

**Evaluation of Planning to Succeed Programme
in Tourism Sector
2010-14**

FINAL REPORT

SCOTTISH ENTERPRISE

16th September 2014

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document records the method, conduct and findings of an interim evaluation of the Planning to Succeed Programme in the Tourism Sector implemented by Scottish Enterprise (SE) in the period between 2010 and 2014. Throughout the remainder of this document we refer to the Programme as the PTST.

1.1 General

The PTST has applied a previously successful group learning and knowledge transfer model used in the agricultural sector to a range of rural tourism businesses located across Scotland. The evaluation considered 4 PTST groups which were established following a successful implementation of a PTST Pilot programme. The four Groups considered in the course consisted of two themed Groups with a geographic focus (Agri-Tourism West and Agri-Tourism St Andrews), a themed Group with no geographic focus.

The evaluation was conducted by MWC (the Consultants) in June and July 2014 with research conducted amongst the Programme Stakeholders, Facilitators and Participants.

1.2 Evaluation Objectives

The Evaluation purpose and objectives were set out in the brief issued to consultants in the invitation to quote.

The evaluation was commissioned in advance of a proposed continuation of the PTST and was specified as:

"a short evaluation to gather feedback on the success of the project and to identify any evidence of the existence and impact of the following:

- *Action Plans;*
- *Additional activity undertaken by the participants as a result of the project;*
- *Any actions/outputs achieved;*
- *Potential outputs;*
- *Any collaborative activity.*

The evaluation should also comment on:

- *Any improvements to the planning to succeed programme model which should be made; and*
- *Reasons for participants withdrawing from the programme (where applicable);*
- *Any other issues relating to the programme format eg. the range and relevance of session topics?*

The evaluation method, detailed in Section 3, was designed in response to this specification.

1.3 Report Structure

In the following sections we set out:

- The background to the PTST Programme and its implementation
- The Evaluation Method
- The Evaluation Findings
- Our Conclusions and Recommendations

2. THE PTST PROGRAMME

2.1 Evolution

The Planning to Succeed (P2S) concept has been established within SE since 2003 and was initially developed in Dumfries and Galloway as part of the Farm Business Steering Group response to the 2001 Foot and Mouth Outbreak. Following an evaluation in 2005 the concept was adopted by SE Dumfries and Galloway as a mainstream programme to assist farm businesses.

An evaluation of the SEDG P2S Programme conducted in January 2008 recommended the consideration of extending the P2S concept to other key industries and sectors and identified the Tourism sector specifically given the potential synergies with diversification within agriculture.

The SEDG P2S Agriculture Programme was subsequently extended to become available throughout the SE operational area.

The P2S model is designed to increase business leaders' awareness of the market and business environment they operate in and to provide the skills, knowledge and confidence to develop and sustain their businesses. It is based on facilitated group working to benchmark member businesses performance and to develop and progress an Action Plan. Action Plan activities are designed to address specific knowledge and experience gaps identified by Group members at the inception of the Group.

The P2S Tourism Pilot programme was the subject of an SE Rural Team approval paper put forward to, and approved by, the SE Operations Management Team in October 2008. This paper established the business case for the P2S Tourism Programme based on specified market failures of Risk Aversion and Information Deficiency.

Following the evaluation of the Pilot, the current PTST Programme was initiated in late 2010 to operate over a three year period.

2.2 PTST Programme Objectives, Format and Content

The objectives of this PTST Programme were set out in an approval paper presented to the SE SAG in June 2010.

The overall aim of the PTST Programme, as stated in the approval paper, was:

“to work with rural tourism business leaders to increase innovation, collaboration, investment and leadership in order to achieve higher value add from Scotland’s rural tourism assets.”

This was to be achieved through facilitated support for groups of businesses over a 3 year period and including:

- individual business reviews as part of the selection process;

- a Group Action Plan addressing issues constraining business growth and identifying collaborative opportunities;
- benchmarking of financial performance;
- developing capabilities in leadership and management;
- motivation, goal setting and business planning;
- financial and business management;
- collaboration and competing in a challenging marketplace; and
- interacting with successful business role models in tourism and other industries.

Participating businesses were to be required to meet entry criteria which targeted business leaders who were:

- positive, enthusiastic and embraced change;
- committed to taking part in the Programme; and
- could play an important role in developing the tourism industry in the area.

The approval paper anticipated the implementation of up to 7 PTST Groups in the period up to the end of financial year 2012/13.

In addition to the four PTST Groups which are the focus of this evaluation, three other Groups, two focussing on Golf (in Perthshire and North East Scotland), and one on fishing were started but terminated early in their first year. These three Groups did not proceed due to a combination of low levels of attendance, lack of commitment to the knowledge exchange process, prevailing market and economic conditions in their sectors and their extensive geographic spread.

An additional area-based Group was established in the Ale Water area of the Scottish Borders in 2013. This latter Group was excluded from the evaluation as it was considered still too recent to have generated meaningful findings.

2.3 2010-14 PTST Groups Included in this Evaluation

Four PTST Groups were included in this evaluation. Summary information on each of the Groups is presented in **Table 2.1**.

Each of the Groups has been engaged with a Facilitator who has managed the implementation of the PTST process. This has, in each case included:

- Promotion of the PTST concept to interested parties.
- Selection and recruitment of Group Members.
- Initial business reviews with each business.
- A series of Group meetings arranged around topics identified by the Groups.
- Presentations to meetings by independent experts.
- Visits to Group Members' businesses, with, in some cases visits to 3rd party exemplar businesses.
- Management and administration of the process including arranging and recording meetings and reporting inputs, activities and outputs to SE.

Table 2.1: PTST Groups included in the Evaluation							
Group Name	Facilitator	Themed	Area Focus	Group Complement	Average Attendance	Total Meetings	Duration
Agri Tourism – St Andrews	The Collection Limited (Victoria Russell)	Yes – Agri-Tourism	No (But members drawn from a defined area)	11	7.2	26	July 2011 to June 2014
Agri Tourism – West	BTS (Stewart Walker)	Yes – Agri-Tourism	No (But members drawn from a defined area)	8	4.7	20	September 2011 to June 2014
Breadalbane*	Dal Riata Thomas McGonigle	No	Yes (Breadalbane)	13	8.5	17	April 2011 to March 2013
Mountain Biking	Dal Riata Thomas McGonigle	Yes – Mountain Biking	No	10	6.3	26	June 2011 to July 2014

* Breadalbane Group duration was 2 years as it was a continuation of a 1 year PTST Pilot.

2.4 Ongoing Evaluation of PTST – Agri-Tourism St Andrews

In June 2013 an interim report of a longitudinal evaluation of the PTST Agri-Tourism Group in St Andrews was produced¹. This was focused on the effects of the Programme in developing adaptive capacity amongst participants (adaptive capacity being the preparedness and ability of individuals to adapt their responses and the activities of their businesses to emerging changes and challenges). The interim report findings suggested there may be merit in:

- Making more use of sub-groups
- Introducing of a buddying system amongst members
- Separating established and developing businesses in future group establishment
- Increasing one-to-one time between facilitators and group members
- Providing for more monitoring of progress over the period of group membership.

2.5 Group Performance Analysis

We have used data provided by the PTST Programme Manager on Group activity and costs to conduct a comparative analysis of Group performance.

We first analysed the attendance levels in each of the Groups. This is presented in **Table 2.2**.

Group	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Overall	
	Average No.	% of Complement						
Agri Tourism West	5.8	71.9%	4.8	60.4%	3.0	37.5%	4.7	58.1%
Agri - Tourism St Andrews	7.0	63.6%	7.8	70.7%	6.7	61.0%	7.2	65.4%
Mountain Biking	7.2	72.2%	5.9	58.8%	5.9	59.0%	6.3	63.1%
Breadalbane	9.2	70.9%	7.8	59.6%	-	-	8.5	65.6%

This analysis suggests that overall attendance levels over the Group lifetimes have varied between 58% and 65% of the complement of members at establishment. However analysis by year demonstrates that the Agri-Tourism West Group saw a significant decline in attendances in year 3 when they fell to 37.5% of the complement at establishment.

In the light of this analysis it may benefit the ongoing management of the Programme to set target levels for attendance of 75% of complement at establishment and to consider a base level for continuation of 50% of complement at establishment. These measures might be reviewed annually to consider the case for cost effective continuation of Groups.

The implications of attendance levels on the cost of delivery and value for money can be demonstrated by an analysis of costs by attendee. This is presented in **Table 2.3**.

