case studies, have featured on the Marches Growth Hub website. This has resulted in a **11%** increase in web visits on the previous 6 months.

Despite the dedicated coronavirus resource section only being published from March 2020, it secured more hits than any other section in the entire October 2019 to March 31, 2020 period. This reversed in the period from April 1 - September 30 when the top viewed section returned to finance and funding.

	1 October 2019 – 31 March 2020	1 April 2020 – 30 September 2020
Website users (unique visitors)	13,018	14,577
Total web visits	19,581	21,794
Page views	78,542	63,612
Average time spent	2 min 33 sec	2 min 41 secs
Return/new visitors	18%/82%	18.3%/81.7%
Most visited pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice and support for Coronavirus • Calendar • MGH Shropshire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance and Funding • Advice and support for Coronavirus • MGH Shropshire

Social Media

MGH Twitter had a total of **4,046** followers which is an increase of **2%** since 31 March 2020. Potential viral reach totalled **4.7m**. @marcheshub

The MGH Facebook page received **716** likes and **741** follows which is up **6%** since 31 March 2020. The average monthly reach was **5,344** (including 1 paid for campaigns) with average organic monthly reach at **4,109**. <https://www.facebook.com/marchesgrowthhub/>

LinkedIn had **889** followers (up **43%** since March 31, 2020) with **6,048** average monthly impressions. <https://www.linkedin.com/company/marches-growth-hub/?originalSubdomain=uk>

Note – All updates are shared across MLEP and Hereford Enterprise Zone channels, as well as significant sharing via MGH partners.

Newsletters

Eleven Mailchimp newsletters issued to a mailing list of 2,018 each time. These newsletters are supplemented by regular joint local authority partner/MGH e-shots promoting events, availability of advice and support and promotion of new grants and initiatives, delivered to in excess of 7,000 businesses.

<https://mailchi.mp/marcheslep/coronavirussurvey-3956897>

<https://us3.campaign-archive.com/?u=2b7ada33c6ebb42413e6e87b4&id=3ba25301fd>

<https://mailchi.mp/marcheslep/signupforgovukwebinars>

<https://us3.campaign-archive.com/?u=2b7ada33c6ebb42413e6e87b4&id=a5b530eaea>

<https://mailchi.mp/marcheslep/funding-for-tourism-and-business>

<https://mailchi.mp/marcheslep/guidance-for-reopening>

<https://mailchi.mp/marchesgrowthhub/recoverysupport>

<https://us3.campaign-archive.com/?u=2b7ada33c6ebb42413e6e87b4&id=40c06c0314>

<https://mailchi.mp/marcheslep/launch-event-sign-up>

<https://mailchi.mp/marchesgrowthhub/millions-secured-for-jobs>

<https://us3.campaign-archive.com/?u=2b7ada33c6ebb42413e6e87b4&id=c95f8b75d>

Case studies

Case studies on businesses for this period focused on working safely during coronavirus:-

Fabweld Steel

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/working-safely-fabweld-steel-products/>

Corbetts the Glavanizer

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/working-safely-corbetts/>

Speller Metcalfe

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/working-safely-speller-metcalfe/>

Existing Partnership Development

- **Partnership working** has continued to be encouraged through the MGH governance and meeting structures, i.e. through the MGH Operations Group (two monthly), MGH Steering Group (quarterly) and MGH Campaign Group (two monthly) meetings. These continue the sharing of good practice.
- **Business Boards** - MGH continued to work closely with three Business Boards in Telford & Wrekin, Shropshire and Herefordshire. The Business Boards help to provide direct links to private businesses which helps both publicise and test the effectiveness of the MGH service.
- **Marches Economic Impact Group** - The MLEP Chair continues to host monthly virtual meetings with local partners including the NFU, FSB, British Business Bank and two Chambers of Commerce, Business Board Chairs and Private Sector Board members.
- **DIT and Export Agenda**- MGH further developed the excellent working relationship with local DIT team (delivered through Shropshire Chamber of Commerce) and West Midlands wide DIT team (further details including outputs/outcomes are provided in this report).
- **West Midlands Cluster** - The Marches LEP continues to work closely and support the work of the West Midlands Cluster. Activity includes a recovery themed telemarketing exercise and a quarterly West Midlands Business Trends Survey (<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/take-the-west-midlands-business-trends-survey-to-shape-the-future/>). Intelligence from

both exercises will be shared in due course and will help to inform business support policy and shape local business support.

