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Evaluation of the Knowledge Transfer, Innovation and Advisory Services Programme

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Evaluation of the Knowledge Transfer, Innovation and Advisory Services Programme

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
AHDB	Agricultural and Horticulture Development Board
BAS	Business Account System
BOSS	Business online Support Service
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CRN	Customer Reference Number
DO	Development Officer
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EIP	European Innovation Partnership
EU	European Union
FC	Farming Connect
GVA	Gross Value Added
HCC	Hybu Cig Cymru
IAB	Industry Advisory Board
IBERS	Institute of Biological and Rural Sciences
IT	Information Technology
MaB	Menter a Busnes
PDP	Personal Development Plans
RDP	Rural Development Programme
SAB	Strategic Advisory Board
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
ToC	Theory of Change
YFC	Young Farmers Club
WEFO	Welsh European Funding Office

1. Introduction

- 1.1 SQW, with Arad and our agricultural expert Martin Collison, has been commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Knowledge Transfer, Innovation and Advisory Services Farming Connect Programme (2014-2020) known as Farming Connect. This report presents findings from the first phase of evaluation; a second evaluation report will be produced in Spring 2020.

Key research questions

- 1.2 The focus of the evaluation is three-fold: first, to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation; second, to gather evidence on the nature and scale of outcomes achieved to date, the extent to which these are additional (and would not have been achieved otherwise) and address the original aims and objectives of the programme; and third, to learn what works (and why) to inform ongoing delivery and the design of future programmes. More detailed evaluation questions are presented in Table 1-1, which draw on our original Specification, SQW's proposal, and discussions with the steering group.

Table 1-1: Key evaluations question

- What activities have been delivered to date, compared to expectations?
 - How intensively do farmers engage with the programme and progress through the offer, and what drives this?
 - How effectively and efficiently is the programme being delivered, managed and governed?
 - To what extent are changes implemented on farms?
 - What outcomes and impacts have been achieved to date?
 - To what extent are outcomes additional, and which aspects of the programme make the most important contribution to achieving outcomes/are most effective (alone or in combination)?
 - What factors enable or hinder implementation and progress towards intended outcomes?
 - What are the key lessons to inform ongoing delivery and design of future interventions?
 - How is the programme performing overall?
-

Source: SQW

Approach

1.3 In order to gather evidence against the questions above, we have adopted a largely qualitative approach to the evaluation. In line with the original Specification for the study from the Welsh Government, quantitative data gathering (for example, via a telephone survey of beneficiaries) and counterfactual impact evaluation techniques were not within the scope of this assignment – as a consequence, we are not seeking to produce quantified estimates of net GVA/Return on Investment for the programme as a whole. Rather, the focus is very much on learning about what works well (or not) to effect change within farming businesses in Wales, and how the current delivery and future programme design can be strengthened to maximise outcomes and impacts across the sector. The evaluation has involved the following tasks:

- **A review of programme documentation and analysis of monitoring data** to assess spend and output performance against targets and to characterise the beneficiary base, alongside a headline review of social media activity by Press Data.
- **18 in-depth consultations with governance, management and delivery staff** at the Welsh Government, Menter a Busnes (MaB) and Lantra. Consultees are listed in Annex B.
- **Four regional focus groups with beneficiaries**, involving 22 farmers in total and each lasting c1.5 hours. Beneficiaries were selected through a combination of random sampling from the Farming Connect database and nominations from MaB of beneficiaries who had previously engaged with Farming Connect’s ‘farmer feedback forums’ in earlier programme periods. These focus groups were facilitated by SQW and Arad; they gathered qualitative feedback on the support received and the difference this made to individuals and their businesses, and how the offer could be improved.
- **A series of 13 in-depth case studies** (eight focused on Lots 1 and 3, and five on Lot 2), which involved detailed consultations with delivery staff and around five beneficiaries involved in each activity. Feedback was gathered on the activity in question and their experiences of other aspects of Farming Connect, their customer journey and ability to navigate through the offer, outcomes achieved and factors that have helped or hindered progress. Each case study was defined in discussion with the Welsh Government, MaB and Lantra, to ensure a spread across policy domains, level of innovation (e.g. incremental through to more transformative), geographical location and varying intensity of engagement with the programme. The case studies are not intended to be representative – given the number of case studies undertaken, and the range and scale of activities delivered by Farming Connect, this was not feasible within the remit of this