¹ Planning to Succeed Agri-tourism (2011-14) Mid Programme Evaluation, Flannigan & Matthews. James Hutton Institute, June 2013.

Figure 2.3: Costs of Delivery			
Group	Total Attendances	Total Cost	Cost per Member Contact Day
Agri Tourism West	93	£18,490	£199
Agri - Tourism St Andrews	187	£31,854	£170
Mountain Biking	171	£27,368	£160
Breadalbane	145	£22,224	£153
Average	149	£24,984	£171

Our analysis here is focused on the Cost per member contact day – as the meetings are scheduled to last for a day – although providers also incur costs in preparing materials for the meetings and their administration of the Groups. We consider this indicator to be particularly relevant because knowledge exchange is initiated and mainly occurs during members time spent face to face with the facilitator and other group members. It is this knowledge exchange which brings about changes in the activities and performance of individual businesses.

Using this measure, costs in the Group with the lowest levels of attendance are the highest and approximately one third higher than the lowest cost Group. This data may be of use in future procurement of the Programme – for example through remuneration of facilitators at a rate per Member Contact Day rather than on time incurred in delivering the Programme.

3. PTST EVALUATION METHOD

Our evaluation method reflected the brief issued by the client and our experience of similar commissions and was conducted in three stages:

- **Stage 1:** Inception & Desk Research
- **Stage 2:** Consultation Programme
- **Stage 3:** Analysis & Reporting

In the following paragraphs we summarise, for each stage, the implementation of this method.

Stage 1: Inception and Desk Research

Following commissioning we attended an inception meeting with the SE Project Manager.

In the course of the inception meeting we:

- Received any information and data not provided in advance of the meeting.
- Reviewed and revised the method contained in our proposal document.
- Reviewed initial drafts of the Facilitator Topic Guide and Group Member Consultation documents.
- Confirmed consultees and their contact details.

Following the inception meeting the Consultants finalised the Topic Guides and Consultation documents and prepared an additional short survey for distribution to Group members who had left the Programme before its completion.

In this stage the Consultants also reviewed the Programme approval papers, the Action Plans for each of the Four Groups and conducted an analysis of meeting frequency, content and attendance levels.

Stage 2: Consultation & Survey Programme

This Stage of the evaluation provided for primary research amongst participants using the Topic Guides prepared in Stage 1 and variously exploring:

- Programme rationale and objectives.
- Member recruitment and motivation of members to become involved.
- Member expectations and the extent to which these had been fulfilled.
- Effects on the individuals and the performance of their businesses.
- Identification of what had worked well and less well.
- Suggested improvements to the Programme.
- Programme Management and Administration.

The Consultants conducted face to face consultations with:

- The Programme Stakeholders (SE PTST Project Manager, SE Director of Rural Operations, SE Tourism Team and Co-operative Development Scotland)
- The 3 Group Facilitators (1 Facilitator worked with two Groups)
- The 4 Chairs of each PTST Group
- A further 3 Group members who were identified by the Chairs as having made significant contributions to their Groups and/or gained most from Group involvement

The Consultants also conducted two surveys using a mix of web based and telephone methods.

The first survey was circulated to all regular Group attendees not included in the face-to-face consultation. This was an in-depth survey and covered the same topics addressed in the face-to-face consultations. Circulation was by e-mail with a link to the web-based survey and provide an option for recipients to complete the survey by telephone.

The second survey was circulated to infrequent attenders or those who had left their Groups soon after their establishment. This short survey sought feedback on why members chose to leave their Groups early or had attended only a small number of meetings.

Stage 3: Analysis and Reporting

The findings from the desk research undertaken in Stage 1 and the primary research conducted in Stage 2 was then analysed and interpreted to produce this report.

4. EVALUATION FINDINGS – GROUP MEMBER EXPERIENCE

4.1 Introduction

In this section of the report we present the findings of our research amongst the members of each of the four PTST Groups covered in the evaluation. These findings are based upon:

- Face to face consultations with the 4 Chairs of each of the Groups – (the Chair were active members of each Groups selected from amongst the participating businesses).
- Face to face consultations with a further three Group members
- A mix of online and telephone surveys with a further 16 Members from across the four Groups.

The findings are reported and analysed across the range of topics covered in the course of these consultations:

- Recruitment, Engagement, Motivation and Expectations
- Programme Content and Delivery
- Effects on Development of the Business
- Personal Development, Communities and Networks
- Good Practice and Suggested Improvements

4.2 Recruitment, Engagement, Motivation and Expectations

We first asked the Participants how they had become involved with their PTST. Of the 22 who responded, just over two thirds (14) stated that they had been contacted by the facilitator and invited to attend. The next most frequent method of involvement was through invitation by another Group member whilst one Participant had approached their Facilitator and asked to become involved.

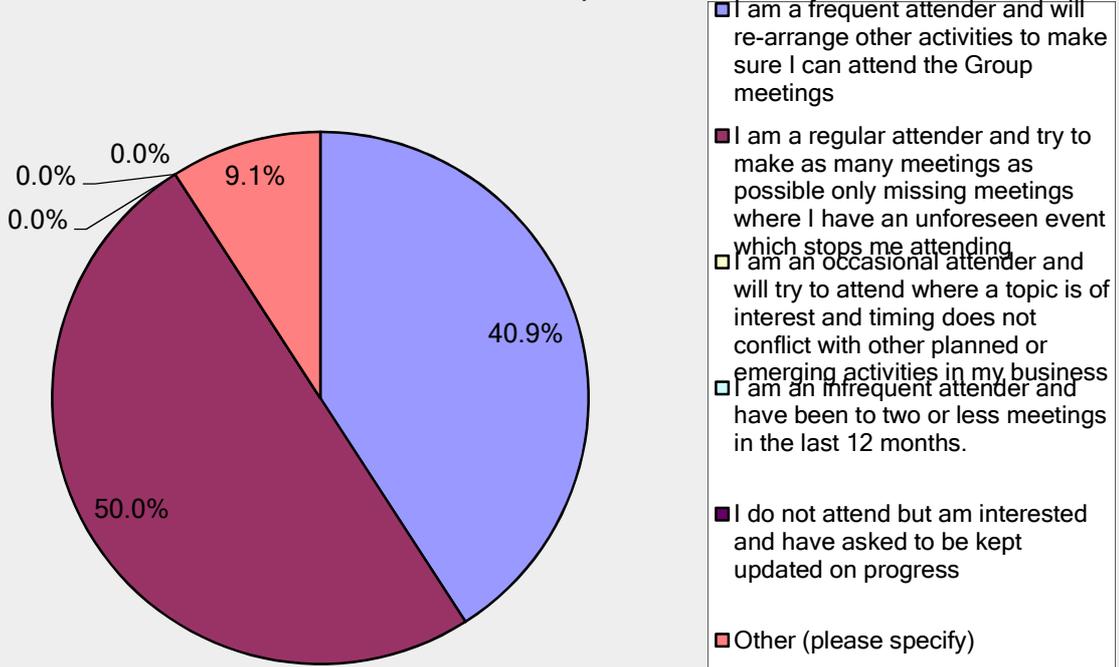
Generally, we conclude that, in line with the Programme's specified delivery process, participation has been secured through pro-active recruitment of prospective members by the Facilitators, with no evidence, amongst the four groups evaluated, of Participants actively seeking to become Group members.

We then asked the Participants to identify the primary and any secondary reasons they became involved in PTST. The responses we received are summarised in **Table 4.1**.