- **Collaborative events** - Success continued with collaborative events and workshops with both existing partners and newly developed partnerships across the Marches. Examples have been provided in Section 4 of this report.
- **Network Groups** - All three growth hubs are very supportive of the FSB, Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, Business Boards and Women In Rural Enterprise (WIRE) activity and events that take place across the county.
- **Innovate UK (part of UK Research and Innovation)** - In the Marches, since 2010/11 until 1st August 2020 (latest figures available), Innovate UK has offered grants to 116 organisations of which 113 are businesses. Ignoring grants which were withdrawn or otherwise not given, grants were given to 111 organisations of which 108 were businesses. This represents 176 grants (which were given) totalling £18,205,968 and of this businesses represented 153 grants totalling £15,456,123.
- **Be the Business - The Mentoring for Growth Programme** is now available to Marches SMEs. Following a meeting with Andrew Cleobury - Marches Mentoring Advisor in September 2019, Andrew is actively working with all three growth hubs to explore possible referrals to the programme. Andrew and Damini Sharma, MD of OM Group and a mentor from the programme delivered a very informative presentation to the MGH Operations Group on 20th February 2020. Since the meeting with the MGH Operations Group, Andrew has secured two Marches businesses on the programme and received 2 mentor suggestions. The MGH website and growth hub teams have been kept informed on the recent eligibility changes.
<https://www.bethebusiness.com/group-event/mentoring-for-growth/>
- **ScaleUp Institute** – Work continues with the institute to support their Annual ScaleUp Review report and other reports being released. A recent press release can be found here on the Marches Scaleup position
https://pressroom.journolink.com/suithemarches/release/fastgrowing_businesses_in_the_marches_are_vital_to_its_economic_future_7332
- **Intellectual Property Office** - The online IP Master Class Bitesize course has continued to be promoted to Marches business advisors. The masterclass enables advisors to develop a detailed understanding of all aspects of IP and its relationship with business, culture and the economy. During this period, 1 Business Advisor from MGH Shropshire team has completed the course.
- **Midlands Energy Hub** – MGH continues to help raise awareness of new projects/programmes available through the hub. Recently the MGH supported the promotion of a new funding scheme for programmes which can deliver training solutions to support the new Green Homes Grant scheme. The Green Homes Grant Skills training competition is designed to provide support to the energy efficiency and low carbon heating supply chains to deliver works under the Green Homes Grant scheme, and to scale up to meet the additional consumer demand generated.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-homes-grant-skills-training-competition>.
- **British Business Bank** – The MGH has actively promoted the Coronavirus Interruptions Business Loans and Bounce Back Loans on the MGH website, via the e-newsletter and through social media platforms. Loans offered as of 2 August by Constituency can be found here <https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CBILS-BBLS-Constituency-Region-Sector-02August20.pdf>

- **Marches Experts in Residence** monthly mini NatWest Boost your Business events in partnership with the MGH were put on hold due to COVID 19. Activity is currently being planned for October 2020.

EU Project/Programme Development - MGH SME businesses had access to 19 EU funded business support projects (including grants and consultancy support) with a total financial value of over £19.5million. A further £2m of investment in business support schemes is in the pipeline. Funding and support through the current and planned programmes will continue until June 2023. The four largest ERDF schemes (Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP), Business Growth Programme 2 (BGP2), Marches Buildings Investment Grant (MBIG) and Broadband Grants) awarded a combined £1.3m to Marches businesses between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020. The EU investment will lead to the anticipated creation of 75 jobs.

These projects/programmes provide in-depth business support for SMEs and are focussed on SMEs with a desire/capacity to grow including creating new jobs. Some of the high-growth/scale-up programmes that are delivered/promoted via the MGH are detailed below including impact information where it has been provided.

- **West Midlands Chambers of Commerce (WMCC) summary of DIT and ERDF contract** Overall performance in the 2020/21 financial year in the Marches has been good considering the Covid-19 challenges that have significantly impacted businesses since the end of March. The year started with a total change in how ITAs work due to lockdown with all DIT staff working from home and having to alter the range of support they offer. Teams were re-purposed to provide businesses with Covid-19 crisis information and were asked to provide intelligence on Covid-19 impact to central government.

With the focus of support moving away from Export to just helping businesses access the Covid-19 support schemes being introduced - DIT recognised that teams across the UK would not be able to achieve the targets originally agreed at the start of the year and as such these were halved. DIT acknowledged the need for ITAs to be on the front-line helping businesses to manage the Covid-19 crisis, as being more about business survival rather than export support.

Given the Covid-19 impact with both teams supporting businesses through the crisis performance in the first three months up until end of June was minimal however, the teams have started to receive more export enquiries. Slowly but surely, the team are starting to see a shift back to normal business.

Progress and performance against targets have been very good, with teams in Shropshire and Herefordshire managing to be ahead of profile in virtually all output areas.

DIT Target	Position
Export Win Value	6 th
Export Win Volume	5 th
New Exporter Volume	6 th
Unique Exporter Wins	5 th
MSB Exporters Volume	6 th

The above table shows the Marches position overall when compared to the other DIT teams operating in the West (out of six).

The current position shows a slight downward shift in ranking when compared to previous years, with the team performance in Shropshire being particularly low when compared to other teams. However, this should not reflect badly on the team given the extraordinary circumstance we have been working in.

The new ERDF Enhanced Export Growth Project started on 1st April 2020 and as such the project was immediately impacted by the Covid-19 lockdown. There was a shift in approach to online content given that the project exclusively funds events and face-to-face activities.

Delivery of ERDF this year has been challenging, although the early adoption and promotion of online webinars was very well received with high attendee numbers, it has been difficult to gain multiple engagements from SMEs, and therefore the ability to generate 12 hours of support has been significantly affected.

The new ERDF project also saw the introduction of a new resource – Channel Manager that will work directly with the MGH and is focussed on supporting Micro and Small, none and novice exporters.

The Channel Manager has worked closely with the MGH in communicating the new offer, the set-up of drop-in clinics and the recent introduction of a series of workshops, all aimed at supporting micro and small SMEs and encouraging them to examine and explore export opportunities. Covid-19, however, has also impacted the Channel Manager, with all meetings and relationship development being done online. The Clinic numbers and workshop attendance is lower than we would have liked. The Channel Manager continues to work in conjunction with the growth hubs to find solutions.

Channel Manager Clinics delivered = 2
ERDF Workshops delivered = 3

To the end of September, the project has engaged with 41 SMEs in the Marches and has collected SME Declaration forms from 19 of these and has managed to achieve the following progress:

No. of Enterprises with 1-4 hrs of support = 20
No. of Enterprises with 5-8 hrs of support = 2
No. of Enterprises with 9-12 hrs of support = 1

The ERDF targets are shown in the table below:

ERDF Output	Target	Achieved
C1 Number of Businesses Assisted	21	1
C4 Number of Businesses receiving 12 hr assists	21	1
P13 Number of enterprises receiving information, diagnostic and brokerage support	11	6
C5 Number of New Enterprises Supported	1	0
C8 Number of New Jobs Created	4	0

It has been a slow start, which is down to Covid-19, both teams along with the Channel Manager are working to find solutions to improve performance and as we continue to see businesses return to a form of normality, DIT envisage the situation improving, although with a limited time for delivery fully expect some underperformance with both spend and outputs for the ERDF project.

