

Innovating a Civic Mission (ICM) – Researching relationships between education, enterprise, and industry

Best Practice Report

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The Valleys region has high levels of youth unemployment and poverty (Bulman, 2018) and developing enterprise skills in young people gives them the power to change their future. This Enterprise Educators UK (EEUK) Research Development Funded evaluations seeks to understand and evidence the positive impact of social innovation and community engagement in this region for both learners and businesses taking part in the Valley's Innovation Project (VIP). This research helps to answer the call of Welsh Government to provide "Good-quality jobs and the skills to do them." (Welsh Government, 2017).

1.2 Executive Summary

Over the course of the last 12 months Simply Do Ideas and Coleg y Cymoedd have been exploring how the conjoined worlds of institutional civic mission and social innovation connect with the priorities of local businesses in the South Wales Valleys region. The Valley's Innovation Project (VIP) combined the entrepreneurial skills of young learners with the economic and social need for businesses to innovate, using the digital innovation platform Simply Do Ideas to enable the collaboration.

This Enterprise Educators UK Research Development Funded research project captured perspectives from learners, educators, and business stakeholders who were involved in the VIP. Allowing us to not only evaluate the past successes and learning from this project, but to provide a passport for positive partnership for the future of social innovation.

A combination of survey and interview content from 5 educational institutions and 2 employers outlined a wide range of learning and understanding to influence the future direction of social innovation activity. The key findings of the research are presented below:

1) **Learners gain entrepreneurial confidence and skills through social innovation challenges**

Skills gains were empirically evidenced across the following areas; creative thinking (+27%), creating and seizing opportunities (+28%), digital skills (+33%), making ideas a reality (+33%), self-reflection (+47%), decision-making (+19%), and communication skills (+52%). Respondents also indicated that before the project they had, on average, 'a moderate amount of confidence' in starting a business with that confidence growing to 'a lot of confidence' in starting-up after the project.

"VIP is a great way for learners to not only demonstrate their skills, but actually develop them as well."

VIP Educational Partner 1

2) **Social innovation can provide economic benefit and wider benefits for local businesses**

Employers and educators highlighted that they saw economic benefits from social innovation such as 'improving processes', 'income', and savings on 'cost and time'. This makes social innovation more attractive for future business participants.

"We produced content really cost-effectively to engage with young people."

(Industry Partner 1t)

3) **Civic mission of VIP educational partners aligns with local business priorities**

Both businesses and educational partners illustrated knowledge, awareness and understanding of civic values and the importance of their local communities. All parties highlighted the development of talent and skills and supporting local businesses as key features of their strategic and operational activity. It should also be noted that care must be taken in future social innovation projects to ensure alignment of civic values between business and education is established during project inception.

"Social innovation challenge is such a positive environment and creates the potential for collaboration between industry, education, and the community."

(Industry Partner 2)

4) **Digital solutions enhance proximity between education and industry**

All parties used the Simply Do Ideas platform to create, manage and assess solutions to these social innovation challenges. Both education and business representatives highlighted the ability and importance of these platforms in engaging young people above and beyond traditional methods of collaboration.

"Embrace digital platforms because that's the future and that's the future of where young people will be working, where they need to develop key skills."

(Industry Partner 1)

The Valley's Innovation Project has highlighted the importance of social innovation for learners, educational institutions, and employers to continuously improve, which is clear from the results of this evaluation. Building on the success of this project is the challenge that all areas of community will need to take-up as we enter a period of socio-economic uncertainty. Investment in social innovation is vital to the advancement of not just enterprise education, but the civic society as a whole.

1.3 Background



Simply Do Ideas is a cloud-based, digital platform enabling organisations to deliver innovation through crowdsourced solutions.

Experts in social innovation across education, government, healthcare and policing. Use cases range from employee idea capture through to fully-managed, global innovation marketplaces.



The Valley's Innovation Project took part over 12 months in 2018 and used the scalability of a digital platform to reach further and faster than standard models of social intervention. As part of VIP, we used the platform to connect 4 charities/social enterprises, using challenge-led innovation, with learners from 4 local colleges and 1 university, helping them to innovate in a safe digital space. To extract these challenges, Simply Do Ideas ran several design-thinking led hackathons with the organisations to really understand their issues (using Appendix 1: Social Challenge Resource).



What is Challenge-Led Innovation?

