

Economy, Skills and Infrastructure Committee	Valleys Task Force Consultation
Submitted By	Joseph Murphy, Senior Business Manager
On behalf of (Organisation)	Simply Do Ideas
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INTRODUCTION

1. As a former member of Welsh ICE, Simply Do Ideas has contributed to the Valleys Task Force (VTF) as a voice for collaborative innovation, connecting key stakeholders to drive economic and social impact. A thriving Welsh tech company, Simply Do has also contributed to VTF Entrepreneurs Roundtable events, is part of the Valleys P2P Entrepreneurs Network, and counts amongst it's clients all Further and Higher Education providers in the South Wales Valleys.

To **find out more** about Simply Do Ideas, please visit www.simplydo.co.uk

CONSULTATION EVIDENCE

How well is the Taskforce working with, and adding value to, other economic development initiatives in the Valleys?

2. Between July 2018 and June 2019, Simply Do Ideas designed and led a collaborative innovation project entitled the **Valleys Innovation Project (VIP)**, using its cloud-based, innovation platform to connect social and economic challenges in the Welsh Valleys with crowdsourced, entrepreneurial solutions from local colleges and universities.

3. The foundation for this project was the assertion that time poor, risk averse, employers need new ideas to survive and thrive. Whilst students need access to 'real-world' experiences to be ready for the world of work. In the middle, Education is tasked with heavy employability targets and stretching curriculum outcomes. Underpinned by academic research in this space (*Exploring Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy: A Study of Undergraduates in Wales, Sharma. L, 2014*) and **Priority 1** of the VTF - "*Good quality jobs and the skills to do them*" - Simply Do proposed a pilot approach with partners within the VTF. **It is important to note** that sharing and discussing this pilot with an engaged, like-minded group of stakeholders was a valuable 'concept test', which otherwise would have been more difficult to capture without the VTF.
4. Whilst support for the pilot project was overwhelmingly positive, funding a 'full-cost recovery' model was not possible. Simply Do explored its own network for suitable partners who mirrored the aims and values of the pilot and that of the VTF, finally agreeing a funding partnership with NatWest. **It is important to note** that the commitment of 'support' (i.e. engagement) from partners within the VTF was crucial to preparing and submitting a successful bid with NatWest.
5. **It is important to note** that many of our existing partners in Further and Higher Education who were also key partners in the proposed pilot were also recipients of *Welsh Government Enterprise and Entrepreneurship* funding, which enabled access.
6. The Valleys Innovation Project was delivered successfully, resulting in the following **Case Study Video**:

WATCH the [Valleys Innovation Project: Case Study Video](#)



To recap, the aim of the Valleys Innovation Project was to unlock:

- Innovation in the Valleys across start-ups, SMEs and the public sector
- Employability and entrepreneurial capabilities of young people
- Attractive, local work opportunities to drive economic growth

KEY PROJECT OUTCOMES

Education partners	5	University of South Wales, Merthyr College, Coleg Y Cymoedd, Bridgend College, Coleg Gwent
Young Innovators Engaged	1,080	Level 1 - Degree Level
Increase in Confidence, Skills and Workplace Understanding	80%	Based on responses
Industry Partners	10	NatWest, Intellectual Property Office, Roof, Recycle Scooters, Prince's Trust Cymru, Be the Spark, Big Ideas Wales, Federation of Small Business, South Wales Chamber,
Industry Challenges Launched	4	VIEW a challenge: Intellectual Property Office Innovation Challenge
Solutions Created	198	49.5 (Avg) Min - 25 Max - 75
Solutions Shortlisted per Challenge	3	VIEW a solution: Influencer Marketing by Lauren Cole
Innovation Sprints Delivered	3	Where solutions are 'workshopped' by Industry and Education Partners alongside students (the solution provider) and an implementation plan is created
Remuneration to Students	£360	Amazon Vouchers

QUANTIFYING SOCIAL IMPACT

7. Our Education Partners completed a short poll, providing the following responses:

- 100% Strongly agreed that it is important for Education and Employers to be able to work together.
- 100% Agreed that the employability skills of students are increased when Education and Employers work together in this way
- 100% Agreed that a greater range of work related experiences can be accessed and experienced using a collaborative, digital platform
- 100% Students become more confident when they tackle real-world challenges
- 100% Agreed that, as a process, it is quick and easy for students to create solutions to real challenges using a digital platform
- 75% Agreed that delivery of the curriculum is supported when Education and Employers work together
- Lauren Cole, BA Marketing Student, University of South Wales: *"Hi! Thanks for the workshop today and the opportunity to get involved with these businesses in creating new ideas!...Really looking forward to this! :)"*
- Ruth Rowe, Entrepreneurship Officer, Bridgend College: *"The experience has enabled her [referring to shortlisted student] to develop her critical thinking skills. This was an **enormous boost to her confidence** as she recognised that her ability to analyse problems and provide solutions would be sought after by employers."*
- Christine Bissex, Head of Enterprise, ERASMUS and Skills, The College Merthyr Tydfil
- Lloyd Williams, Employability Development Manager, University of South Wales
- Lesley Cottrell, Enterprise, Skills and Employability Manager, Coleg Y Cymoedd