Over the course of the year to end of September, DIT has supported 178 businesses in the Marches through 31 separate online activities. No Trade Mission activity has taken place during the period due to COVID-19, but on-line market information has been provided.

DIT and WMCC value their partnership with the MGH and continue to seek innovative ways to build and strengthen their work as demonstrated by the introduction of the ERDF Channel Manager provision.

- **Business Growth Programme 2 (BGP2)** Effective from April 2019, BGP2 offers grants of £2,500 - £1,000,000 and is designed to strengthen supply chains, stimulate innovation and help businesses grow. The programme is available to:
 - Start-Up B2B Small to Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) moving into or located in the MLEP Partnership area only; and
 - Existing B2B SMEs moving into or located in The Greater Birmingham & Solihull and the MLEP Enterprise Partnership areas.

Part funded by the European Regional Development Fund and managed by Birmingham City Council, BGP2 builds on the successful delivery of the £33m Business Growth Programme which closed in December 2018. Between 1 April 2020 to 31 September 2020, 13 BGP applications were approved totalling £ £326,050.49 which will help to create 36 jobs. Private sector match totals £ £249,725.78 with £36,017.14 private sector leverage.

- **Marches Renewable Energy (MarRE) Project** is designed as a straightforward grant scheme allowing any eligible applicants to apply for a 50% grant for the installation of eligible renewable technologies on their premises. Grants are awarded for new installations. MarRE seeks to support a wide range of applicants. Eligible applicants include Local Authorities, statutory and non-statutory public funded organisations/bodies, Higher and Further Education Institutions, voluntary/community organisations, private sector companies, registered charities and not-for-profit organisations. There is no maximum grant, although installations are expected to be in the range of 4-200kWp. Installations larger than 200kWp will not be considered for this project.

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the delivery of MarRE, with fewer applicants wanting to invest in renewable technology due to the uncertainty during this time. However, the MarRE team is now seeing an increase in the number of applications. To date the grant scheme has awarded 14 grants worth over £175,000 to projects that will deliver nearly 600kWp of renewable energy. The project team is concentrating on promoting the grant in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, where fewer applications have been received to date. For more information about MarRE see the electronic copy of the new MarRE leaflet [here](#) and the Case Studies ([CS 1](#), [CS 2](#), [CS 3](#)) which have been written to encourage more applications. www.herefordshire.gov.uk/MarRE

- **Agri-tech Growth and Resources for Innovation (AGRI)** - Aston University and Harper Adams University have been part funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to support the delivery of AGRI. AGRI initiative assists Marches based SMEs to innovate and develop new products and services in order to exploit growing market opportunities; particularly in agri-tech, food and drink manufacture and specialist food and drink logistics, as well as to break into new agri-food markets. Having met its initial output targets, the AGRI project has been successfully extended and will now complete in October 2022, supporting 173 SMEs in the region over 5 years. The extension support from March 2020 will be delivered in the Shropshire and Telford and The Wrekin transitional area of the Marches LEP region, and to date has worked with 102 companies, 88 of which have completed and 14 are currently in progress. Helping to develop new products and services with both short one-to-one assists and longer-term innovation development collaborations - 24 of these companies have moved on to longer term innovation development support, of which 22

have now completed. Additionally, the project has delivered 7 specialist workshops: covering areas such as precision agriculture, logistics, innovation in food and drink production and measuring and sensing in food processing using photonics. Additional project information can be found at www.agri.org.uk, on Twitter via @agritechsupport and Instagram via @agri_project.

- **Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF)** - Current MEIF Fund of Funds position at the end of August 2020 - £81.3m invested and loaned in 403 investments/loans in 301 SMEs of which £2.5m invested and loaned in 24 investments/loans in 20 SMEs was in the Marches. MEIF Fund of Funds position for the financial year (1st April 2020 – 31st August 2020) is £16.57m invested and loaned in 84 investments/loans in 44 SMEs of which £715k invested and loaned in 5 investments/loans in 3 SMEs in the Marches.

The MGH continues to work closely with the 5 fund managers to help promote the funds available. The Marches LEP Business Support Lead (BSL) is the Chair of the MEIF Regional Advisory Board (RAB). The BSL together with the chair of the East & South East Midlands RAB presented RAB feedback to the MEIF Strategic Board on 17th July. The Marches LEP BSL Lead will also be involved in strategic discussions around a MEIF successor fund with the MEIF SOB on the 21st October. The MEIF Senior Relationship Manager Ryan Cartwright is a member of the MGH Operations Group.

Case study for the first proof of concept Marches investment can be found here:

<https://www.meif.co.uk/agri-robotics-start-up-raises-250k-from-meif-for-revolutionary-system-to-improve-crop-yields-2/>

- **Marches Buildings Investment Grant (MBIG) and Small Equipment Grant (SEG)** - In September 2019 Herefordshire Council secured a further £3m of ERDF funding for Marches Business Investment Programme. This programme contains two schemes, the extended MBIG and the SEG. MBIG was launched in November 2019 and provides an improved offer to businesses under this programme. Businesses can access grants of up to £150,000 (maximum 50% contribution) to extend /reconfigure commercial properties and can now also access funding for new build developments. The Small Equipment Grant (SEG) went live in March 2020 and provides funding for capital equipment purchases up to £10,000 (50% contribution). The programme since launching has received 409 enquiries (of which 257 between April and September 2020). A total of £831,573 has been allocated to businesses to date, of which £694, 484 has been approved since April 2020 to 28 businesses that aim to achieve 57 jobs. The programme is currently seeking an additional £500k ERDF and hoping to extend the operational period to June 2023.
- **Digital Solutions** at University Centre Shrewsbury has been initially funded through the European Regional Development Fund as a Priority 1b project promoting digital research and innovation until December 31st, 2020. The project builds on existing expertise and resources to deliver targeted support to SMEs, aligning with the MLEP growth plans for its digital and related sectors, particularly how digital developments can be used to unlock growth in the health sector. Innovation activity in areas such as health and digital advancements are positioned as focus areas that will drive productivity.