1. Focused on speed and agility and where solutions are not fully known
2. Creative process so non-prescriptive and solutions-focused
3. Flexible format with increasing intensity sprints
4. Maximum engagement for learners and businesses

We work and live in South Wales Valleys, an area which has high levels of youth unemployment and poverty which needs to change. The Covid-19 crisis has also led to a projected youth unemployment rate of 50% in Wales (Nation Wales, 2020). This crisis will continue to present challenges in bringing together learners and opportunities for work-related experience, stifling the ambitions and horizons of these young people. Add to this the fact that Valley's regions are present in the top 10 areas of multiple deprivation in Wales, and

features deep-rooted inactivity in areas such as education and employment (WMID, 2019), making understanding the successes and lessons learned from this project essential.

Initial feedback of the VIP has evidenced the initial positive impact of social innovation with over 80% of participants indicating a positive impact. The project's outputs also included fantastic community engagement with over 200 socially-driven ideas for new products, services, and processes benefitting learner employability, business growth, and vacancy protection. The need to build on these findings and understand how and why employers and educators are drawn to social innovation through strategic mechanisms like institutional 'Civic Mission' and socio-economic motivators is tremendously important for future policy and practice in the field.

“As a small business, there isn't much time to keep improving. This project gives me the chance to gather new ideas quickly and easily.”

Helen Walbey, Recycle Scooters, VIP Industrial Partner

2. Research Journey

2.1 Research Questions

To explore the impact of the Valleys Innovation Project, the proposed research project sought to answer the following research questions aligned with EEUK strategic aims:

Research Question 1: Do learners gain entrepreneurial confidence and skills through social innovation challenges? (EEUK Aim: To increase the scale, scope and effectiveness of enterprise education initiatives)

Research Question 2: What is the economic impact for local businesses using socially-driven innovation challenges? (EEUK Aim: To develop new areas of applied enterprise education which link with the national focus on the needs of the economy and employers)

Research Question 3: Does the civic mission of VIP educational partners align with local business priorities? (EEUK Aim: To develop new areas of applied enterprise education which link with the national focus on the needs of the economy and employers)

Research Question 4: How does a digital solution enhance proximity between education and industry? (EEUK Aim: To provide evidence of the effectiveness and impact of enterprise education)

2.1 Methodology

This study uses a sequential mixed research methodology combining quantitative and qualitative data to explore the research questions generated (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The purpose for using this

method is facilitate the discovery of new insights which are then expanded upon sequentially in further research using a different methodology. The approach was chosen to explore each of the research questions from multiple perspectives which “fortifies and enriches” to ensure findings are triangulated and provides more generalisable results (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 3).

Methods

In order to gather the learner data relating to Research Question 1, the study sought to capture learner data using a quantitative survey mechanism. This method was adopted for pragmatic reasons as capturing representative interviews with learners across the 5 institutions would have been difficult within the time constraints of the project. The survey consisted of 20 questions captured through the Qualtrics Survey platform (see Appendix 2: Questionnaire). Questions were constructed using primers from relevant literature in the space and referenced the research questions appropriately. The survey was distributed to 115 learners involved in the project with 17 responses received representing 14.78% sample of the total population. The data captured was analysed using SPSS software before relevant results were incorporated into the qualitative surveying.