evaluation¹. That said, we have purposely selected case studies that are deemed to be relatively “typical” examples of an activity, rather than best case examples. For group activities, one case study covers one facilitator but beneficiaries from two groups (including those that have worked well and less well), and for paired or one-to-one activities we have consulted with multiple pairings/individuals in order to widen the range of perspectives. It is envisaged that the case studies will be longitudinal, and so beneficiaries will be revisited next year to track their ongoing journeys through Farming Connect and whether anticipated outcomes have been realised. Further information on the case studies is provided in Annex A.

- **Consultations with 10 wider stakeholders**, including representatives from the Welsh farming unions, levy body, AHDB, Young Farmers Club and Agricultural Advisory Board. Consultees are listed in Annex B.

1.4 A scoping report was produced in summer 2018 after the initial document and data review, providing a more detailed workplan for the study for client approval. The first phase of research involved more detailed data analysis, regional focus groups with beneficiaries and the in-depth consultations with governance, management and delivery staff. Emerging findings were presented in an interim report in Autumn 2018, which was discussed with the Welsh Government, Menter a Busnes (MaB) and Lantra. The second phase of research then included the in-depth case studies and consultations with wider stakeholders.

Report structure

1.5 This report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides an overview of the Farming Connect programme, including the anticipated logic model and theory of change, and summary of progress to date.
- Section 3 presents feedback on implementation, including what has worked well (or not) throughout the customer journey and in terms of management and governance of the programme.
- Section 4 explores the extent to which farmers are implementing changes as a result of Farming Connect, and outcomes and impacts achieved.
- Finally, Section 5 presents our conclusions.

¹ For example, we covered two of 117 Agrisgop groups.

- 1.6 The report is supported by three annexes: Annex A provides an overview of the case studies; Annex B provides a list of consultees for the study; and Annex C presents Press Data information on social media. In addition, the detailed case study reports are provided in a separate appendix.

2. Overview of the FC programme

- 2.1 In this Section, we present an overview of the Farming Connect programme design, including the original rationale, the programme's aims, inputs and activities, and intended outputs, outcomes and impacts. We also summarise progress to date, in terms of spend and outputs against targets, and provide an overview of beneficiary characteristics and engagement.

Programme overview

Context

- 2.2 The Farming Connect framework has been developed under the Welsh Government Rural Communities–Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, a seven-year European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) programme funded by the European Union and Welsh Government. The Wales Rural Communities–Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP) aims to increase the **productivity, diversity and efficiency** of the Welsh farming and forestry businesses; improve the Welsh environment, encouraging **sustainable management of natural resources and climate action** in Wales; and promote **strong, sustainable rural economic growth** in Wales. Farming Connect is aligned with, and provides the core underpinning activities necessary to address, the six main priorities of the RDP:

- Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry, and rural areas
- Enhancing competitiveness of all types of agriculture and enhancing farm viability
- Promoting food chain organisation and risk management in agriculture
- Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems dependent on agriculture and forestry
- Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in farming, food and forestry sectors, and
- Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.

Rationale for intervention

2.3 As set out in the Specification for Farming Connect delivery, the programme design was informed through consultation and engagement with the industry and internal stakeholders throughout the RDP planning process, and drew heavily on experience with earlier programmes and in-house reflection on this experience. The specification stated that:

“There is a need to provide a coordinated and integrated package of knowledge transfer, innovation and advisory service that targets the farming, forestry and food sectors. Knowledge transfer and business development are two key priorities for the Client in helping to deliver cultural change in agriculture and a strong rural economy more generally.