The project activities address digital innovation from two angles:

- Working with SMEs to develop new digital innovations – (research and innovation)
- Working with SMEs users of these technologies, particularly SMEs in the health sector, but open to any sector – (technology transfer and commercialisation).

Although the project started in January 2018, delays and issues with recruitment resulted in the project only becoming fully active towards the end of 2018/early 2019. However, since the team has been in place, the project is meeting all its business support targets and is supporting a growing pipeline of businesses that have expressed an interest. www.digitalucs.co.uk

During 1st April to 30th September 2020: -

- A total 151 new SMEs have expressed an interest in support
 - Of those, 41 have or are currently, receiving/received innovative support
 - Of the 41, 33 have completed their support package
 - Of the 33 completed 8 are currently receiving long term collaborative support from University Centre Shrewsbury
 - The project has exceeded the new product to firm target by 4 (10 claimed, target 6) and are anticipating achieving the new product to market by the end of the year (1 claimed, target 3)
 - The project is also forecast reaching out target 40 business support outputs by the end of December 2020
 - Due to Covid19 the New job (C8) output may be difficult to achieve
 - Project extension is awaiting approval to start in January 2021.
- **European Bioenergy Research Institute (EBRI)** supports businesses to apply for collaborative research funding to develop new products, processes and technologies and take them to market. The MLEP results for period 1 April 2020 – 31 September 2020:
 - LEP enrolments– 7 (Transitional)
 - Claimed in period – 1 (C1 & a C26 – More Developed)
 - To be claimed in period - 1 (C1 at Q3 – Transitional)www.bioenergy-for-business.org
 - **System Analytics for Innovation (SAfi) / Think Beyond Data (Aston University)** - The aim of the SAfi project is to help businesses use their data to automate and scale business processes, find better and more efficient solutions and gain a deeper understanding and new business insights. Think Beyond Data enables businesses to make better use of their data, empowering them to better understand and control their domain, through the use of leading-edge AI, machine learning and analytics techniques. Businesses supported between 1 April 2020 30 September 2020 include:
 - Whichchoice Limited - Investigated potential product APIs and databases that can be used as part of Choice Master development and testing. The report also includes some initial recommendations for Choice Master design and evaluation strategies.
 - Therapyaudit Limited - Investigated and provided recommendations regarding predictive healthcare analytics for monitoring rheumatoid arthritis (RA).
 - Business Education Projects Ltd - Produced a report for Biz Ed to provide the system analysis of the Work Experience Placement (WEP) Builder system. The system analysis is done from the viewpoint of the system users: Admin, Employer, and Learner.
 - The Marches Energy Agency - Explored various Customer Relationships Management (CRM) systems that could be used for managing their customer data as well as Energy Property Efficiency (EPC) data.
www.thinkbeyonddata.com
 - **Advanced Materials Characterisation and Simulation Hub (AMCASH)** allows SME's access to key facilities and expertise within Metallurgy and Materials. The core offer is for 2-days work fully funded through ERDF in the areas of Polymers, Microscopy or Modelling of metallic alloys. April to September 2020 has been a challenge for AMCASH to deliver the services due to COVID-19. One of the key challenges has been the lockdown period during which the project had limited access to the University's laboratories in the School of Metallurgy and Materials. From July, the project was able to regain limited access as the University implemented plans for a staged increase in access to laboratory facilities. SME activity, and efforts to engage them, has been limited by government restrictions and also furlough of many of the project contacts. The project response has been to use digital meeting platforms (Teams, Zoom) to increase engagement activities with SMEs, in order to at least scope projects during the lockdown period. Having made adaptations to their engagement strategy, the project has increased their online direct contact with SMEs and have run a number of

successful webinars, in collaboration with industry organisations. They have used social media to run campaigns, highlight expertise and publicise specific events all of which have been amplified by the MGH. During April to September 2020, the project has engaged with 3 SMEs and R&D support works are in progress, which they are aiming to complete in Q4 2020. Links to recent events can be found below:- <https://www.castmetalsfederation.com/news/2020/06/cmef-waste-foundry-sand-and-ic-shell/> / <https://thecbm.co.uk/events/cbm-amcash-workshop-10am/>

www.amcash.co.uk

- **The Manufacturing Growth Programme (MGP)** has been operating since October 2016 and is now working across 17 LEP areas. Delivered by Economic Growth Solutions, part of Oxford Innovation, the programme supports SME Manufacturers to grow by identifying, understanding and removing barriers to growth and enabling sustainable business improvement. The project provides free advice and support to manufacturing SMEs to help them: -
 - Identify opportunities and create plans for growth and improvement
 - Work with the best external experts to implement those plans
 - Cover 33% and 43% (Transitional areas) of the cost of implementing the plans through a growth/improvement grant
 - Connect to wider support to maximise opportunities for growth.