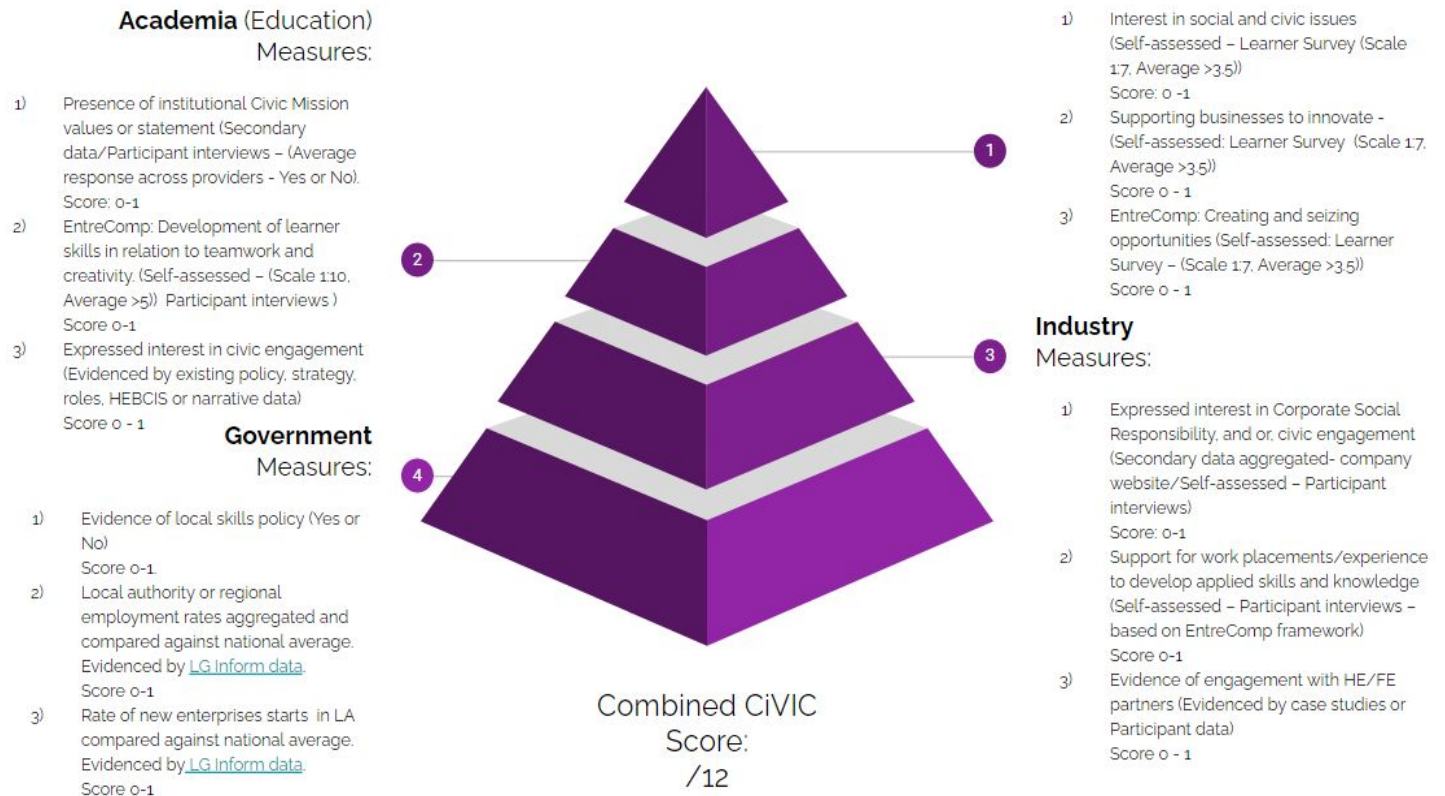
A semi-structured interviewing approach was then used to capture the perspective of employers and the educators involved in the project, Due to both the limited number of participants and the need to explore employer and educators perspectives from a narrative perspective this approach was adopted. Interview questions were created using a combination of findings from quantitative analysis and relevant literature in the space (see Appendix 3 & 4 for more detail). A total of 4 educational providers were interviewed from a total population of 5. The university partner could not take part due to the pressures of Covid-19. From the employer total population of 4 organisations, we captured 2 interviews with a the third employer unavailable for comment and the fourth partner has unfortunately ceased trading. Deductive analysis was then performed on the transcribed data to form the basis of the findings.

2.1 Civic Value Innovation Calculation (CiVIC)

As part of the research design phase, the research project team created an evidence-based calculation for other practitioners to adapt and adopt in order to allow future social innovation activity to be measured against the successes and learnings of this project. These metrics were captured both qualitatively through surveys and quantitatively through interviews across the study to create the **Civic Value Innovation Calculation** (CiVIC). The scoring mechanism is conceptually based on the quadruple-helix theory (Carayannis and Rakhmatullin, 2014; Galvão *et al.*, 2017) which states that an entrepreneurial innovation ecosystem is made-up of four elements; industry, academia, government and community. In CiVIC, three measures are given for each element of the quadruple-helix using a combination of primary data mapped to the EntreComp entrepreneurial competencies framework, which can be captured as part of standard evaluation of these programmes using our template questionnaire (see Appendix 2), and secondary data from local

authority and national government sources are combined to give a social innovation project a score out of 12. The 'government' element of the quadruple-helix as illustrated below is entirely made up of third-party data to ensure that external factors affecting the success and failure of the social innovation activity are illustrated (see diagram below).