Table 4.1: Reasons for Engaging in PTST Group				
	Primary		Secondary	
	No	%		
To improve marketing of my business	2	9.1	9	11.2
To identify opportunities to access new markets	2	9.1	7	8.8
To improve the offer of my tourism business	2	9.1	9	11.2
To explore alternative forms of income generation for my tourism business	0	0	5	6.3
To explore opportunities for collaboration with other tourism businesses	4	18.2	8	10.0
To share experiences with others in the area or sector	1	4.6	11	13.8
To learn more from others in the area or sector	7	31.8	9	11.2
To meet like-minded people working in tourism businesses in the area	3	13.6	16	20.0
Other	1	4.5	6	7.5
Totals	22	100.0	80	100.0

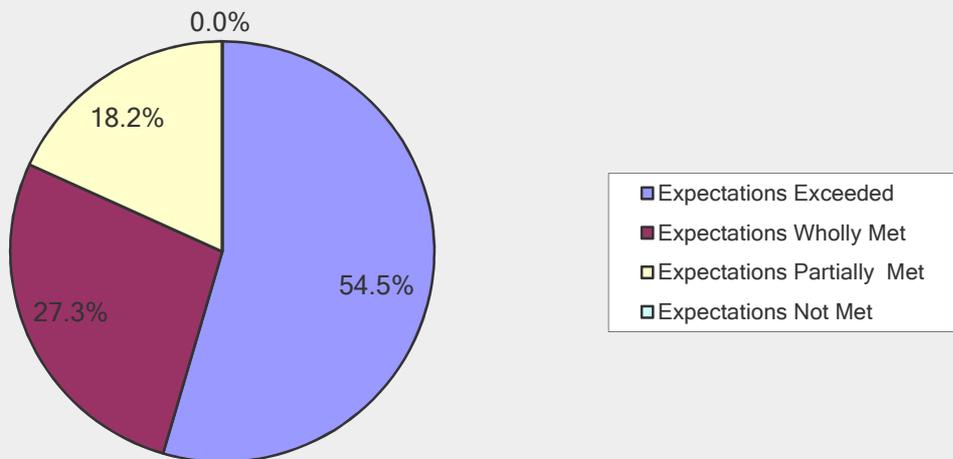
We also asked the Participants about their commitment to their Groups – asking about their frequency of attendance. The results here are likely to be skewed if only because those who took the time to engage in the consultations or survey were more likely to have been committed to the process. In addition four of our respondents were Chairs of their Groups, so would have been likely to miss meetings only in exceptional circumstances. The responses are illustrated in **Figure 4.1**. All of our respondents were either frequent or regular attendees at the meetings (of the two “other” respondents one had been frequent but had dropped out in the final year and the second provided a response which was not consistent with the question asked).

Figure 4.1: Which of the following best describes your engagement with the PTST Group



Finally, we asked the Participants to reflect on their reasons for joining their PTST Groups and consider the extent to which their expectations had been met. The responses (illustrated in **Figure 4.2**) suggest that the Groups have been very successful in meeting Participant expectations, with over half stating that their expectations had been exceeded and over 80% having their expectations wholly met or exceeded.

Figure 4.2: Thinking about these reasons for joining the PTST Group can you tell us the extent to which your expectations have been met?



Overall we conclude from our research amongst the Participants that, whilst they were in the main actively prospected as Group members, once engaged their reasons for involvement were aligned with the Programme objectives. Of those responding to our requests for input to the research, most were regular or frequent attendees and had their expectations of the Programme met or exceeded (although it should be remembered that because our consultees undertook to provide feedback through consultation or survey they were more likely to have had significant and useful engagement with the Programme).

4.3 Programme Content and Delivery

4.3.1 Programme Content

We asked the Participants to consider the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements relating to the content of the Programme,

Their responses in relation to content are illustrated in **Figure 4.3**. More than 50% of the Participants agreed strongly with the statements that:

- the Programme content had stimulated the exchange of ideas and knowledge within the Group; and
- the PTST had challenged them to look at their business from a different perspective.

There was also strong endorsement of the Programme content with almost all Participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that the content:

- Covered issues of interest and potential benefit to their own businesses and other businesses in their Groups; and
- Was relevant to the businesses in the Group.

A significant majority of the Participants also agreed or strongly agreed that the Programme content had initiated changes in their business and in other businesses in the Group.

Overall we conclude that there was a high level of satisfaction amongst the PTST Group members with the Programme content in relation to its relevance, interest and potential to benefit their business. It was also clear that the content challenged them to look at their businesses from a different perspective and stimulated the exchange of ideas and knowledge – aspects which are central to the process of knowledge exchange.

We also asked participants about the quantity and quality of information they received in the course of the Programme. Their responses are illustrated in **Figures 4.4 and 4.5** and demonstrate that Participants are almost wholly satisfied with the quantity of information they received in the course of the Programme whilst over 95% considered the quality of information received to be “good” or “very good”.

Figure 4.3: Please state the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to the content of the PTST Programme - including demonstrations, talks, visits and any other activities undertaken with the PTST Group.

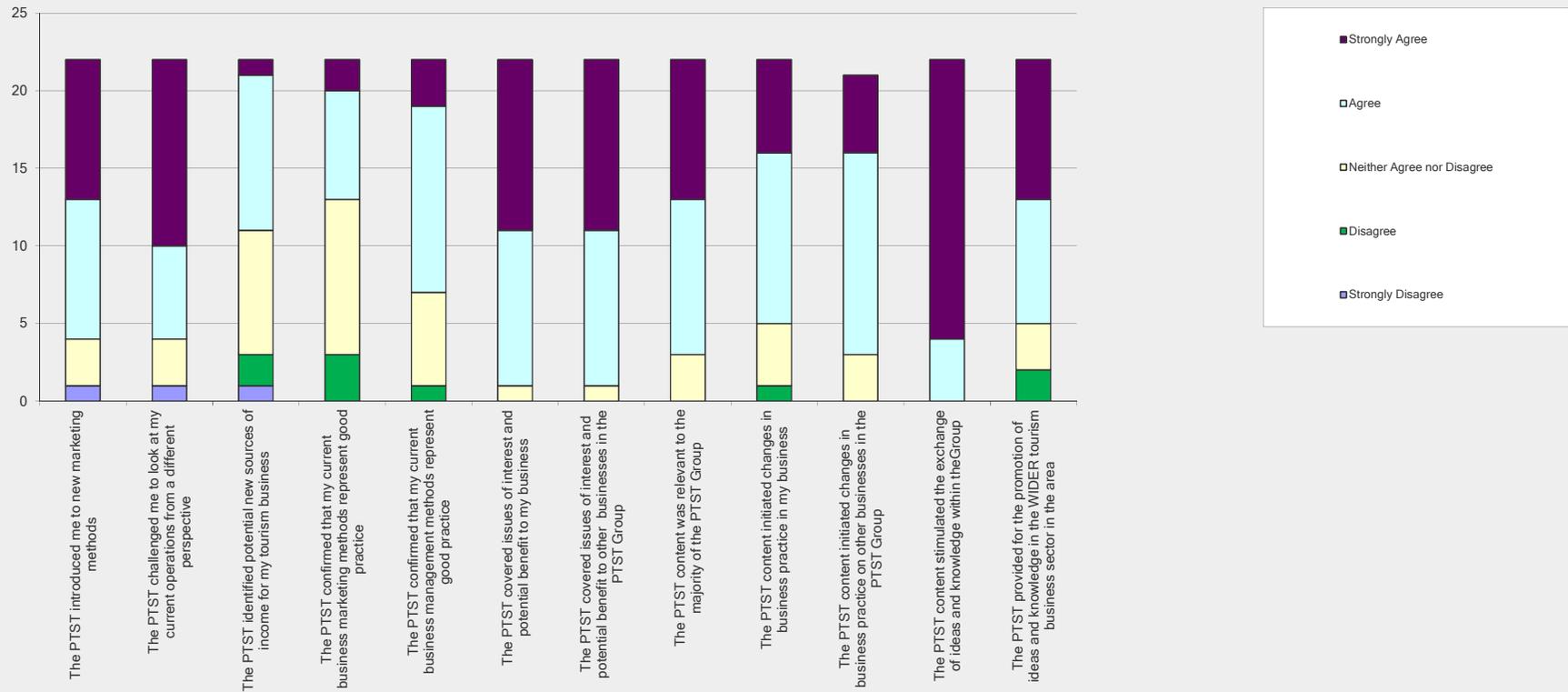


Figure 4.4: Do you consider the QUANTITY of information you receive on the PTST Programme to have been