Progress in the Marches from 1 April to 30th September 2020 includes work conducted with 21 clients with grants offered worth £55,042 to businesses. Delivery of the current programme will continue until March 2023. A representative from this programme is a member of the MGH Operational Group. <http://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/>. A list of case studies and market intelligence can be found below: -

Motor Design <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/motor-design/>

White Heron Drinks <https://youtu.be/bHybnlQnTCY>

Hitherbest <https://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/energised-shropshire-manufacturer-defies-brexit-uncertainty-with-20-sales-increases/>

Fabdec Limited - <https://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/an-ellesmere-manufacturer-has-seen-a-jump-in-productivity-after-gaining-external-support-and-grant-funding/>

https://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Marches-MGP-Insight-Report_08-2020.pdf

<https://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/market-data/barometer/>

- **Centre for Research into Environmental Science and Technology @ University Centre Shrewsbury (CREST @ USC)** - In partnership with Reaseheath College and Birmingham University, CREST@UCS helps SMEs across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin to develop and test new products, processes or services. The support on offer includes research collaborations; feasibility and testing; air, soil and water analysis; help developing low carbon products and services; access to Low Carbon Opportunities Programme (LOCOP); waste and resource assessments; business models and value propositions; masterclasses and workshops.

During April to September 2020, 51 SMEs have received the standard package of support under ERDF, which is a minimum of twelve hours support. Of these 51, 11 have been start-ups less than a year old. 22 enterprises have received, or are receiving, longer term research and innovation support. This has resulted in 3 new jobs being created, 1 new product to market and 2 new products to firms.

Some examples of recent impact of business support:

- Research into indoor air quality and links to health and wellbeing
- Helping businesses apply for LOCOP funding

- Development of a prototype linked to lift sharing
- Research on social value in construction
- Waste assessments on both a manufacturing and construction site
- Development of value proposition for business consultancy
- Building networks and contacts for start-up companies
- Research into market competition for start-up companies
- Market information on biochar and associated products – likely to develop into a longer-term research project to demonstrate impact of biochar
- Research into the use and value of green space
- Investigate nesting patterns of certain birds, and identify technology that can detect their nests
- Successful Innovate UK bid through Sustainable Innovation Fund
- Online event in July on Aquatic Ecology. Available to view on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAMVKD1h89w&t=4114s>
<http://crestatucs.com/>
<http://crestatucs.com/case-studies/>

- **Innovate 2 Succeed** is an Innovate UK funded project (until March 2022) delivered within the Marches by Coventry University Enterprises Ltd. This is a fully funded programme that is targeted at ambitious SME's that wish to grow and develop new products and services. The aim of the programme is to help SME's bring products and services to market more quickly and with less risk. In addition to this, the programme helps to improve innovation and growth capabilities.

Between April and September 2020, the programme interacted with 5 companies in the Marches area and of these 1 has joined the programme with another being supported through the business assistance launched at the start of the COVID pandemic. All are involved with business growth through innovation (both products and services). There are no case studies at this stage as most are at an early stage. One company the project is still working with has not just weathered the storm but is going stronger than ever with record sales in the past two months (approx. +50% sales growth).

The programme continues to operate during the current COVID-19 outbreak through the use of remote support and coaching. In addition, the project is also supporting a number of innovate businesses through this period via their "5 Day Assist" to weather the storm.
<http://www.cuebusinesssolutions.com/innovate2succeed-i2s/>

- **UK-Centric Supply Chains (UCSC)** is an ERDF project led by Dr Aristides Matopoulos that offers free business support to eligible SME businesses in the food and drink, automotive and associated manufacturing sectors. UCSC assists SME's to map, assess and improve the capabilities of their supply chains with the view to maximising UK content and gain a better understanding of their supply chain in terms of geography/location and relationships with suppliers/customers. A unique Supply Chain Readiness Level (SCRL) diagnostic tool developed by Aston University is used to assess the companies supply chain maturity and support managers' decision-making processes for future supply chain activity. The diagnostic results are analysed, and a plan proposed for the identified needs, followed up with support from academic supply chain experts on a one to one basis or one to many, as well as offering workshops.

The project has completed two of the three years duration which ends on the 30th September 2021. An application for an extension to extend the project to June 2023 is with MHCLG but is delayed due to Covid-19 staff secondment. The project forecast is to support a total of 28 SME's within the MLEP (transitional area), four of which will be start-up companies. To the 30th September 2020, 15 Marches SME's have completed and received 12 hours of supply chains C1, C4 support, of which 2 are C5's newly registered start-up companies. A further 8 SME's are work in progress and there is a large pipeline of prospects at various levels of discussion and engagement.

The impact of COVID-19 and the 'lockdown' changed ways of working but the team and academics continued working on the project. Project delivery activity with 6 monthly academic workshop events was planned for the Marches starting on the 31st March 2020. The March to July 2020 lockdown resulted in all public events being cancelled. Whilst project activity slowed because of SME availability, instead of business engagement managers (BEM's) visiting SME's they are working from home with calls and meetings online and similarly support has been done via email and video meetings. Travelling time has been saved, as have travel costs and impacts on reduced fuel emissions. Some businesses have been very busy so have had to pushback meetings and others have been forced to close during the lockdown. As the duration of the lockdown was unknown initially, some business owners took advantage of the time at home to look at their businesses and supply chains strategically and to speak to the BEM.

A well-attended (36) virtual webinar was held on the 24th July "Bouncing Back, why your supply chain needs to adapt". Dedicated Marches BEM Jamie Pratt attended 8 networking events and 18 events held by the Marches Growth hub and other regional events between March and September 2020. An engagement video for the project is commissioned and a marketing campaign is planned for the latter quarter of 2020.

The supply chain challenges faced by many manufacturers and food and drink producers have been accentuated by the impact of Covid-19 and Brexit and shown a need for programs such as UK-Centric Supply Chains to help address issues and build resiliency. Positive impact from the project to 2 SME's has resulted in wider research opportunities to enable Knowledge Transfer Partnerships to increase staff and grow the businesses. www.ukcentricsupplychains.co.uk/

University of Wolverhampton (UoW) ERDF Project/Programme Development

Some projects are delivered in other areas as well in the Marches and their data is included as it is difficult to split out.