Civic Innovation Value Calculation (CiVIC)



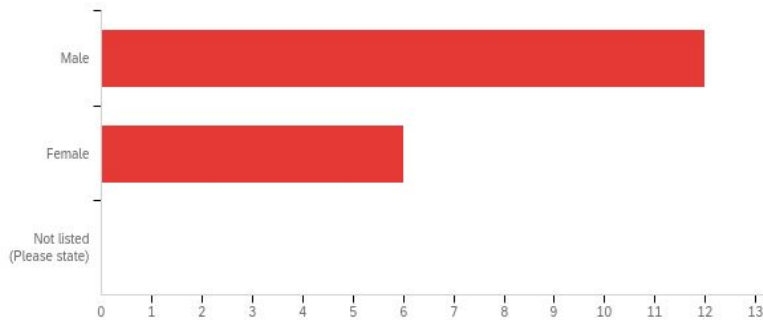
The CiVIC calculation is flexible and scalable to allow researchers and practitioners to gain a more rounded perspective on social innovation activity and benchmark similar project activity against the VIP outcomes. The CiVIC calculation for VIP is included in the Outcomes 4.2 section.

3. Analysis

2.1 Quantitative Analysis

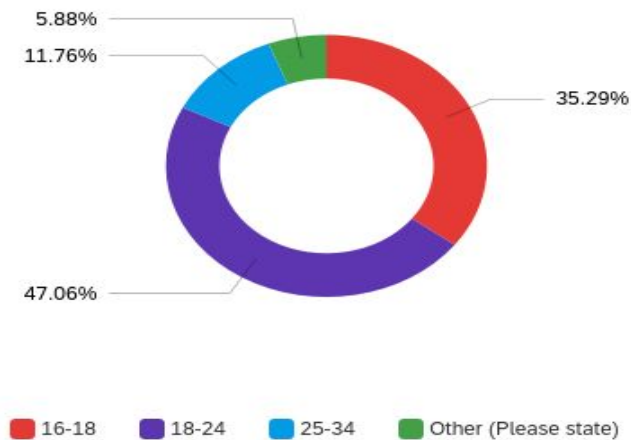
Learners from across all 5 educational institutions were surveyed over the course of a 3 month period using standardised questionnaires to understand their motivations and outputs from the project. Presented below is the descriptive analysis to frame the results, with a full record of the survey results in Appendix 5: Survey Results.

Gender Profile



The gender distribution across respondents shows a relative male bias with over double the male participants. This is broadly representative of the total accessible population which features 52% of male respondents.

Age Profile



The age of participants is predominantly below the age of 25 which aligns with the typical FE/HE age demographic. This majority of participants, 81%, are within this age bracket with a small percentage of 11.76%

in the 25-34 age bracket. Only one respondent selected the other option entering their age as 49, which due to its distance from the age of the majority of respondents should be considered as outlying data.

Learner Gain

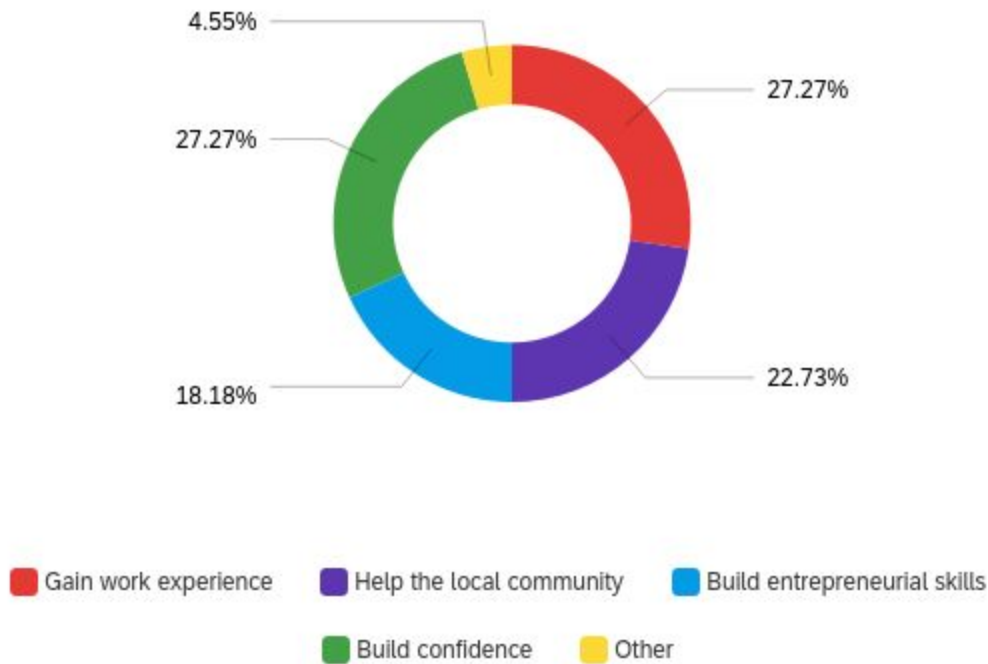
Participants in the project were asked to self-assess their skills in-relation to 7 [EntreComp competencies](#) before the project and after the project using a 7-point Likert scale. The results of this self-assessment are presented in the table below:

EntreComp Identified Skill	Before VIP (percentage above average)	After VIP (percentage above average)	Gain/Loss (+/-)
Creative thinking	73%	100%	+27%
Creating and seizing opportunities	71.43%	100%	+28.57%
Digital skills	66.67%	100%	+33.33%
Making ideas a reality	60.87%	94.12%	+33.25%
Self-reflection	46.67%	93.75%	+47.08%
Decision-making	69.23%	88.24%	+19.01%
Communication skills	33.3%	85.71%	+52.41%
			Average Gain/Loss: +34.37%

The results illustrate that across each of the identified skills sets the learners have made significant gains. The highest learner gains were in the areas of communication skills and self-reflection, which are interesting measures to test in future social innovation projects. This also justifies the exploration of Research Question 1, as all participants have identified learner gains against the EntreComp entrepreneurial competencies framework. The survey next sought to establish how and why learners gain entrepreneurial confidence and skills through social innovation challenges.

Motivations

Learners were next asked why they wanted to be involved in VIP using a multiple choice format. The results are presented below:



Interestingly, the results illustrate that the majority of learners were looking to build confidence and gain work experience again reinforcing and helping answer Research Question 1. The importance of building confidence is also highlighted by the educational partners in the Qualitative Analysis section of this report and should form part of the marketing and publicity of these projects to learners in the future.

In order to explore the entrepreneurial confidence of learners further, participants were also asked to rate their confidence in starting a business before and after the project using a 7 point Likert scale illustrated by in the figure below:



The mean values, represented in the figure on the previous page, illustrate the average point selected on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from 'None at all' to 'A great deal of confidence'. Respondents indicated that before the project they had, on average, 'a moderate amount of confidence' with that confidence growing after the project towards 'a lot of confidence'. This again illustrates the positive impact of VIP on entrepreneurial self-efficacy and allows us to empirically state that learners build entrepreneurial confidence through social innovation activity in this project..

A complete report of the descriptive results of the survey is included in Appendix 5 for future reference, and SPSS parametric and non-parametric testing performed in Appendix 6: SPSS Analysis. The reason for non-inclusion of SPSS data in this report is that with such a small sample population to work from the results are likely to be tokenistic and not adequately describe correlations or differences between variables in the data.

2.2 Qualitative Analysis

Stakeholders from educational and industrial partners were interviewed by telephone/virtually by both research project partners. to support the exploration of Research Questions 2,3,and 4. Question formation was supported by the results of the learner survey, and full theoretical mapping of the questions is provided in Appendix 3 and 4. The interviews were then transcribed, anonymised appropriately, and coded within nVivo using Strauss and Corbyn's (1998) deductive approach where keywords and themes are formed by a combination of what participants have said, literature, and terms that emerge as you analyse the data. This led to the creation of 78 codes across the 5 interviews. Analysis below presents key data relating to the research questions.