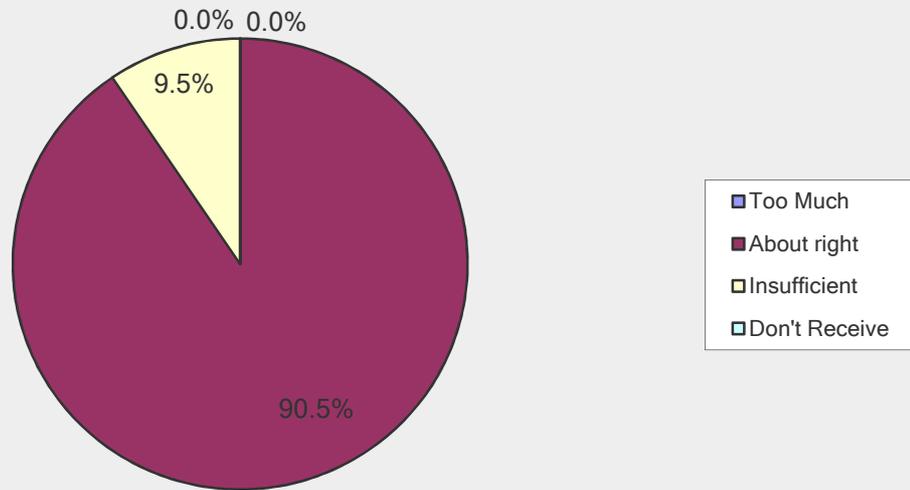
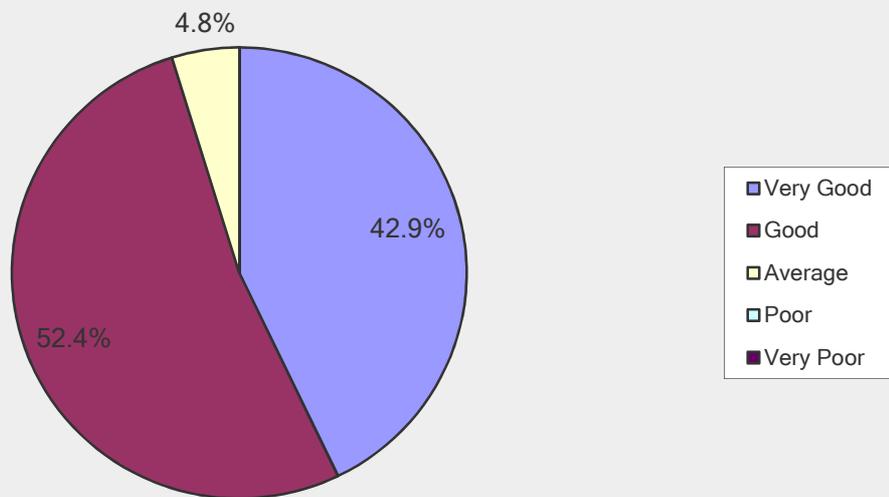


Figure 4.5: Do you consider the QUALITY of information you receive on the PTST Programme to have been



4.3.2 Programme Delivery

We asked the Participants about their experience of the delivery of the Programme, with our questions focussed on the activities and the effectiveness of their Group Facilitators. Again, we asked the Participants on the extent of their agreement with a series of statements relating to the Facilitators. The responses we received are detailed in **Table 4.2**.

Table 4.2: Effectiveness of the Facilitators						
Answer Options	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Totals
I understood the role of the facilitator from the outset of the Programme	59.1%	36.4%	0.0%	4.5%	0.0%	100%
The facilitators communicated effectively with the Group and kept us fully informed	77.3%	22.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
The facilitators provided the Group with sufficient advance notice of Group meetings and activities	63.6%	36.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
The facilitators actively sought to provide content which was relevant to the Group members	54.5%	40.9%	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
The facilitators reacted positively to requests and suggestions from the Group on content and delivery of the sessions	72.7%	27.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
The facilitators arranged Group meetings at times and venues which suited the other commitments of the Members	54.5%	40.9%	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
The facilitators were effective in managing the PTST Group meetings and in keeping the sessions on topic and to time	59.1%	27.3%	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
The facilitators were effective in allowing all members of the Group to contribute to discussion and provided a suitable environment for free exchange of knowledge and information	63.6%	31.8%	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Where the facilitators acted as experts and delivered sessions the content was useful and relevant	54.5%	36.4%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
The facilitators brought a sufficiently wide range of third party experts to the meetings	50.0%	45.5%	0.0%	4.5%	0.0%	100%
Where the facilitators brought third party experts to meetings the content delivered was useful and relevant	50.0%	45.5%	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Too much of the Programme content was delivered directly by the nominated facilitators (as opposed to other experts)	4.5%	9.1%	13.6%	59.1%	13.6%	100%
The facilitators provided sufficient back up materials (e.g. supporting literature, presentations etc.) used by both them and third party speakers at sessions.	27.3%	59.1%	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
The facilitators provided regular written reports to us on the Programme progress	13.6%	45.5%	31.8%	9.1%	0.0%	100%
If asked, the Facilitators were available outside meetings to provide advice and support to me.	45.5%	40.9%	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
The facilitators actively sought feedback from attendees at the end of meetings through feedback forms and or questionnaires	27.3%	27.3%	31.8%	13.6%	0.0%	100%
The facilitators produced and circulated reports to the Group after meetings, summarising activities and outcomes.	36.4%	45.5%	9.1%	9.1%	0.0%	100%
The facilitators helped establish a group that will continue (or has continued) beyond the end of the official PTST Group lifetime	54.5%	27.3%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%	100%

The responses we received provide a very strong overall endorsement by the Participants of the performance of their Facilitators. Areas of greatest satisfaction include:

- Communication with the Group to keep them informed on progress and activities
- Reacting positively to requests and suggestions from the Group for Programme content
- Facilitating contribution from all of the Group members to discussions and providing a suitable environment for knowledge exchange
- Providing sufficient advance notice to Members of the times of meetings.

The few areas where slightly lower levels of endorsement were received related to:

- Actively collecting feedback from participants on the content and format of sessions at the end of meetings
- Providing reports on conclusions of meetings and progress of the Group against their objectives
- Provision of content by people other than the Facilitators.
- Creating a Group which would continue to exist after the end of the formal PTST Group lifetime.

Overall we conclude that the delivery by the Facilitators has been effective and is highly rated by all of the Participants involved in our consultations and survey.

4.4 Effects on Development of the Business

Our consultations and survey covered, in detail, the effects of the Programme on Participants' businesses. We first asked the Participants what had been the main changes they had made in their businesses during the time they had been PTST Group members. Unsurprisingly, given the variation of business types, sizes and ages engaged in PTST we recorded a diverse range of changes. However these can be typified as:

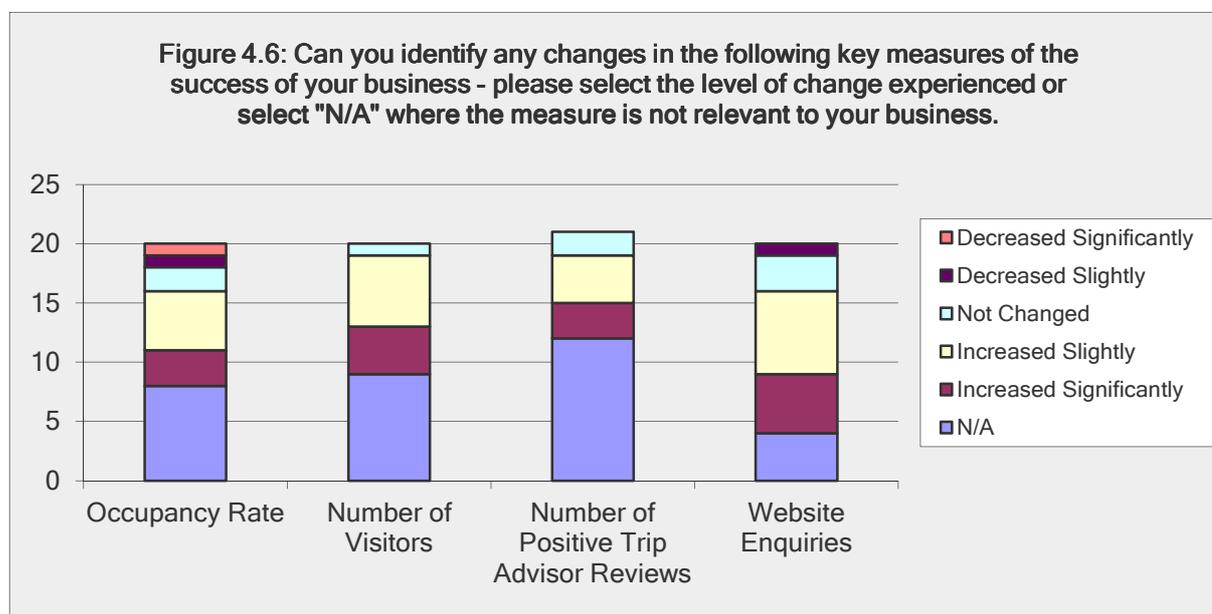
- Developing and improving the existing product offer of the business.
- Establishing a new form of income-generating activity through addition to or diversification of the existing business.
- Introducing or improving a process of business planning.
- Re-defining the roles and resource allocation of people employed in the business.
- Improving the marketing of the business – particularly through new or improved web-sites, use of social media and e-mail shots.
- Improved financial planning and accounting.
- Engagement in collaborative ventures with other Group members' businesses.