The uptake of knowledge, the exchange of ideas, and support for the application of innovative practices on the ground are important tools to support the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in the farming, forestry and food sectors. They are key to helping to restore, preserve and enhance ecosystems, protecting biodiversity, tackling poverty, and for promoting social inclusion in rural areas.”

2.4 We have surmised the rationale – in terms of market and/or other failures pointing to the need for intervention – as follows.

- **Information failures and risk aversion:** farmers are typically unable to access the latest UK/international sources summarising research findings and innovative applications in agri-science, which would enable them to identify what might be most useful in their own context, and to translate this into practical on-farm solutions. Farmers are then reluctant to invest in new technology or processes, because they do not realise the scale of potential return, they perceive the risk to be too high, and/or they operate under time/financial constraints because many are micro/small businesses.
- **Co-ordination failures:** Given large number of actors involved and a sector which includes a diverse mix of size and type of businesses, farmers can struggle to know where to go for support.
- **Wider externalities and spillovers:** Farmers are likely to underinvest in innovation from a societal perspective because they are unable to capture full returns on this investment. The knowledge/technologies they acquire become part of global knowledge stock, leading to improved performance of other farming businesses. The failure to deliver fully on socially desirable objectives, including helping to address societal challenges, climate change, environmental sustainability, and food security issues, are therefore, to some degree, ‘Innovation failures’. These conditions also reduce the extent to which negative externalities,

the potential consequences of farming on the environment or animal health/welfare, are addressed.

Aims and objectives

- 2.5 A key objective of Farming Connect is to increase the emphasis on business focused behaviour and therefore improve the **profitability, competitiveness and environmental performance** of farm, forestry and food businesses, and by extension, **promote the economic growth and development of rural areas.**² The programme aims to support the forestry and farming industry through a period of significant change and help support the adjustment away from reliance on direct payments (Common Agricultural Policy {CAP} payments). The aim is to deliver a programme which will provide a **responsive and flexible** means of addressing the evolving strategic priorities of the industry and Welsh Government. Within this framework the following priority areas for the Welsh Government have been identified: climate change; grassland; biodiversity; forestry; red meat; dairy; arable; horticulture; organic production; pigs and poultry.³
- 2.6 There are three programme lots, each with specific aims:
- The aim of the Knowledge Transfer Programme (Lot 1) is to support the farming and forestry industries in building **resilience and enhance sustainability** of businesses for the future, with an emphasis on technical and efficiency improvements.⁴
 - The aim of the Lifelong Learning and Development Programme (Lot 2) is to deliver a **more professional industry** through its support for continuous professional development, accredited training, a new e-learning platform and clear focus on personal development.⁵
 - The Advisory Service (Lot 3) aims to provide independent, bespoke, one-to-one and group advice to improve the **sustainable management and the economic and environmental performance** of farming, forestry and food manufacturing SMEs operating in rural areas.⁶

² Knowledge Transfer, Innovation and Advisory Service under the Wales Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, Specification for the Farming Connect delivery framework

³ Knowledge Transfer, Innovation and Advisory Service under the Wales Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, Specification for the Farming Connect delivery framework – see for more information on each priority

⁴ Knowledge Transfer, Innovation and Advisory Service under the Wales Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, Specification for the Farming Connect delivery framework

⁵ Specification for: Evaluation of the Knowledge Transfer, Innovation and Advisory Service delivered through Farming Connect

⁶ Knowledge Transfer, Innovation and Advisory Service under the Wales Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, Specification for the Farming Connect delivery framework

Intended Inputs

- 2.7 The total programme budget is **£27.7m**, with £19.5m allocated to Lot 1, £2.4m allocated to Lot 2, and £5.7m allocated to Lot 3. Expenditure is expected to increase annually through to 2018-2019, as illustrated below.