Economic Benefits of Social Innovation

In order to understand the impact that social innovation can have on education and industry participants were asked a series of questions around the benefits/disbenefits of involvement in the VIP. Participants Participants from both education and industry identified economic benefits for industry involvement in social innovation:

"It can improve processes, then obviously that's going to improve value in terms of the business itself, whatever the business is." (Education Partner 1)

"I suppose wider economic impact is ultimately the program we chose that we wanted to try and drum up the ideas around is one that would contribute to the wider economic society, and young people starting a business, gaining income, and contributing to the economy." (Industry Partner 1)

The opportunity of engaging learners in ideas creation through social innovation also offered partners cost and time-saving opportunities:

"It's like casting into an audience that you may not have considered who could generate ideas far more cost-effectively than in engaging in external agency for instance." (Industry Partner 1)

"It would be maybe more time-consuming. Well, definitely more time-consuming." (Education Partner 2)

However despite these economic benefits from the project, participants were also quick to highlight that the real benefits of the project were more learner-centred:

"mobilize young people regardless of their background, where they're from, what postcode they live in." (Industry Partner 1)

"prepare young people for the world of work and to be responsible citizens" (Industry Partner 2)

Despite this positive feedback from participants, one of the clear lessons learned from this project is that economic benefits of social innovation need to be more precisely calculated using an agreed impact measurement tool with employers. Still, the feedback from participants clearly indicates that social innovation projects like VIP deliver economic benefits to industrial partners supporting the answering of Research Question 2 as the economic benefits are described by participants as improving " processes", "income", and savings on cost and time. These findings are also presented in the Social Innovation Top Tips: Working with Employers document.

Civic Mission's Alignment with Business Priorities?

Civic mission is defined by Thomas and Vokes (2018, p2) as a combination of strategic and action orientated activities by educational institutions which include "boundary spanning civic leadership", "links with schools", "active citizenship", and "social enterprise and innovation". Many institutions including Cardiff University and York University have publicised Civic Missions, so understanding if and how industry and these civic missions align and misalign with educational priorities is useful for the future success of these initiatives.

Interviews with VIP participants sought to understand the awareness, knowledge, similarities and differences in perspective between education and industry views of the civic mission. Further education partners in the project all outlined their proximity to the community in their institutional approach to civic mission;

"we've got close links with the town center, we've got loads of excellent links in terms of word-based learning... I would say we've got a very strong community and we do live our values and live our mission in that way." (Education Partner 2)

"Help the whole community. That's people, the businesses, the charities, to help everybody just to give everyone-- to help that way in all aspects." (Education Partner 3)

"massively behind supporting the development of the Valleys and the Valleys' people to prosper. That is definitely our mission for the college as well. We do that in lots of different ways." (Education Partner 1)

"colleges now are starting to work more closely with business/organisations now because of the new employer-led approach. Our college does provide a community fund to support local business./charities etc." (Education Partner 4)

The same question was posed to industry partners to understand any synergies between the two populations with the following responses received;

"supporting young people in the way in which they need it with tangible skills, knowledge, and experiencing they need to progress in life is most important. Very closely aligned to that, is that being able to contribute to society." (Industry Partner 1)

"We already support local schools, colleges, and universities with our work in the education sector. Raising awareness of intellectual property and where it fits. We also support local businesses through our outreach program." (Industry Partner 2)

The core theme running through both sets of responses is the development of talent and skills while supporting local businesses, which suggests that there is indeed alignment between business and civic mission outcomes supporting the answering of Research Question 3. In fact, the Education Partner 1's representative outlined that the VIP *"aligns well with our aims and objectives and values as an organization."* This strategic organisational alignment with the civic mission and socially-driven innovation is an important, and a key lesson, in attracting employers into future projects of this nature and features in the Social Innovation Top Tips: Working with Employers document. The matching of educational and organisational priorities should be performed during recruitment of employers to the project to ensure both parties expectations are met, as in the case of VIP.

Digital as an Enabler of Industry and Educational Relationships

The Valley's Innovation Project was hosted on the Simply Do Ideas digital platform and enabled organisations across the diverse geographical range of the South Wales Valleys to collaborate with educational institutions. Given the impact of Corona-virus on more traditional forms of physically-enabled collaboration, the exploration of the effectiveness of digital forms of entrepreneurial and innovation collaboration are crucially important as we move into a post-Covid world.