We also asked the Participants if their engagement in PTST had caused them not to implement a change which they had previously considered prior to their involvement. Approximately 25% of the participants said this had been the case and amongst the changes not made were:

- Not committing to social media as a form of marketing on realising the time commitment required.
- Not rushing down-market or over-committing to discount voucher schemes to boost occupancy.
- Not establishing a not-for-profit voluntary organisation.
- Not introducing a specific facility to self-catering accommodation.
- Not engaging third party advisors or cleaning contractors.

All of these decisions were taken after engaging in discussions with other Group Members or on hearing from experts attending the Group meetings.

We asked the Participants about any changes which had occurred in a series of pre-determined measures of success measures of tourism businesses. Given the range of businesses engaged in the Programme these were not always relevant to all of the Participant businesses. The responses we received are illustrated in **Figure 4.6**.



Setting aside the “not applicable” responses it is clear that the majority of the Participants have seen “slight” or “significant” increases in each of these measures over the period of their engagement in PTST.

We then asked the Participants to identify the effects of their experience of the Programme on a series of key measures of the performance of the business. Their responses are detailed in **Table 4.3**.

Again, setting aside the “not applicable” responses (where there had been no change in the performance measure) it is observable that the most significant positive and strong positive effects occurred in relation to:

- Introduction of improved marketing practices
- Access to new markets
- Improvements in productivity
- Increase in profit

Answer Options	Strong Positive Effect	Positive Effect	No Discernable Effect	Negative Effect	Strong Negative Effect	Not Applicable	Totals
Increase in turnover from pre-existing income sources	4.8%	23.8%	47.6%	0.0%	0.0%	23.8%	100.0%
Increase in turnover from new income sources	9.5%	38.1%	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%	23.8%	100.0%
Increase in profit	9.5%	47.6%	23.8%	9.5%	0.0%	9.5%	100.0%
Introduction of improved marketing practices	23.8%	66.7%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	100.0%
Access to new markets	14.3%	47.6%	19.0%	0.0%	0.0%	19.0%	100.0%
Joint marketing with other tourism businesses	14.3%	23.8%	19.0%	0.0%	0.0%	42.9%	100.0%
Package offers with other tourism businesses	14.3%	23.8%	9.5%	0.0%	0.0%	52.4%	100.0%
Entering a Joint Venture with another tourism business	23.8%	19.0%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	52.4%	100.0%
Improvements in Productivity	4.8%	52.4%	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%	14.3%	100.0%
Increases in prices for my product or services	0.0%	47.6%	38.1%	0.0%	0.0%	14.3%	100.0%
Cost savings through better use of labour (e.g. staff costs or use of contractors)	14.3%	28.6%	23.8%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	100.0%
Delivery of cost savings through more effective or efficient use of key inputs	4.8%	28.6%	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%	38.1%	100.0%
Delivery of cost savings through improved energy efficiency	9.5%	9.5%	38.1%	0.0%	0.0%	42.9%	100.0%
Reduction in environmental impact	9.5%	0.0%	42.9%	4.8%	0.0%	42.9%	100.0%

Looking specifically at those areas where changes had not occurred is useful in identifying aspects where PTST is not impacting significantly on the business of the Participants. Those areas where most businesses had experienced no change were related to two areas:

- Joint working
 - Joint marketing with other tourism businesses
 - Package offers with other tourism businesses
 - Entering a joint venture with another tourism business

- Energy efficiency and Environmental Impact
 - Delivery of cost savings through improved energy efficiency
 - Reduction in environmental impact

This is not to say that these changes did not occur amongst the Participants in the Groups (indeed several members of the Mountain Biking Group are engaged in an ongoing joint venture) but that these are areas where effects were less prevalent.

We also asked the Participants if they could quantify the effects of the PTST on the performance of core aspects of their performance, specifically:

- Cost reduction.
- Additional turnover.
- Increase in profitability.
- Capital investment.
- Marketing expenditure.

The results of this assessment were intended only to be indicative as our experience, and that of other evaluators, suggests that those engaged in low intensity knowledge exchange programmes such as PTST find it difficult to attribute direct changes in business performance to the activities.

Despite this we had several Participants who were able to attribute changes to these measures over the period since they had joined the PTST and the changes, by measure, year and number reporting are detailed in **Table 4.4**.

Table 4.4: Quantifiable Effects Attributed by Participants								
	Year Joined	Joined + 1	Joined + 2	Joined + 3	Joined + 4	Joined + 5	Joined + 6	Totals
Cost Reduction (£)	£1,500	£4,500	£4,750	£1,500	£1,250	£1,250	£1,250	£16,000
No. Reporting	2	6	5	2	1	1	1	
Additional Turnover (£)	£9,750	£28,500	£27,750	£6,250	£6,250	£6,250	£6,250	£91,000
No. Reporting	3	6	5	1	1	1	1	
Increase in Profitability (£)	£3,750	£9,750	£14,750	£0	£2,250	£2,250	£2,250	£35,000
No. Reporting	3	3	3	0	1	1	1	
Capital Investment (£)	£6,250	£64,750	£30,500	£8,500	£7,000	£6,250	£6,250	£129,500
No. Reporting	1	4	4	2	2	1	1	
Marketing Expenditure (£)	£1,750	£9,750	£5,500	£1,250	£2,500	£1,250	£1,250	£23,250
No. Reporting	3	7	4	1	2	1	1	

We would not propose grossing up these reported effects to the whole PTST participant population (primarily because the majority of our sample could not quantify effects) but they do indicate the potential the Programme has to generate real and measurable changes in the performance of the participating businesses.

We also asked those who were unable to attribute quantifiable effects of PTST activity to their businesses why they considered this was the case. Their responses are recorded in **Table 4.5**.

	%	No.
Because there have been no measurable changes in the performance of my Business	0.0%	0
Because I cannot link changes which have occurred in my Business performance to the PTST Group activities and learning	14.3%	2
Because I think that the PTST Group learning has had a positive effect on my Business performance but I am unable to quantify this.	85.7%	12
Because I do not think involvement in the PTST Group has had any effect on the performance of the my Business	0.0%	0

From these responses it is clear that the majority of Participants feel PTST membership has had a positive effect on the performance of their business, and importantly, none of the respondents who could not attribute quantifiable effects felt that the PTST had not had any effect on the performance of their business.

We also asked the Participants about projected changes in employment in their businesses in the period up to 2017. The responses we received from 12 Participants forecast an increase of 10 full time and 20 part time employees in their businesses by 2017.

Overall we conclude that the PTST has had a wholly positive effect on the businesses of the Participants. All have made changes in their businesses which they can relate to learning or experience gained through PTST. These have included product development, business planning and management improvements, enhanced marketing, introduction of new income streams and participating in collaborative activities with other businesses. All of the Participants responding to our research have confirmed that the performance of their business has improved as a result of their PTST engagement and a minority have been able to quantify this. Projected increases in employment to 2017 also suggest that some of the PTST business envisage continuing growth in their businesses.

4.5 Personal Development, Communities and Networks

PTST was also expected to have positive effects on the personal developments of the Participants and their propensity to be engaged with communities and networks. We asked the Participants about the effect of PTST on a series of aspects of their personal development. The responses we received are recorded in **Table 4.6**.

From the responses we received it is clear that significant proportions of Participants are now:

- More willing to share learning and experience with others
- More open to adopting new marketing methods
- More likely to pursue opportunities for joint working with other businesses
- More likely to network with others to offer and seek advice
- More confident in presenting and discussing business issues with their peers.

Generally it is clear from the responses that the benefits of joint working and engaging in knowledge exchange have left a lasting impression on the participants which will influence how they interact with others, and their businesses. This is perfectly illustrated by the fact that all of our respondents agreeing that they would maintain an ongoing relationship with some or all of their PTST Group members.

We further explored the extent to which changes in perceptions and realisation of the benefits of networking and communicating with others had affected the Participants. We asked them about specific aspects of engagement with networks and organisation since becoming involved in PTST. The responses we received are summarised in **Table 4.7**.

These results demonstrate that a significant majority of the Participants have become more active in representative groups and organisations since their engagement with PTST whilst many have received awards for their tourism businesses at local, Scottish and UK levels.