Table 2-1: Annual programme budget (Financial schedule submitted in the tender bids by contract year)

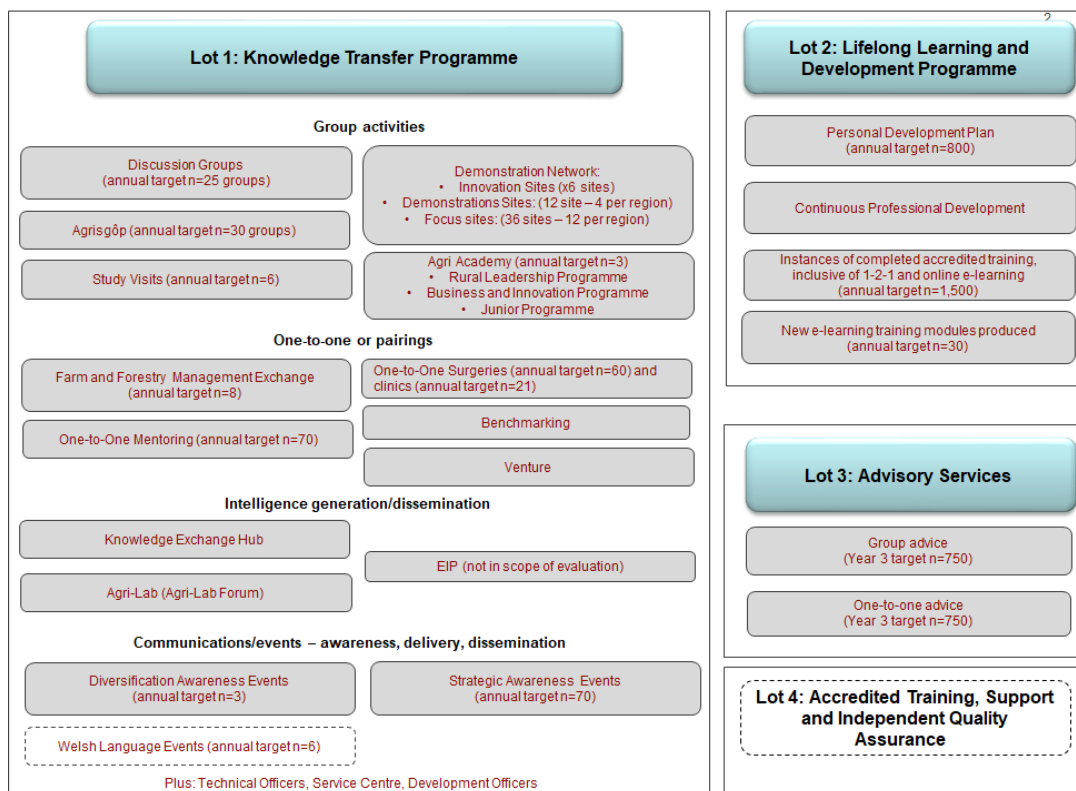
Lot	Contractor	Year 1 Aug 2015- Aug 2016	Year 2 Aug 2016- Aug 2017	Year 3 Aug 2017- Aug 2018	Year 4 Aug 2018- Aug 2019	Total
Lot 1: Knowledge Transfer Programme	MaB	£4,892,046	£4,763,720	£4,834,106	£5,051,208	£19,541,080
Lot 2: Lifelong Learning and Development Programme	Lantra Wales	£598,895	£598,883	£598,857	£598,441	£2,395,076
Lot 3: Rural Business Advisory Scheme	MaB	£1,551,072	£1,405,773	£1,373,491	£1,349,728	£5,680,064
Total	-	£7,042,013	£6,768,376	£6,806,454	£6,999,377	£27,616,220

Source: Welsh Government, dated 10/09/2019

Intended activities, management and governance

- 2.8 The planned activities under Farming Connect are summarised below, alongside the target number of events/groups/assists where appropriate.

Figure 2-1: Farming Connect activities



Source: SQW. Note: the Welsh Language Events and Lot 4 were not delivered as planned

2.9 Farming Connect is overseen by the **Welsh Government**, which contracted **Menter a Busnes** (MaB) to deliver Lots 1 and 3, and **Lantra** to deliver Lot 2. Both MaB and Lantra sub-contracted some of the delivery activities, as part of their tender for this programme.

