



**BUSINESS GATEWAY GROWTH HUB**

**Celebrating  
success**



## Introduction

The Business Gateway Growth Hub is one of 38 growth hubs across the country. It serves as a one-stop shop providing business support to small and medium-sized businesses in Leicester and Leicestershire.

Since 2019 an enhanced service has been operating through a partnership project including Leicester City Council (the accountable body), Leicestershire County Council, East Midlands Chamber and the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP). This project has been part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

The enhanced service included a larger team of business advisers to provide 1-to-1 support, a growth grant, an extensive events programme as well as signposting to other local, regional and national support.

This brochure highlights project achievements and some of the businesses supported.

## Key statistics

### Enquiries



**10,000**

dealt with in 54 months

**4,000**

businesses went on to access further adviser support

**100-200**

average enquiries a month trebled during Covid-19

### Advice

**4,968**

hours of intensive support for 414 businesses

**456**

Businesses given at least 3 hours of support



### Grants



**£2.05 million**

in grants to 110 businesses

### Events

**5,191**

delegates engaged

**502**

free workshops and webinars delivered



### People

**212**

jobs created so far



### Investment

**£3.6 million**

private sector investment





“I’ve been given all the additional tools I need by the Business Gateway. It’s not just the grant, it’s the courses, the advice, the peer-to-peer sessions. Having them on board has been like a breath of fresh air.”



“Using the Business Gateway was a straightforward process. We were guided through everything by our Business Adviser Juan Pardo, who was professional and knowledgeable. The Business Gateway provided all the support we could have hoped for.”

## | Interiors by Design

A significant investment in machinery and support from the Business Gateway is helping kitchen and bedroom manufacturer, Interiors by Design fight back in difficult trading conditions.

The Wigston-based business is led by directors Mohammed Essajee and Simon Colebourne. It designs, manufactures and installs kitchens and bedrooms and supplies other showrooms, fitters and house builders.

Mohammed said: “Things were ticking along but we got to the stage in 2020 when we needed to go for it. But everything at the workshop was being done by hand. It was restricting our growth and limiting capacity.”

Mohammed got back in touch with the Business Gateway who had supported him in the past. “I spoke to Business Adviser Joanna Moore about grants and at the time there was a growth grant available. With Jo’s help, we were

successfully awarded £25,000 towards the purchase of a vertical CNC machine and an edge bander. Our total investment was over £90,000. The new machinery is more accurate; we’re saving time and it has improved efficiency.”

The team has also grown from three to seven with more staff being recruited.

**Support:** Business advice, grant, peer-to-peer

**Impact:** Improved efficiency and capacity.

**Area:** Wigston

## | TEK Seating

TEK Seating has invested £125,000 in new machinery to satisfy rising demand and take additional control of its production process. The investment has been supported with a grant of £25,000 from the Business Gateway.

TEK Seating, part of TEK Group with TEK Military Seating and SitSmart, is the UK’s biggest independent supplier of vehicle seats. The business began in 1972 and makes seating for commercial transport such as HGVs, taxis, buses and trains. Manufacturing takes place at Rearsby, which also includes orthopaedic office and military seating as well as high-end seat trims for Morgan cars and Ultima sports cars, to name but a few.

Instead of outsourcing for their large volume work, TEK Seating’s new automated cutting machine now means it can all be done in-house.

Apart from a reduction in transport costs and carbon emissions, its manual cutting technicians don’t have to work on large volume jobs anymore, which previously took a long time. Thanks to the new machinery, their time will be better spent on higher-skilled, lower-volume cutting.

Cutting is now 30 times faster, saving around 10 days in the whole process improving efficiency, productiveness and competitiveness.

**Support:** Business advice, grant

**Impact:** Time efficiencies, improved productivity, reduced costs

**Area:** Charnwood



“Aruna has been a massive support – the connections, the people I’ve met or that she’s recommended. Without her directing me to these people I wouldn’t have known where to start or have the network I have now.”



“I’ve gained a lot of management information from the peer-to-peer sessions so far. It’s made me go back and look at key values and lots of other things. Honestly, I didn’t think I’d get anything from it, but it’s made me realise how much I’ve actually lost, forgotten or dismissed.”