- **Built Environment Climate Change Innovations (BECCI)** benefits SMEs in the Black Country and Marches LEP areas of the West Midlands, by providing free support in the development of products and services that reduce carbon usage.
 - Supports inventors to get their products and processes adopted by industry.
 - Linking academic research into business, driving innovation in areas such as smart grid, battery storage, heating and cooling controls, social landlord engagement and property developer support.
 - Testing and measuring of products, with access to a variety of technology including thermal comfort sensors, energy loggers, air tightness kits, ventilation measuring kits and a portable weather station.
 - Hosting technology showcases, challenges and workshops, providing SMEs with exhibition opportunities.
 - Strategic research in energy efficiency with social housing providers, developers and commercial organisations.

www.wlv.ac.uk/BECCI

Number. of enterprises receiving support	12
Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	1
Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	1

- **Composite & Additive Layer Materials Engineering Research & Innovation Centre (CALMERIC)** project supports SMEs to carry out research & innovation projects in the field of advanced engineering materials, in collaboration with specialist staff and resources in the Centre.

- Composite materials
- Additive manufacturing (3D printing)
- Engineering, Research and Innovation
- Industrial Research Collaborations
- Product optimisation (using less or lighter weight materials)

www.wlv.ac.uk/Calmeric

No. of enterprises receiving support	5
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	5

- **Smart Concept Fund** offers a Proof of Concept grant designed to support the commercialisation of new technologies.
 - Product Development
 - Prototyping
 - Testing
 - IP Protection
 - Market research

www.wlv.ac.uk/smartconceptfund

Number of enterprises receiving grants	3
Number. of new enterprises supported	3
Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	1
Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products	1
Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	1

- **SPEED** is the extension to the Enterprise Action project and is being delivered in Shropshire & Telford from January 2019 – December 2021. SPEED supports entrepreneurs to start up their own business through one to one support, workshops and an opportunity to apply for a grant up to 50% of the total cost.

Number of enterprises receiving support	4
Number of enterprises receiving grants	3
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	4
Number of new enterprises supported	3
Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants) (£)	£5,341
Employment increase in supported enterprises	4
Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready	7

- **Science in Industry Research Centre (SIRC)** supports companies in the West Midlands to develop new science-based products.
 - IP Review and guidance
 - IP Grants
 - Scientific Research
 - New product design
 - Laboratory testing

www.wlv.ac.uk/SIRC

Number of enterprises receiving support	1
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	1
Number of researchers working in improved research infrastructure facilities	2

- **Cyber Quarter** acts as a Midlands Centre for Cyber Security, a Police RCCU Hub and proactive network facilitation service.
 - Provides a Cyber Range designed to immerse the business in a real-world customer network that can be used for educational training and for testing response procedures to known or simulated threats.
 - Strategic insights and planning to address their cyber and security needs.
 - Live demo environment to test & develop cyber defence and attack measures alongside leading cyber security academics.
 - Hub and facilitator for the cyber, security, blue-light and defence communities.

www.cyberquarter.co.uk

No. of enterprises receiving support	5
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	5

Local Growth Outputs

Jobs connected to the intervention	2
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- **Elite Centre for Manufacturing Skills (ECMS)** offers SME's in the manufacturing and engineering industry short courses and training to up skill the ageing workforce.
 - Hire of facilities and rooms for meetings, events, conferences, training etc.
 - Manual & Commercial training and short courses
 - Material testing and analysis
 - Specialist training provision at the National Foundry Training Centre
 - State of the art equipment (Labs, Foundry workshops, CAD IT Suite)

www.theecms.co.uk

- **Solutions for Digital Enterprises (SOLVD)** Accelerating growth in digital businesses through opportunities, challenges and innovative solutions.
 - Assist digital leaders with their technology, digital & security strategies.
 - Solving commercial problems through digital technologies.
 - Accelerating digital and technology companies by accessing new markets.
 - Consultancy and support to enable the development of products or services and bring these into their business or to market.

www.wlv.ac.uk/solvd

- **The Marches Centre of Excellence in Healthcare, Allied Health & Social Care** - the aim of the project is to create a nationally recognised centre of excellence in Health, Allied Health and Social Care at the University of Wolverhampton Telford Campus (Priorslee). This will be achieved through the development and refurbishment of state-of-the-art teaching and office space within the Angad Paul building and in doing so provide specialist facilities and technologically enabled infrastructure.

New Key Partnerships/Engagements

- **Enterprise Nation** - For the past 3 years Enterprise Nation has run a campaign for Facebook called [She Means Business](#) which has trained thousands of female founders on how to boost their digital skills. The fourth year of the campaign kicked off at the start of 2020 with Facebook COO, Sheryl Sandberg, and Enterprise Nation recruiting 10 Growth Hub (**one of which was the Marches Growth Hub**) to be involved in hosting an event for female founders across the UK. The virtual events **#SheMeansBusiness Sessions** were delivered on the She Means Business Facebook page on Tuesday 15 September 12-3. The event brought together a collection of inspiring, insightful and real stories from women who mean business, following what has been a challenging time for all, including those in business. The event was run in partnership with Facebook, Enterprise Nation, NatWest and the selected Growth Hubs in England. The sessions included some well-known faces and names to

include Holly Tucker, MBE, co-founder of Not On The High Street, June Sarpong, OBE and Asma Khan, founder of Darjeeling Express and the first British chef to appear on Netflix's Chef's Table. The Marches Growth Topic was Ads manager, the ultimate time and money saver which was delivered by with accredited #SheMeansBusiness trainer [Rhea Freeman](#).