- Under Lot 1, MaB has sub-contracted the delivery of some activities – for example, Aberystwyth University’s Institute of Biological and Rural Sciences (IBERS) is responsible for hosting the Knowledge Exchange Hub at the University Campus. Menter a Busnes has also partnered with the Welsh Innovation Farm Network, ADAS Wales, Kite Consulting, Innovis, Lantra, Bangor University and others, to deliver the Programme.
- To deliver the Lifelong Learning and Development Programme (Lot 2), Lantra collaborated with IBERS, Think Associates and Menter a Busnes. Again, each sub-contractor will have a specific role; for example, IBERS is responsible for producing the e-learning modules, whilst Think Associates has developed the on-line PDP.
- The Advisory Service (Lot 3) is being delivered by eight advisory companies acting as sub-contractors to Menter a Busnes: ADAS Wales, Agri Plan Cymru, Andersons, CARA, Kite Consulting, Landsker, Promar International and Savills.

- 2.10 A team of regionally based Development Officers is in place to ensure an effective overall process, including moving between the products and services within Farming Connect and direction where necessary to the appropriate partner. Eight Technical Officers will support the Development Officers by taking responsibility for the coordination of projects and trials within their specific area of work.
- 2.11 The Farming Connect **Strategic Advisory Board** (SAB) overseeing the programme, includes representatives from the Welsh Government, HCC, Coleg Cambria, Agri Advisor, AHDB and Coed Cymru. The role of the Strategic Advisory Board is to identify and prioritise research, knowledge and information delivered to meet the needs of the industry and put forward recommendations to the Farming Connect management team. Three Sub-Groups sit beneath the Strategic Advisory Board, one for each Lot, providing advice on the needs of farm and forestry businesses in Wales. It was also anticipated that the programme would have an **Industry Advisory Board** (IAB) comprising industry representatives, designed to identify priorities and ensure the activities meet evolving needs of the sector⁷. The IAB was due to report directly to the Strategic Advisory Board

⁷ Note: IAB met on a few occasions, but it was not fulfilling its purpose so is no longer in operation.

Intended outputs, outcomes and impacts

2.12 The intended KPIs under each Lot are summarised in Figure 2-2.

Figure 2-2: Target outputs for the programme (2015-2019 – 4 years)



Source: Progress reports/Farming Connect Specification

2.13 We have ascertained from the aims and objective and the wider documentation that intended programme outcomes and impacts focus on the following.

- **Outcomes:** development of skills, capacity and expertise; encouraging knowledge transfer/exchange *and* the application of innovation in businesses supported; building resilience and enhance sustainability of businesses for the future; technical and efficiency improvements; increasing ‘business-focused’ and ‘professional’ behaviour of farms, with a greater focus on personal development; improved farm/food/forestry business profitability, competitiveness and environmental performance.
- **Impacts:** enabling wider spillovers of knowledge/technologies/processes/innovations to the wider agricultural sector; improved supply chain integration, increased competitiveness, productivity, diversity, viability and efficiency of the Welsh farming and forestry businesses as a whole; reduced reliance on direct payments; improving the Welsh environment, encouraging sustainable