## Mela & Sharpe

Pamela Sharpe started with a fashion business on eBay selling women’s clothing in 2010. This led to the development of her online platform for many luxury brands. Whilst doing this she found herself advising some of the smaller independent businesses.

Pamela explained: “I was drawn to helping people, that’s where I felt really comfortable. From there it was natural for me to be an investor relations consultant where I can help people gain steps toward their entrepreneurial life and navigate the private equity and venture capital landscape.” Pamela spent months planning her investment-ready workshops and events and was due to start just as Covid-19 hit. Having worked with Business Adviser, Aruna Bhagwan before, she reached out again.

Pamela now runs workshops on getting investment ready for startups and SMEs and also provides business mentoring to individuals. One of her clients is the Zinthiya Trust.

“The mentoring work with the Zinthiya Trust was funded by the Community Renewal Fund. This work is around supporting females from the BAME community who want to do something different, or maybe have an idea but aren’t sure where to start.”

“Whilst on this project I’ve discovered a lot of areas we could do more to help women in Leicester. But I’ve heard it’s hard to get funding, so this is another area I discussed with Aruna.”

**Support:** Business advice  
**Impact:** Defining business direction, creation of marketing strategy  
**Area:** Leicester

## Hear4U & Healthscreen

Entrepreneur and audiologist Samantha Bennett has helped the hard of hearing for nearly 30 years. Her businesses include Hear4U hearing centres, HealthScreen, an occupational health service, and Hearing Aid Accessories, an online shop. Though initially sceptical of external help, support from the Business Gateway and East Midlands Chamber has assisted growth and the creation of a unique shopping app.

“We decided to try for funding to create the first app in the industry for the hard of hearing. I got in touch with the Chamber, and they put me in touch with Business Gateway Adviser, Aruna Bhagwan.

“Aruna has helped with lots of things. She pointed me to different people and organisations that could help with funding for the app. We’ve had some long conversations about the business, our challenges and where we want to go.”

Samantha has received advice on valuing the business for investment. Her daughter, Tyler is already running Hear4U and will take over officially soon.

She has also taken part in the Ambition to Grow programme which provides peer-to-peer support for business leaders.

**Support:** Business advice, peer-to-peer, workshops  
**Impact:** Succession planning, signposting, new products  
**Area:** Hinckley



“The biggest thing is clarity, which has been invaluable – clarity of thought and action. I’ve never had a business plan since we started, we have one now and that’s down to support from Jo. She’s been incredibly helpful.”



“We didn’t have any business experience and Joanna provided that continual voice of sanity in the madness. It’s taken a long time to get through just learning about day-to-day survival to now having more confidence and thinking strategically.”

## Weatherwise Services

Gritting business Weatherwise Services has seen a whopping 157% increase in turnover in the last four years of trading. It started in 2017 with just two vehicles covering 36 sites and now has 14 vehicles over 250 sites. Growth has been rapid for directors, Tim Grainger and Andrew Martin.

Weatherwise provide a personalised winter gritting and snow clearance service to private customers. Geographically the business covers sites from Sheffield down to Northampton with a focus on the Midlands. During the season Tim and Andrew are available 24/7 to manage a team of 18 contractors with vehicles holding loads from 3,500 to 26,000 tonnes.

Tim was introduced to the Business Gateway and Business Adviser Joanna Moore following a networking event. He explains: “Computerisation was a big issue for me, but just talking to Jo and going through things helped. We’ve now

got a new CRM that integrates with our website, email and enquiries and this has made life easier. “Support from the Business Gateway has allowed me to see a broader picture and understand what I need to do to control the issues concerning me.”

**Support:** Digitalisation, business planning, time management

**Impact:** Time savings, improved efficiency.

**Area:** Charnwood

## Willoughby Book Club

Willoughby Book Club, run by Marianne Chala, is a bespoke book subscription service that caters to all reading tastes and ages with around 5,000 subscribers.

Marianne reached out to the Business Gateway before Covid-19 and had already started working with Business Adviser, Joanna Moore on developing growth strategies. However, during the pandemic, a different kind of support was needed as the focus shifted from growth to survival.