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1563917043780509/>

- **UoW Cyber Quarter and SOLVD Project** -The project manager was invited to present at the MGH Steering Group meeting (March) and MGH Operations Group meeting (July). The presentation helped the groups understand the support available through the Cyber Quarter and the new SOLVD project. Since the presentations, the project manager and the three growth hubs are working closely to help raise the profile of the projects, encourage referrals (both ways) and explore possible collaborative working/events.
- **Enhanced Export Growth Project – New Channel Manager support.** The Marches Channel Manager was invited to speak at the MGH Operations Group meeting in July. The Channel Manger role is to work directly with the 3 growth hubs to provide knowledge transfer and support capacity building to enable effective handling of lower level SME export enquiries, ensuring that non-export ready businesses are meaningfully supported through a range of triage activities and businesses are signposted to other relevant business support. To date, a number of clinics have been delivered in the Marches and programme of webinar events are being shaped. A link to a press release confirming the support can be found here <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/new-expert-help-on-hand-to-boost-export-sales-for-the-marches/> and promotion of 121 support can be found here <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/blog/new-1-2-1-export-clinics-for-businesses/>
- **The Marches Small Business Recovery Grant Scheme funded by ERDF COVID 19 Kickstart Funds –** The MGH teams have been involved shaping this scheme which is being led by Telford & Wrekin Council. The website www.marches-sbrg.co.uk went live at noon on 6th October and applications will start to be received at 9am 14th October
- **Marches Step-up Programme (ERDF)** - Telford and Wrekin Council in conjunction with partners at Herefordshire Council & Shropshire Council are close to appointing a supplier(s) to deliver this coaching and mentoring programme. The programme will look to support aspiring entrepreneurs, Start Ups (both via Step up to Start) and businesses with growth aspirations (via Step up to Growth). The programme will aim to run from 1st November 2020 to December 2022. This is subject to change depending on contract award dates. The MGH will help promote the programme and the MGH teams will help support referrals.
- **Peer to Peer Network Programme –** This activity will be outsourced by the Marches LEP and the tender is currently live. Additional LEP resource has been sourced to support the procurement and set-up of this programme.

New Services

- Additional business/specialist advisors (supported through Growth hub uplift funding) will help support 121 business advice across the Marches. The three growth hubs are at present busy procuring and planning activity for the rest of the financial year. Q2 COVID 19 specific support has successfully been delivered by 2 of the 3 growth hubs. This activity will be reported to BEIS in the uplift funding report later this financial year.
- The LEP have successfully recruited a temporary full time LEP administrator to support the Marches LEP Business Support Lead. The new member of the team started on the 12th October. Costs will be met by Growth Hub uplift funding as agreed with BEIS.
- The MGH is currently in the process of re-designing and upgrading the MGH website to WordPress. The MGH Steering Group approved the draft visuals at the September 2020 meeting. As the next step, the existing content will be audited and updated. The website will hopefully be ready for external testing in November (subject to the provision of content) with a Live date in December

(subject to time required from changes through feedback).

5. Positive news stories, case studies, testimonials.

- Please provide any case studies, news stories, best practice, testimonials or innovative approaches that showcase the Growth Hub best. When choosing case studies in particular please ensure that the 'Case Study' is from the first half 2020/21 where possible. You may also wish to consider case studies that align to the LEP's Strategic Economic Plan priority sectors/planned Local Industrial Strategy.

Marches Growth Hub helps thousands of business during pandemic

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/marches-growth-hub-helps-thousands-of-business-during-pandemic/>

Growth Hub moves business expertise online to help coronavirus fightback

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/growth-hubs-move-business-expertise-online-to-help-coronavirus-fightback/>

Expert online events will help businesses recover from coronavirus lockdown

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/expert-online-events-will-help-businesses-recover-from-coronavirus-lockdown/>

Marketing expertise on offer at free webinars

Expert help on how to market your business in the wake of the coronavirus crisis is on offer at a series of free webinars. MGH Shropshire has teamed up with the [Buy-From](#) team to put together the webinar programme to examine how businesses can adapt their digital marketing and thrive in the coming month. <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/marketing-expertise-on-offer-at-free-webinars/>

Lucas returns for Shropshire digital skills workshops

A nationally respected marketing expert is returning to Shropshire for a new series of ten workshops to help companies master digital skills. Lucas Karemo has teamed up with the MGH Shropshire to stage the series of free online events to give business owners an expert insight into using digital technologies, data and communications within their organisation.

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/lucas-returns-for-shropshire-digital-skills-workshops/>

Creativity Bootcamp promises to help unlock your potential A series of virtual workshops is promising to help businesses across Shropshire unlock their creativity and reach their full potential. MGH Shropshire has teamed up with [The Innovation Beehive](#) to deliver the series of three webinars as part of a Creativity Bootcamp. The series promises to demonstrate how creativity can be learned and provide businesses with the tools needed to stretch their thinking and provide solutions to their challenges. <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/creativity-bootcamp-promises-to-help-unlock-your-potential/>

New expert help on hand to boost export sales for the Marches A new service has been launched offering expert help to Marches companies looking to break into new markets overseas. An international trade specialist has been appointed to work alongside the Marches Growth Hub and Department for International Trade (DIT) to help new and inexperienced exporters across the region. John Wigley has taken up the role as part of the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) funded Enhanced Export Growth Project to help SMEs in the Marches make the most of new export

opportunities. <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/new-expert-help-on-hand-to-boost-export-sales-for-the-marches/>

Businesses urged not to miss out on renewable energy grants

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/businesses-urged-not-to-miss-out-on-renewable-energy-grants/>

Marches Building Investment Grant (MBIG) and Marches Small Equipment Grant Case Studies Shropshire manufacturer fit to grow thanks to grant help

BeaverFit - which operates from a 3.5-acre site at Leebotwood near Shrewsbury - has built a new manufacturing workshop and showroom/office area and created five new jobs after receiving £97,582 from the Marches Building Investment Grant.