Overall we conclude that personal development through PTST has led to a greater propensity for individuals to network with others, inspired confidence in doing so and is already being reflected through their participation in other organisations and the recognition of their businesses through awards.

Table 4.6: Please state the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to the effects of the PTST experience on your personal development.

Answer Options	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Totals	Response Count
I am now more confident in presenting and discussing business management and marketing with my peers	38.1%	38.1%	23.8%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	21
I am now more open to adopting new marketing methods	38.1%	52.4%	9.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	21
I am now more willing to take advice on the management of the business from third party advisors	23.8%	28.6%	42.9%	4.8%	0.0%	100.0%	21
I am now more confident in taking investment decisions which will affect the performance of the business in the medium term	23.8%	33.3%	42.9%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	21
I am now more willing to consider alternative sources of income to the business	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	21
I am now more willing to share learning with others in my area to help improve both their and my productivity and profitability	33.3%	57.1%	9.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	21
I will maintain an ongoing relationship with some or all of the PTST Group members	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	21
I am now more likely to pursue opportunities for joint working with other tourism businesses	42.9%	38.1%	19.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	21
I am now more committed to sustaining and growing my business	38.1%	33.3%	23.8%	4.8%	0.0%	100.0%	21
I am now more likely to network with others in the area to offer and seek advice	42.9%	33.3%	23.8%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	21
I am now more likely to make informed and considered decisions on business marketing and management	38.1%	28.6%	28.6%	4.8%	0.0%	100.0%	21
I am now more likely to volunteer for a representative or leadership role in the tourism sector	19.0%	23.8%	33.3%	19.0%	4.8%	100.0%	21

Table 4.7: In the period since you became a member of the PTST Group have you: (Tick all that apply)		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Joined a tourism or business organisation	65.0%	13
Taken up a local representative or leadership position in a tourism or business organisation	30.0%	6
Taken up a national (Scottish) representative or leadership position in a tourism or business organisation	20.0%	4
Taken up a national (UK) representative or leadership position in a tourism or business organisation	0.0%	0
Received an award or other recognition for your business within your local area	5.0%	1
Received an award or other recognition for your or business at national (Scottish) level	30.0%	6
Received an award or other recognition for your or business practice at national (UK) level	15.0%	3
Been asked to participate as a speaker or contributor to an event because you are recognised as a member of a PTST	40.0%	8
None of the Above	20.0%	4
answered question	20	20

4.6 Good Practice and Suggested Improvements

In our research amongst the Participants we asked them to tell us what had worked well, what had worked less well and what suggestions they had to improve the content or delivery of PTST.

The Participants identified many aspects of the Programme as having **worked well**, in particular they highlighted:

- Networking and collaborative working with the other Group members along with a process of knowledge exchange from the Group and also between individual members. This was assisted by the different types, scale and maturity of the businesses involved.
- The importance of on-site visits to each other's businesses where they could better experience and understand the issues and propose potential solutions.
- Provision of advice from facilitators and attending experts in core skills including business planning, time management and marketing.
- The role of the facilitators in helping the Group identify topics and creating an environment of trust and mutual support within the Groups whilst maintaining approachability outside mainstream PTST activities.

- The mutual support provided by Group members in a period when businesses were being developed and evolving with reassurance that issues could be overcome and that the chosen direction of travel was correct. Newer businesses, or those planning significant investment found this to be a particular benefit.

There were fewer instances of people identifying **things that had worked less** well in the implementation of the Programme. The aspects most often cited were:

- The early exit of members who had attended at the outset of the Programme with a suggestion that the value of participation had to be demonstrated at an early stage to minimise such losses. However one other respondent suggested it was important to accept all potential members at the outset to capture a core of effective members.
- Concerns were also expressed over members who attended infrequently and those who were less committed to the Group or active in taking the Group forward.
- There were also some smaller businesses who felt that some Group activity was focused on more mature and larger businesses and some larger businesses which felt activity was not relevant to them as it related to newer or much smaller businesses. It was suggested that a significant change in a small business could significantly improve its performance but might be considered insignificant in a larger enterprise. Some Participants also thought that having businesses in the Groups at different stages in their development significantly limited the potential for knowledge exchange – with the more mature businesses learning very little from the newer and smaller businesses.
- Several Participants suggested that the agri-tourism restrictions in their areas had resulted in some businesses which would have benefitted the Group being excluded (because they had no link to agriculture).

Among the suggestions we received for possible improvement of the Programme were:

- More structure to the provision of supporting information arranged round topics and in a format to allow for easy future reference.
- Greater focus on agri-tourism businesses where agriculture remains an important source of income for the business and is incorporated within the tourism offer.
- Greater emphasis on securing active tourism businesses which are entering or going through a planned process of growth.
- Provision of links and signposting to financial and other resources to assist the Participant's business initiate and continue growth.
- Greater emphasis on the use of the Group to become effective in the promotion of the geographic area – developing a successful destination from which businesses could derive future growth.
- Have consideration to the practicalities of attending meetings and promoting networking by not spreading Groups over too large a geographic area.

On balance, given their identification of what worked well, we consider that the Participants had a very positive experience on PTST. Their identification of areas for improvement and constructive suggestions for improvement reinforce this. As a final measure of their level of satisfaction with PTST we asked them if they would or had recommended the Programme to others. Of the 21 respondents to these questions all said they would recommend the Programme to others and 15 had already done so.

5. EVALUATION FINDINGS – FACILITATORS & STAKEHOLDERS

5.1 Introduction

In this section of the report we present the findings of our research amongst the facilitators and stakeholders. These are based on:

- Face to face consultations with the 3 Facilitators (One of the Facilitators having been engaged to work with two Groups).
- Face to face stakeholder consultations with the current and previous SE PTST Project Managers, the SE Director of Rural Operations and telephone Surveys with representatives from the SE Tourism Team and Co-operative Development Scotland (CDS).

The findings in relation to these two groups of consultees are reported separately below.

5.2 Facilitator Consultations

These Facilitator consultations were conducted face-to-face using a Topic Guide prepared in advance and agreed with the Client. The collective findings from the consultations are reported here against the main headings used in the Topic Guide.

- Group Establishment and Membership
- Core Activities and Action Planning Process
- Information Gathering & Experience Sharing
- Collaboration amongst Participants
- Group Dynamics
- Good Practice
- Improvements to PTS Model

5.2.1 Group Establishment and Membership

All of the Facilitators approached the task of identifying Group Members through broadly similar processes using a combination of exploring existing industry interest groups and databases, e-mailing databases held by SE and others, word of mouth and direct approach to key individuals in the area and sector. In the case of Breadalbane the process was smoothed because of the existence of a pilot PTST Group in the area and in the case of the Mountain Bike Group through an existing cluster development initiative within the Scottish Mountain Bike Development Consortium. Initial meetings were used to identify potential attendees and Facilitators arranged one to one sessions with those expressing a desire to commit to the Group.

All of the Facilitators experienced reduction in membership from the initial levels. Whilst this was considered a potential negative there were often extenuating circumstances such as changes in business ownership or focus or, where the members were employees rather owners, competing demands from the business owners. Facilitators took a balanced view on trying to persuade members to stay – recognising

that an inactive or un-engaged member may inhibit rather than promote a positive group dynamic. One Facilitator commented that members had left by default – through continual failure to turn up at meetings. It was suggested that levels of potential commitment were difficult to assess at the outset of the Programme and that if a “soft entry” approach (which provided for trying out the Programme but did not require commitment at the outset) were not promoted then potentially valuable Group members might be discouraged.

Where Groups had members join later in the process the experience was positive, although any members joining after the establishment of the core group were normally subject to the approval of the pre-existing members.

Several facilitators noted that owners or owner-managers made the best members as they had authority to act and share information immediately at the meetings. One Facilitator suggested that the agri-tourism criterion on membership had restricted the number of potentially strong and active members, whilst another suggested that because of the agri-tourism criterion the businesses selected had been too disparate and spread over too wide a geographic area to function easily as a cohesive group.

5.2.2 Core Activities and Action Planning Process

The Facilitators adopted a relatively common approach to the development of the Group Action Plan variously using an SE Template or an evolution of the template based on their previous experiences in facilitating their PTST Pilot Groups.

In all cases the topics for inclusion in the Action Plan were derived in consultation with the Group informed and advised by the Facilitator on the practicalities of availability of materials, expert speakers and resources.