In order to understand the influence of a digital platform on a project such as this (Research Question 4) participants were asked to reflect on these digital tools as an enabler. Respondents highlighted the power of digital platforms as a tool for engagement with young people:

"embrace digital platforms because that's the future and that's the future of where young people will be, will be working, where they need to develop key skills." (Industry Partner 1)

"definitely to engage with young people...we engaged with young people that possibly we wouldn't have engaged with if we'd launched the competition ourselves. It also enabled us to easily reach young people in different educational institutions." (Industry Partner 2)

The educational partners highlighted ease and effectiveness of a digital platform in supporting the activity;

"A lot easier for businesses to collect all the information. They can see all the ideas. If we hadn't done it digitally then they would have had, you know, 25 bits of paper with the students' ideas on. I think that the digital platform is of huge benefit." (Education Partner 2)

"we realized how important digital connection is and perhaps we come to realize how we can use it more effectively." (Education Partner 1)

The pragmatism of these responses illustrates the importance of digital platforms to support activity such as the VIP. But Industry Partner 1 also commented that they wanted to meet the educational partners face-2-face as it would be "useful to have met representatives from the education organizations involved". Interestingly, from Education Partner's 3 perspective they felt the lack of virtual engagement with the work-place also left something missing for learners; "That might have been nice if they'd shown a video of the actual premises, because I think the learners would have felt more comfortable going there." So whether the relationships need to be built in person, or with the support of digital tools, there is a place in this collaborative activity for both approaches to support social innovation.

4. Outcomes

4.1 Conclusions

In reflecting on the research questions set out in the Section 2 of this best practice report we can conclude the following:

Q1) Do learners gain entrepreneurial confidence and skills through social innovation challenges?

Learners do gain entrepreneurial confidence and skills through the social innovation challenges of VIP. This is evidenced quantitatively on average by a 34% increase across 7 skills set mapped against the EntreComp competency framework. Learners also identified a specific rise in entrepreneurial confidence in setting up a business which again illustrates the potential impact of social innovation on entrepreneurial futures. Despite the positive impact of this project on both skills and potential start-up

rates, it would be interesting to track whether participants have actually started a business venture as a result of this activity for the purposes of future study.

Q2) What is the economic impact for local organisations using socially-driven innovation challenges?

There are economic benefits for local organisations involved with social innovation challenges such as cost and time savings, alongside process efficiencies and income generation for learners. However, pinpointing the actual economic benefits in terms of the amounts of money saved and generated needs to be recorded and calculated more precisely using a models like [World Business Council for Sustainable Development \(WBCSD\)](#), or The [University of Oxford's Student Impact measures](#) will help institutions gain more precise value from the engagement of their learners. Further study could explore a precise calculation based on notional time spent on the project by learners multiplied by the average graduate, or school leaver, starting salary.

Q3) Does the civic mission of VIP educational partners align with local business priorities?

The civic mission of both employers and educators does align within this specific project, broader research could establish more uniform findings, in the key areas of the development of talent and skills while supporting local businesses. But it should be noted that matching of institutional values needs to be performed prior to project launch to ensure that the community-based values of educational institutions are not in conflict with the economic imperative of industry partners. It would be interested in similar evaluations to look specifically at this tension potentially with more profit-driven businesses and establish any kind of cultural change due to the activity in this environment..