“Joanna gave us just what we needed at the time. During the crisis, I was regularly advised on the furlough scheme. I was supported with helping staff return to work, arranging a socially distanced workplace, flexible hours and working from home options.”

“We’re working more efficiently now, half the team work from home successfully and we’ve cut our costs. There

were some cultural and workforce issues within the organisation and an understandable nervousness about the Covid situation. With Joanna’s help, we’ve improved communication and implemented better HR practices.”

“There’s also been concrete support on putting together financial and business plans. She’s made me focus on the stuff I don’t really like, or know, but is necessary. That gentle accountability was very good for me.”

**Support:** Business advice

**Impact:** Improved efficiency and communication, new HR practices, reduced costs

**Area:** Blaby



“We really appreciate this funding. The grant has allowed us to move forward with a part of the business that we’ve not been able to change for years. Having someone like Aruna to walk us through everything at each point has been so helpful.”



“Paul’s help was like gold dust. He was able to steer us in the right direction with specific details on what the panel wanted. With the timescales we had, that kind of help was so useful.”

## Football America UK

Football America UK was started in 2008 by former Leicester Panthers player, David Hagger. It supplies 350 American football teams with all forms of equipment, including helmets, shoulder pads and gloves manufactured in the USA.

It also produces personalised clothing for players and fans including shirts, hoodies, caps and shorts. Customising these products was a labour-intensive process involving vinyl which was heat pressed onto garments. The cutting out of the design and ‘weeding’ bits of vinyl that aren’t needed took 15-20 minutes per garment. When orders went up, this process compromised their 10-day turnaround delivery promise.

Finance & Operations Manager, Steve McKenzie explained: “We had to offer relatively simple designs on the team wear products otherwise it made the process more costly and even more labour intensive.”

With the help of a £9,600 grant from the Business Gateway and support from Business Adviser, Aruna Bhagwan, Football America UK made the biggest single purchase of equipment in its history, investing £28,000 for the new printer. Lead time per garment has dropped to 3-5 minutes, and instead of 22.5 pieces, they now can create around 90 items a day.

**Support:** Grant, business advice

**Impact:** Increased capacity, diversification

**Area:** Hinckley & Bosworth

## Komodo Fireworks

Komodo Fireworks specialise in providing bespoke, dynamic and musical firework displays for weddings, bonfire nights and other special occasions. The business was hit hard by Covid-19 but it gave owner Rob Sosbe the time to look at opportunities in fireworks and new effects. This ultimately led to the creation of his innovative ‘i-MOVE’ product.

Essentially the business has reverse-engineered existing lighting equipment on the market removing the light and putting fireworks in their place. They can drive the ‘i-MOVE’ unit to independent positions and move it in a 360-degree tilt and pan movement throughout a show, so fireworks synchronise in time with the music – this has never been done before.

Once the unit was working Rob began to explore additional funding to support the project so they could build more. He contacted the Business Gateway and with support from Business Adviser, Paul Bennett managed to secure a £6,000 growth grant for controls and software (35% of his total costs of £18,000).

**Support:** Grant, business advice

**Impact:** New product development and diversification

**Area:** Market Harborough



## Business Adviser Team



Matt Bateman



Joanna Moore



Rana Sultan



Altaf Ahmed

## Future support

With the end of the European funding, we are currently going through a major shift in the business support landscape. However, the Business Gateway is still here to support you. It will continue as a triage and signposting service to local, regional and national business support for the Leicester and Leicestershire business community.

To keep abreast of changes and support available to you and your business check our website regularly, sign up for our newsletters and follow us on social media.

Sign up here:

<https://bizgateway.org.uk/enquiry>

"The Business Gateway is here and ready to support any business that has ambitions to develop and grow. We're working hard to build strong links with support providers so our information is timely, useful and up-to-date. Keep in touch and don't miss out on relevant support for your business."

Salma Manzoor, Partnerships and Growth Hub Manager



Aruna Bhagwan



Juan Pardo



Russ Pacey



Part-funded by:



**0116 366 8487**  
**[bizgateway.org.uk](http://bizgateway.org.uk)**  
**[growthhub@bizgateway.org.uk](mailto:growthhub@bizgateway.org.uk)**

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