The Action Plan, once crystallised was used as a focus for activities and used by the Facilitators to plan meetings and keep the Groups on time and to topic. Progress against the Action Plan was reviewed at Group meetings and the Plans were also used by SE as the basis for monitoring activity and remuneration of the Facilitators.

The core activities of the Group meeting were designed to achieve the Action Plan objectives and outcomes and generally comprised

- Facilitated discussion around the identified Action Plan topics
- Input from both the Facilitators and third party advisors and experts on key topics including business planning, time management, marketing, social media, search engine optimisation, revenue planning and management accounting.
- Visits to Group Members businesses
- Visits to exemplar businesses (not owned or managed by Group members)

Facilitators reported strong interest in all of the activities covered – a reflection of the fact that the Members had all been involved in topic selection. However several facilitators noted that marketing always tended to excite an interest amongst participants as they saw it as key to growing and sustaining their businesses.

5.2.3 Information and Experience Sharing

Facilitators explained how they began the process of encouraging the Members to share information and experience about their respective businesses. Several advised that they had not required the sharing of financial information at the outset as this might have stifled engagement.

Before information was shared it had been essential to consolidate the Group membership and establish as quickly as possible an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect amongst the members. The Facilitators all took the time through one to one discussions at the outset to fully understand the development stage of each business and the issues they were wishing to address. This then allowed them to encourage input and discussion from these members when topics of mutual interest arose. Facilitators then used their knowledge and judgement to assess when and if businesses were ready to share market information and data on costs, pricing and revenue generation. As the process of exchange continued Members became mutually supportive of each other and wanted to see all of the businesses in the Group survive and grow.

It was apparent that some Groups were more willing to share information at an earlier stage than others. Facilitators commented that the composition of Groups with no direct competitors (either through geography or product offer) was an important factor in stimulating information and experience sharing.

5.2.4 Collaboration Amongst Participants

We asked each of the Facilitators about the extent and nature of collaboration between PTST Participant's businesses. Two groups have engaged on a specific collaborative project following the activity undertaken through PTST. The Breadalbane Group has initiated and secured funding through to 2016 for a transport initiative which provides a tourist bus around key locations in the area over the summer holiday season. The Mountain Biking Group has formed a commercial operation which hosts and manages mountain biking events. Both of these Groups have also evolved a co-operative business model to facilitate the collaborative project beyond the formal life of the PTST Group.

The other two Groups have not progressed formal collaborative projects although the facilitators did seek to initiate a number of collaborative actions including a buying group. Both the facilitators of these Groups were hopeful that less formal collaborations involving a sub-set of members might occur in the future where geographic proximity or synergies between the businesses encouraged this.

5.2.5 Group Dynamics

All of the Facilitators were experienced in managing and maintaining a positive dynamic amongst groups of diverse individuals and none reported any difficulties in doing so with the PTST Groups. All emphasised the importance of early identification and selection of a Chair to the effective operation of the Group. Several Facilitators also highlighted that the lack of direct competitor businesses within the Groups meant that it was easier to secure commitment to sharing of information and experiences.

5.2.6 Good Practice

Facilitators made a number of observations on good practice which they considered should be replicated in any future iterations of the Programme. These were in the main related to the practicalities and logistics of managing the Groups including:

- Arranging meetings and putting dates in diaries over a 3 to 4 month period and allowing for seasonality of the businesses.
- Using the Member's businesses as venues for the meeting to allow all the Members to gain a full understanding of each other's assets and challenges.
- Making the Action Plan a working document that the Group all buy into which is relevant for the businesses, their sector or the destination – as appropriate.
- Attracting and retaining members who are willing to give up time, are willing volunteers and are interested in implementing change through novel approaches and ideas.
- Members should be both interested in developing their own businesses but also interested in developing and helping others in the Group.
- Facilitators remembering that they are not advisors and developing a full understanding of what the Group wants to achieve.
- Whilst theming of Groups might provide focus it is important for this not to become restrictive and excluding businesses that could benefit and add value to the Group.
- Good qualities in Group Members:-
 - A willingness to commit themselves and their time to the process
 - Open to sharing information and also good listeners
 - Recognising they need to provide input to get maximum value from the process – both for themselves and the other Group members.
- Good qualities in Facilitators:-
 - Patience
 - Questioning – playing devil's advocate to open up discussion
 - Balancing the Programme objectives and administrative requirements with the response to the Group Members' wishes

5.2.7 Improvements to PTS Model

We asked each of the Facilitators if they could suggest any improvements to the PTS Model. The suggestions they provided included:

- Introducing a learning element to the model – rather than wholly focussing on exchange of knowledge between the Members provide for some core learning modules that each Member could benefit from.

- There is no reason why the model need be restricted to rural areas – is a means of getting a group together to achieve objectives of mutual benefit and could be used in a wide range of areas.
- Make it a requirement for Members attending for the first year to make a full commitment to Years 2 and 3. One way of arriving more quickly at a core group of committed members.
- Provide for a budget match-funded by SE or others to allow the Group to undertake learning journeys or other activities related to their objectives.
- The process may benefit from a clearer specification of the PTS Model – including clear objectives and perhaps a template.
- In establishing Groups geography needs to be considered – if too disparate Group may struggle to be sustained as travel takes up a large proportion of the Members' time in attending.
- Group achievements and benefits need to be better communicated to encourage future Groups to attract enthusiastic and committed members.
- Need to signpost and understand further support for the Members and the ideas they have for their business. Need to move Members from a reactive to a pro-active approach to planning and growing their businesses.

5.3 Stakeholder Consultations

The stakeholder consultations were used to identify:

- the consultees' expectations of the Programme and the extent to which they considered the Programme was meeting its original objectives;
- any issues or concerns they had identified in their involvement with the Programme; and
- any suggestions they had for improving the Programme content or the PTST Model.

5.3.1 Expectations and Objectives

Generally our stakeholders considered that the PTST Programme had lived up to their expectations as a means of engaging tourism businesses in facilitated Group working to improve the collective performance of their businesses and the tourism offer in their areas.

Given the relatively low intensity of assistance provided and the capacity of the Groups there had not been an expectation of significant quantifiable business and economic benefits within the lifetime of the Programme. Nevertheless the stakeholders considered that the Groups had all delivered business and personal development objectives.

The SE Tourism Team representative considered PTST to be a particularly useful means of uniting tourism development and rural development. This was particularly the case where the Group was focussed on area development as it provided smaller scale but complimentary provision to SE's Destination Groups. PTST might also be considered as a means of building capacity in areas where there may be potential for Destination Groups in the future. There was also considered to be an ongoing case for considering themed PTST Groups – although the early termination of the Golf-themed Group (not covered in this evaluation) demonstrated the need for careful selection of the theme, area, Group members and Facilitator.

The evolution of two of the Groups into project-specific co-operative bodies was an unexpected but welcome outcome which it was hoped might be encouraged and facilitated within future applications of the PTST model. This theme was picked up by the CDS representative who put the application of the co-operative business model down to the familiarity with the model of the same Facilitator of both Groups which adopted it. CDS also considered that the co-operative business model might be applicable to future PTST groups – as tourism businesses were familiar with the concept of working together to deliver common objectives.

5.3.2 Issues and Concerns

The main area of concern expressed by Stakeholders was around the recruitment and retention of Group members with the ambition and potential to generate meaningful change in the offer and performance of the tourism industry in their sector.

In particular the ability of the Facilitators to keep the Groups at a scale and frequency of attendance which ensures meaningful outcomes was of concern. The Facilitators and the SE Project Manager have worked together to maintain the four Groups evaluated in this report despite some restrictions as a result of diverse geography and (in the case of the agri-tourism Groups) restrictions on the businesses which could be involved.

A related issue, but one not necessitated in the case of the four Groups evaluated, is the decision of when to terminate Groups which have failed to sustain Members with the ambition, energy and resources to make changes in their businesses and areas. The decision to terminate a Group has implications in terms of abortive costs, termination of contracts with Facilitators and reputational risks to the PTST Model and SE. However, where a Group is patently not working the consequences and costs of not continuing need to be balanced against this. There are also issues over whether the members, the area, the theme or the Facilitators are either individually or collectively contributory factors to the failure of the Group. Finally, consideration needs to be given to the maximum time allowable for a Group to become established and settled at a sustainable level before any decision is taken to terminate the intervention.