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/shropshire-manufacturer-fit-to-grow-thanks-to-grant-help/>

Shropshire company expands thanks to grant help

The Bridgnorth-based 3D Measurement Company (T3DMC) has created a new area to show off its range of hand-held 3D scanners and taken on three new members of staff after receiving just over £11,000 from the Marches Building Investment Grant scheme.

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/shropshire-company-expands-thanks-to-grant-help/>

New jobs at Telford manufacturer thanks to grant help

A specialist Telford manufacturing company has expanded and created six new jobs after receiving nearly £100,000 from a grant programme supported by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership. During 2019 Midland Alloy took on new staff and built a warehouse extension at its Stafford Park base after receiving £97,285 from the Marches Building Investment Grant

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/new-jobs-at-telford-manufacturer-thanks-to-grant-help/>

Shropshire Film production company set for growth thanks to new grant

A Shropshire film production company has its sights set on growth thanks to a £10,000 grant from a new business support programme. The Ludlow-based Wild Edric Media company has used the money – from the Marches Small Equipment Grant (SEG) – to help it buy a £30,000 multi-camera professional-standard live streaming package. Wild Edric Media director Carl Walker says the new equipment will help it target a new and growing sector of the market by broadcasting live performances straight to the internet. The grant scheme, which is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund and supported by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership and Marches Growth Hub – is part of a £3million funding package which also includes the Marches Building Investment Grant. (no link as news release yet to be released)

Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF) & COVID 19 Support

Hereford company wins Innovate UK grant

A Hereford company which has gone from strength to strength after receiving £200,000 funding from the Midlands Engine Investment Fund has scooped a national grant to help local traders adopt eCommerce. Stok.ly has been announced as a winner of Innovate UK's COVID-19 Technology Grant to launch a community eCommerce project to help traders recover from the coronavirus pandemic.

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/winner-of-innovate-uks-covid-19-technology-grant-to-launch-a-community-ecommerce-project/>

Agri-robotics start-up raises £250k from MEIF for revolutionary system to improve crop yields

A Shropshire start-up which aims to use cutting-edge technologies to help farmers improve crop yields has raised £250,000 from the MEIF Proof of Concept & Early Stage Fund, which is managed by Mercia and part of the Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF). The funding will allow Earth

Rover to launch its first product, a 'crop scouting' system which predicts the size and timing of harvests. The Earth Rover system uses cameras fitted to a tractor to scan the plants and measure their growth as the vehicle passes through the fields on routine farm operations. The data is then analysed using artificial intelligence (AI) housed in a supercomputer on board the tractor.

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/agri-robotics-start-up-raises-250k-from-meif-for-revolutionary-system-to-improve-crop-yields/>

West Midlands businesses benefit from almost £3.5bn of funding under Coronavirus loan schemes New data shows that businesses across the West Midlands have received a total of almost £3.5bn in funding under the government's two largest Covid-19 loan schemes, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and the Bounce Back Loan Scheme. These provide financial support to businesses across the UK that are losing revenue, and seeing their cashflow disrupted, as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak.

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/west-midlands-businesses-benefit-from-almost-35bn-of-funding-under-coronavirus-loan-schemes/>

Quest88 mobility equipment manufacturer in Shropshire secures CIBL funding- A company that makes mobility equipment for organisations including the NHS and charities has secured a Lloyds Banking Group loan as it grapples with a slowdown in orders because of COVID 19. Quest88, whose products include equipment for children with cerebral palsy, has agreed a £200,000 funding package with the bank via the CIBL scheme. It has also refinanced £110,000 of debt. The Shropshire based company manufactures and sells equipment to the NHS, councils and charities that support people with mobility issues, but it has seen a 50 per cent reduction in orders since the COVID 19 lockdown began last month.

<https://www.ukfinance.org.uk/lenders-provide-£55-billion-smes-through-cbil-scheme>

Marches Bottling and Packaging is a family business based in Herefordshire run alongside the family's cider production business, Celtic Marches Beverages. HSBC has provided the company with an overdraft facility, which it will use to help fund the production/manufacture of its new hand sanitiser being provided to key workers and members of the public.

<https://www.ukfinance.org.uk/lenders-provide-£55-billion-smes-through-cbil-scheme>

Market Drayton Grant and MGH Support

Valley Motorsport will move into a refurbished unit at the Tern Valley Business Park, near Market Drayton, thanks to funding from the Market Drayton Business Grant Scheme.

<https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/business/2019/04/18/homecoming-for-shropshire-racing-car-firm/>

Business Growth Programme 2

£25,000 investment puts Telford workwear specialist back on course for £2m sales A leading Telford workwear specialist is bouncing back from Covid-19 thanks to renewed investment and the acquisition of new garment print technology. **MyWorkwear**, which operates from Halesfield in Telford, is now setting its sights on £2m sales by 2023 as it looks to secure new contracts from companies looking for personalised workwear and fast turnaround on orders. The £25,000 investment, which is partially funded by a grant from the [European Regional Development Fund's Business Growth Programme 2](#), will support the creation of two new jobs over the next few months and the installation of a new garment printer and heat press that will increase capacity by 100%. <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/25000-investment-puts-telford-workwear-specialist-back-on-course-for-2m-sales/>

Manufacturing Growth Programme

Marches companies to get share of £6.5m boost for manufacturers looking to recover from

Covid-19 impact Small to Medium-sized (SME) manufacturers across the Marches are being urged to take a slice of a £6.5m funding boost to help them recover from the Covid-19 pandemic and address key barriers to growth. <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/marches-companies-to-get-share-of-65m-boost-for-manufacturers-looking-to-recover-from-covid-19-impact/>

MGH Case studies focussing on working safely during coronavirus:

Fabweld Steel

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/working-safely-fabweld-steel-products/>

Corbetts the Glavanizer

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/working-safely-corbetts/>

Speller Metcalfe

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/working-safely-speller-metcalfe/>