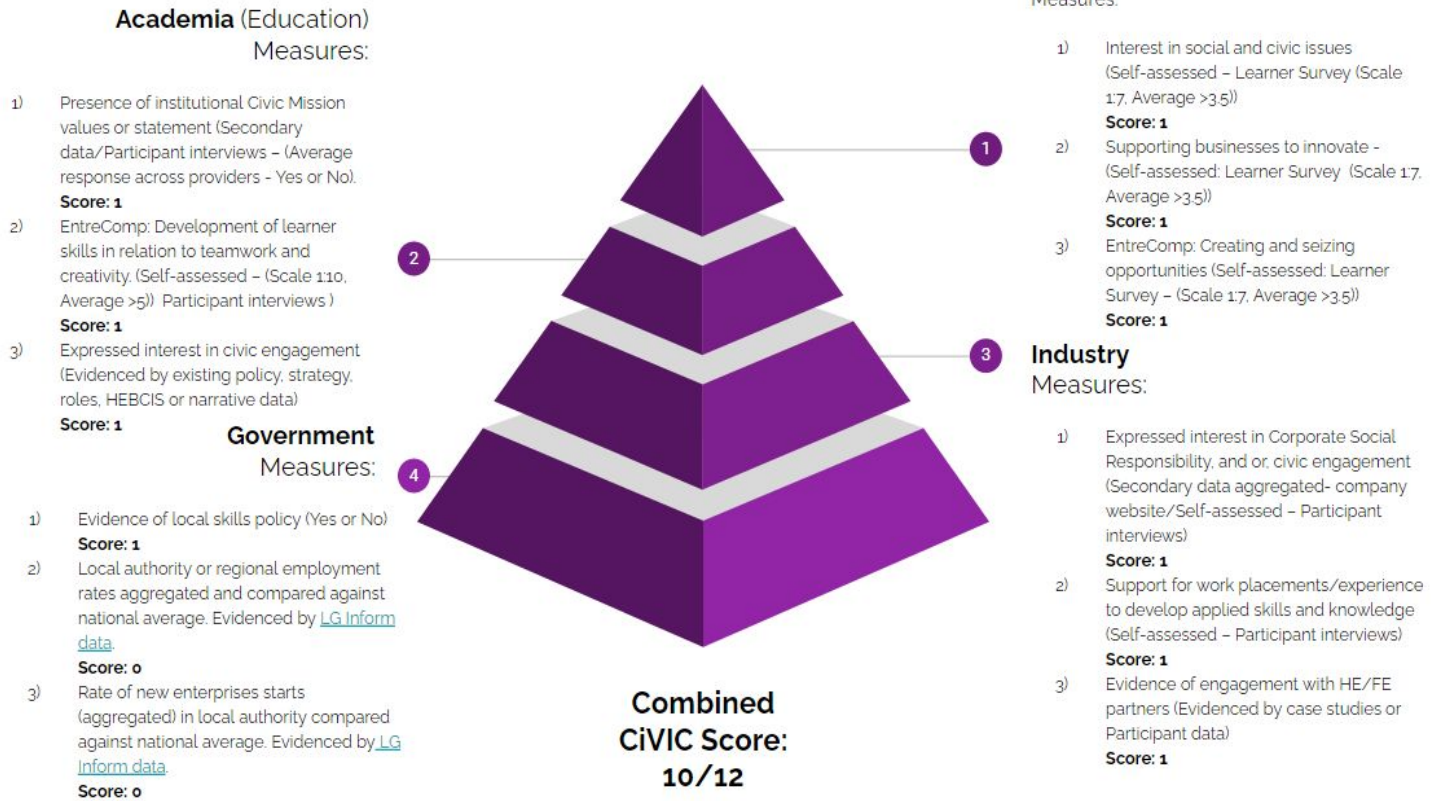
Q4) How does a digital solution enhance proximity between education and industry?

Digital solutions clearly added benefits to the project across the space allowing the proximity between learners, employers, and educators to reduce. Gains were seen in terms of project organisation, process, and engagement with learners. There was however, useful feedback from employers about the need to meet the educational partners in a physical space to build longer-term relationships. This will be taken forward into future projects of this nature and marketed to employers as a direct benefit of involvement in social innovation activity. Special attention also needs to be given to ensuring that learners are engaged with the employer environment either through virtual tours, or through direct interaction with the employers to ensure they are confident to enter the world of work.

4.2 CiVIC Score

In order to provide a test-base for the CiVIC scoring mechanism, the VIP project's qualitative data has been assessed and combined with secondary data.. The results across the quadruple-helix ecosystem are presented overleaf:

Civic Innovation Value Calculation (CiVIC): VIP Results



In evaluating the combined score of 10/12 for VIP, it is important to note the impact of the 'Government' element of CiVIC which frames the data from a broader more regional perspective. The regional economies of Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf are weaker in comparison to the more traditional urban population-centres of Cardiff and Swansea in Wales, and this is expressed through lower, than national average, business birth rates and employment levels. This calculation will need to be robustly tested in more vibrant economies to ensure that the measures are achievable, but indicate a level of difficulty and aspiration in order to achieve a high score.

4.3 Limitations

The limitations of this research are that the results regarding learner (n=17) and employer (n=2) data capture represent small sample populations, although are in line with representative sampling of closed populations, affects the generalisability of these results beyond the VIP project. Methodologically the project is limited by assessing learner skills gains after the project rather than deploying a more methodologically robust pre and post-project survey approach. This was due to a lack of funding for the evaluation at the start of the project. Also, the project's outcomes are also limited by the inability to include the Higher Education partner in the qualitative interviewing element of the study due to the pressures of Covid-19. Learner data was however captured from the university partner, so the findings still remain pertinent for this audience.

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5.2 Acknowledgments

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