← Tweet

 **Christine Bissex-Foster** @cbissex
@USW in a celebration event for the Valleys Innovation Project. A project between SME's, 3 colleges of FE, USW and @SimplyDoIdeas. Great way to solve business issues by students. @ColegMerthyr @coleggwent @ColegYcymoedd



← Tweet

 **Lloyd Williams** @hlloydwilliams
Strikes me that the drivers of #enterprise @SimplyDoIdeas and those of #employability @aCapitalRegion #graduatescheme have significant synergy in terms of innovation and support for students, graduates and business in the region



4:12 PM · Jun 13, 2019 · Twitter for Android

← Tweet

 **Lesley Cottrell** @lesleycottrell1
Good crowd at the @SimplyDoIdeas VIP event @USWConferences Centre. Great to catch up with Lee @PrincesTrustWal looking forward to seeing how we can work together for the benefit of our learners @ColegYcymoedd. Brilliant work going on in the Valleys @coleggwent @CollegeMerthyr



3:39 PM · Jun 13, 2019 · Twitter for Android

8. We did observe that there was a much broader spread of academic ability and subject areas amongst young innovators than anticipated. Students from a whole host of subject areas and levels of study engaged, from entry level Business and A Level IT, to HND Health & Social Care and Degree Level Marketing. This innovative model, through a collaborative innovative project supported by a digital platform, has proved incredibly INCLUSIVE; ideas, in that sense, levelled the playing field.

QUANTIFYING ORGANISATIONAL IMPACT

9. Our Industry Partners completed a short poll, providing the following responses:
 - 95% Strongly agreed that it is important for Education and Employers to be able to work together.
 - 100% Strongly agreed that It's important to capture the insights of young people through collaborative innovation.
 - 100% Strongly agreed that, as a process, it is quick and easy to collaborate with innovators using a digital platform.
 - 100% Strongly agreed that new ideas and solutions of value were created through the Valleys Innovation Project.
 - Lisa Redman, Innovation Policy Advisor, Intellectual Property Office: *"Just wanted to say thank you for leading us through the Innovation Sprint. We found it really useful as, just by asking the right questions, it has helped us focus our minds on some possibilities for the future."*
 - Lee Williams, Operations Manager, Prince's Trust Cymru: *"I thoroughly enjoyed it and got a lot from it...I've highlighted some Digital Champions and we're in the process of implementing the actions from our innovation sprint!"*
 - Helen Walbey, Managing Director, Recycle Scooters: *"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."*
10. **It is important to note**, that whilst we were able to meet regularly with partners from the VTF and fed back at key points to the group as a whole, a Project Celebration Event was also held, acknowledging the role of the VTF and all of the partners involved in realising the aims of the project. 25 influential entrepreneurship and innovation experts supported the invite only event, including representatives from all Education and Industry partners, in addition to Welsh Government, the FSB and the South Wales Chamber of Commerce.

11. From the outset this was an incredibly ambitious and complex project, with multiple stakeholders and partners required to embrace new concepts and new processes simultaneously. Beyond this underpinning challenge, we then needed to connect young innovators seamlessly to the real challenges of industry partners and enable large scale collaboration at a regional level. Through smart use of technology, partnerships and a bold and determined vision, we have delivered an innovative proof of concept which demonstrates a solution to a genuinely systemic national issue.
12. Partners from the VTF are also contributing to the full [Enterprise Educators UK](#) evaluation of the project, including survey design and distribution with specialist academic support from Coleg Cymoedd. This includes questions around learner destinations for Coleg Gwent, Coleg y Cymoedd, USW and Merthyr Tydfil College linked with Foundational Economy sectors, Civic Mission policy and academic texts.

How should the Task Force's work be taken forward after it disbands in March 2021?

13. In relation to the statement by the Dept Minister for Economy and Transport around the VTF 7 areas of focus ([VIEW STATEMENT](#)), the VIP open-innovation model has already begun SCALING through the [Welsh Government Foundational Economy Challenge Fund](#), which includes key regions such as Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot and key sectors, such as Tourism ([VIEW Challenge from the Retreats Group](#)). Further challenges are scheduled during 2020 and which will benefit from the continued support of the VTF and appetite to collaborate.
14. In a review of the VTF earlier this year, **Natasha Davies, Policy and Research Lead at Chwarae Teg** said: "The work of the Valleys taskforce has the potential to play a crucial role in tackling the causes of gender inequality...Delivering better outcomes for women in the Valleys will require different interventions...[that] are responsive to the needs of women, and are designed and delivered with women's different experiences and challenges in mind." ([VIEW ENTIRE ARTICLE](#)). Further to this, the [Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship](#) in 2019 found that there was much work to be done to tackle the gender gap in business start-ups, which if filled could add up to **£250billion to the UK economy**.

15. In response, we have also recently launched the [Female Founders Platform](#) in partnership with [Chwarae Teg](#) and NatWest, designed by women for women, to provide an innovative, safe, digital space for females across Wales to express and explore their early-stage ideas. Whilst we have engaged with colleagues from Welsh Government and the VTF independently, including Business Wales, the VTF should seek to support this programme of work systematically.