One other area of concern expressed by the project managers was the limited amount of benchmarking of performance of the businesses within the Groups. This is an issue requiring a delicate balance to be struck by the Facilitators, as a requirement of Members, at recruitment, to commit to sharing financial information may deter interest and involvement. In building up trust amongst Group members this may become more feasible although Facilitators had not in all cases approached the Members and asked them to consider sharing financial information.

5.3.3 Improvements

In the course of our Stakeholder consultations we asked for suggested improvements to the PTST content, delivery or model. The suggestions we received were:

- Inclusion of a residential element at an early stage in the Programme to bond participants and raise ambitions through exposure to an exemplar tourism business.
- A greater focus on area development.
- Establishment of direct communication links between the SE Project Manager and the Chairs of the PTST Groups.
- A session for Facilitators at the outset of the Groups to explain strategic context and fit with SE Tourism strategic approach.
- Planned succession for Groups and/or members to further implement the changes they initiated in the course of their membership.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this final section of the report we set out our conclusions in relation to:

- Progress towards achievement of the original objectives of the Programme
- Effects on individuals and their businesses
- Collaborative Actions
- Group Member recruitment and retention
- Group geography and themes

Based on these conclusions we then present a series of recommendations for consideration in the future implementation of the Programme.

6.2 Conclusions

6.2.1 Achievement of Programme Objectives

We consider, based on the findings of our research amongst the Groups and Facilitators that each Group has contributed towards the achievement of the Programme Goal as set out in the original approval:

“to work with rural tourism business leaders to increase innovation, collaboration, investment and leadership in order to achieve higher value add from Scotland’s rural tourism assets.”

This is evidenced by:

- The PTST participants reporting a universally positive effect on their businesses - all having made changes in their businesses which they can relate to learning or experience gained through PTST. These have included product development, business planning and management improvements, enhanced marketing, introduction of new income streams and participating in collaborative activities with other businesses.
- Two ongoing innovative and collaborative ventures emerging from two of the Groups (Breadalbane and Mountain Biking Groups)

6.2.2 Effects on Individuals and their Businesses

Our research suggests that the Programme has had a significant effect on the personal development of the participants and that as a result of their involvement they are now:

- More willing to share learning and experience with others
- More open to adopting new marketing methods
- More likely to pursue opportunities for joint working with other businesses
- More likely to network with others to offer and seek advice
- More confident in presenting and discussing business issues with their peers.

Our research identified a diverse range of changes made by Participants in the running their businesses. These included:

- Developing and improving the existing product offer of the business.
- Establishing a new form of income-generating activity through addition to or diversification of the existing business.
- Introducing or improving a process of business planning.
- Re-defining the roles and resource allocation of people employed in the business.
- Improving the marketing of the business – particularly through new or improved web-sites, use of social media and e-mail shots.
- Improved financial planning and accounting.
- Engagement in collaborative ventures with other Group members' businesses.

All of the Participants responding to our research have also confirmed that the performance of their business has improved as a result of their PTST engagement and a minority have been able to quantify this.

6.2.3 Collaborative Actions

In addition to the two specific collaborative projects referred to in Section 6.2.1, our research has shown that Participants are now more likely to pursue opportunities for joint working with other tourism businesses. The Facilitators also reported that they were hopeful that less formal collaborations involving a sub-set of members might occur in the future where geographic proximity or synergies between the businesses encouraged this.

6.2.4 Group Member Recruitment and Retention

Our research has suggested that the recruitment of Group members has to date been pursued through a prospecting exercise by the appointed Facilitators using a mix of database trawling, canvassing of existing organisations and word of mouth. This may not be the most effective way of securing an optimum mix of members with the ambition, energy and resources to make a step change in their businesses and, collectively, the contribution of the sector to the local economy.

In each Group there has been a degree of Membership attrition as those expressing an interest at establishment drift away from the Groups. None of the Groups have been successful in re-invigorating membership back to the levels at establishment.

6.2.5 Group Geography and Themes

Our research has been equivocal on the effects of theming and geographic spread on the effectiveness of the Groups in attracting and retaining members.

For example the Mountain Biking Group has been successful in retaining members from a wide geographic area. However the agri-tourism west Group has had some difficulties in retaining members because of the wide geographic area over which the membership is spread. In addition both the agri-tourism Group Facilitators have suggested that the agri-

tourism membership criterion has restricted their ability to involve ambitious local (non-agri) tourism businesses in their Groups.

There are also potential related issues in including several local competitor businesses in a themed group. Direct competitors working within a Group may constrain the willingness of members to share market intelligence or data on costs and pricing. Whilst this might have been an issue in the St Andrews agri-tourism Group (which included a number of accommodation providers within a tight geographic area) this was avoided because the Members were operating in distinct market sectors.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions from our research we would recommend the following changes be considered to enhance the effectiveness of the Programme:

- A more targeted and structured approach is adopted to the recruitment of Group members. This might include a call for proposals from formative group members within a geographic or thematic area. This could be in the form of a competitive bidding round for the services of a Facilitator and associated resources over a period of three years. Using the positive results of this evaluation as promotion for the competition SE might offer to fund a set number of Groups based on proposals which identify:
 - The overall aim of the Group being proposed and the area or theme being addressed.
 - The names and business biographies of the proposed membership of the Group.
 - A series of growth-based objectives for the Group and associated outcomes anticipated as a result of the Group activity over a three year period
 - A commitment from the Group to share information and engage in business benchmarking.

This approach might succeed in attracting dynamic and ambitious Groups with self-defined purposes and focus which would endure over the lifetimes of the Groups. In selecting or otherwise establishing Groups careful consideration should be given to the potential effects on membership recruitment and retention of geography and tightly defined themes.

- Decisions on continuing or terminating Groups might be eased by introduction of transparent attendance targets. We suggest a target ongoing attendance of 75% of the Group complement and triggering Group dissolution when attendance falls below 50% of complement for two consecutive meetings.
- The ultimate success of the Groups in delivering economic development is wholly dependent upon securing the involvement of growth-orientated businesses. The balance of the Group is also vital to effective working and outcomes for all – so businesses need to be aligned in terms of their scale, age and growth stage to allow for beneficial knowledge exchange. If not some Members with larger and well established businesses will feel they cannot learn from others and some smaller and

younger businesses may feel the lessons from larger businesses are not relevant to them.

- Greater integration of PTST with other rural development initiatives currently being promoted by SE. In particular PTST might be a natural progression for the most active Agri-tourism Monitor Farm Community Group members. These Groups would benefit in having Members who had already seen the advantages of knowledge exchange on the Monitor Farms and who had evolving or part-formed projects which they might implement over the PTST period - with the appropriate input from each other and their Facilitator. PTST Group members coming to the end of their Group membership period may also feel they could benefit from enrolment on the SE Rural Leadership Programme. In addition the synergies and complementarities with SE Tourism Team interventions might be further explored - with PTST area-development Groups offering a potential precursor to Destination Groups.
- Given the evolution of two of the PTST Groups into Co-operative structures to facilitate collaborative working it may be appropriate for all Facilitators to be made aware of the support available from CDS and to call on them to address and advise Groups at an early stage where they are contemplating a successor initiative to PTST or implementation of a joint initiative.
- There has been no significant benchmarking of individual businesses or Groups and, whilst the businesses engaged in PTST vary they all have key business performance measures relating to turnover, profitability and levels of capital investment. Facilitators should be required to collect this information on a one-to-one basis with each member business at the outset of the Programme. They should continue to review this over the lifetime of the Group – probably on an annual basis - and endeavour to have the businesses sharing this information by the end of the first year of membership. In addition to planned activity the Group Action Plans should be developed to have specific and measurable outcomes for the Group which relate back to their objectives. These outcomes (as distinct from activities) should be measurable and progress against them recorded in the Action Plan updates and submitted to SE as part of the process of verification of Facilitator performance.
- Facilitators should implement a method for recording member feedback at the conclusion of each meeting to identify what aspects of the content are valued by participants, their preferences for future content and any suggestions for continual improvement of content and/or delivery.
- A mechanism should be put in place for direct communications between the Group Chairs and the SE Project Manager to provide for voicing of any member suggestions or concerns over the progress of the Group or the performance of their Facilitator.
- SE and the Facilitators should together consider compiling a guide for Group Members signposting further support which may be available to PTST members in their areas to take forward initiatives they have developed in the course of the Programme.
- Both Facilitators and Group Members have expressed a desire for a residential or learning journey component in the early stages of establishment to help bond and inspire the Members. SE might wish to consider how this might be incorporated and

resourced with the expectation that the Members would contribute to the associated costs.