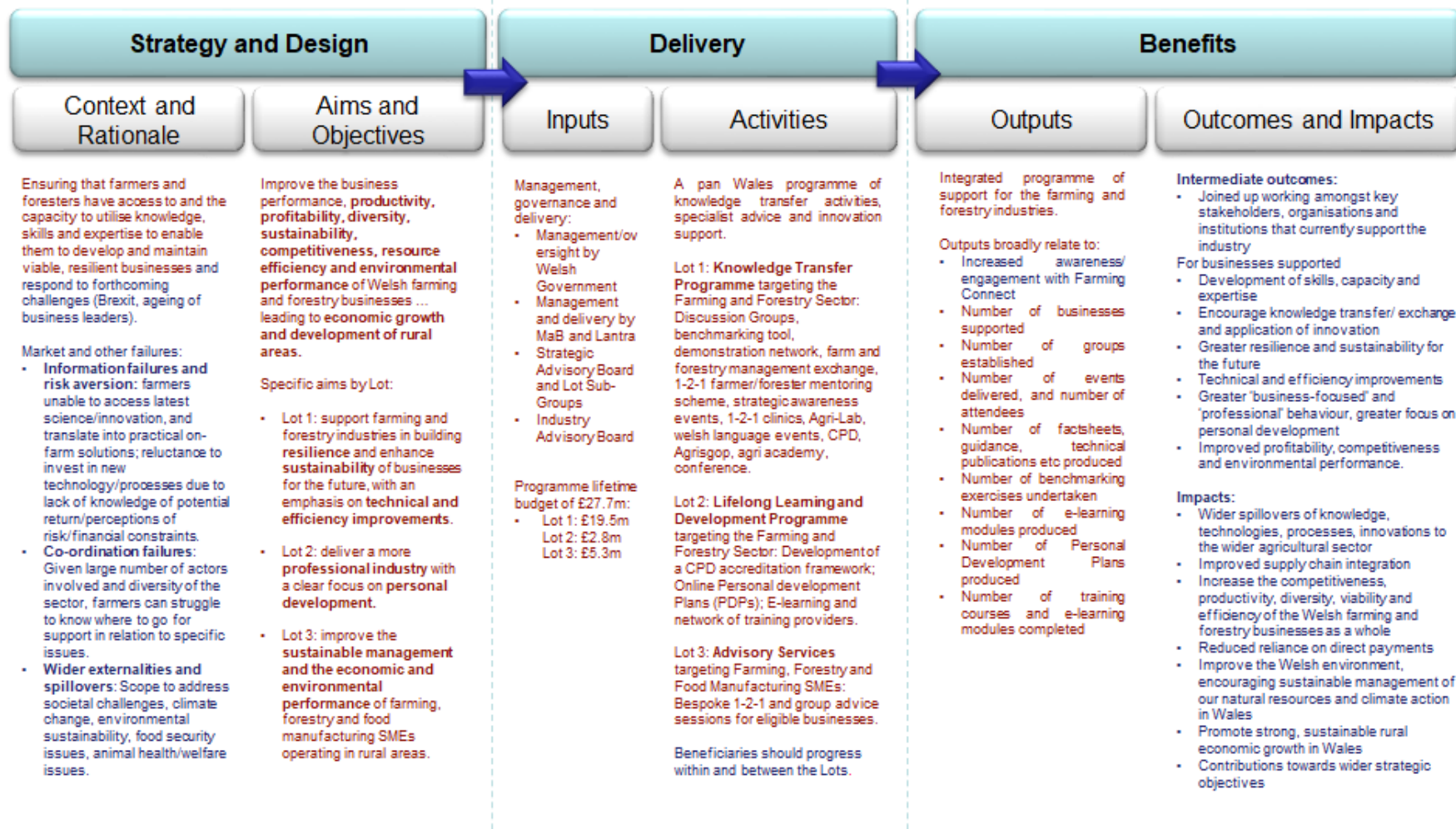
management of our natural resources and climate action in Wales; promoting strong, sustainable rural economic growth in Wales; contributing towards wider strategic objectives, such as creating a prosperous, resilient, healthy, more equally globally responsible Wales.

Logic chain and ToC

- 2.14 A summary logic chain and theory of change (ToC) was not produced for the programme at the outset. SQW has therefore drawn on, and added to, the documentation reviewed to date in order to develop an overarching logic chain. As depicted in Figure 2-3, this sets out the rationale and strategic context, aims and objectives, inputs and intended outputs, outcomes⁸ and impacts for the programme as a whole. The content drawn from our review of documentation is denoted by red text. SQW has added some information for clarification and/or to ensure a logical flow from rationale to impacts, based on our understanding of the programme and feedback from the Steering Group and scoping consultees: this is shown in blue text.
- 2.15 In Figure 2-4, we then present SQW's interpretation of the Theory of Change (ToC) for the programme. This attempts to show how and why Farming Connect is expected to bring about outcomes and impacts, by setting out causal links between activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts, and associated assumptions and risks/reasons why the logic might break down.

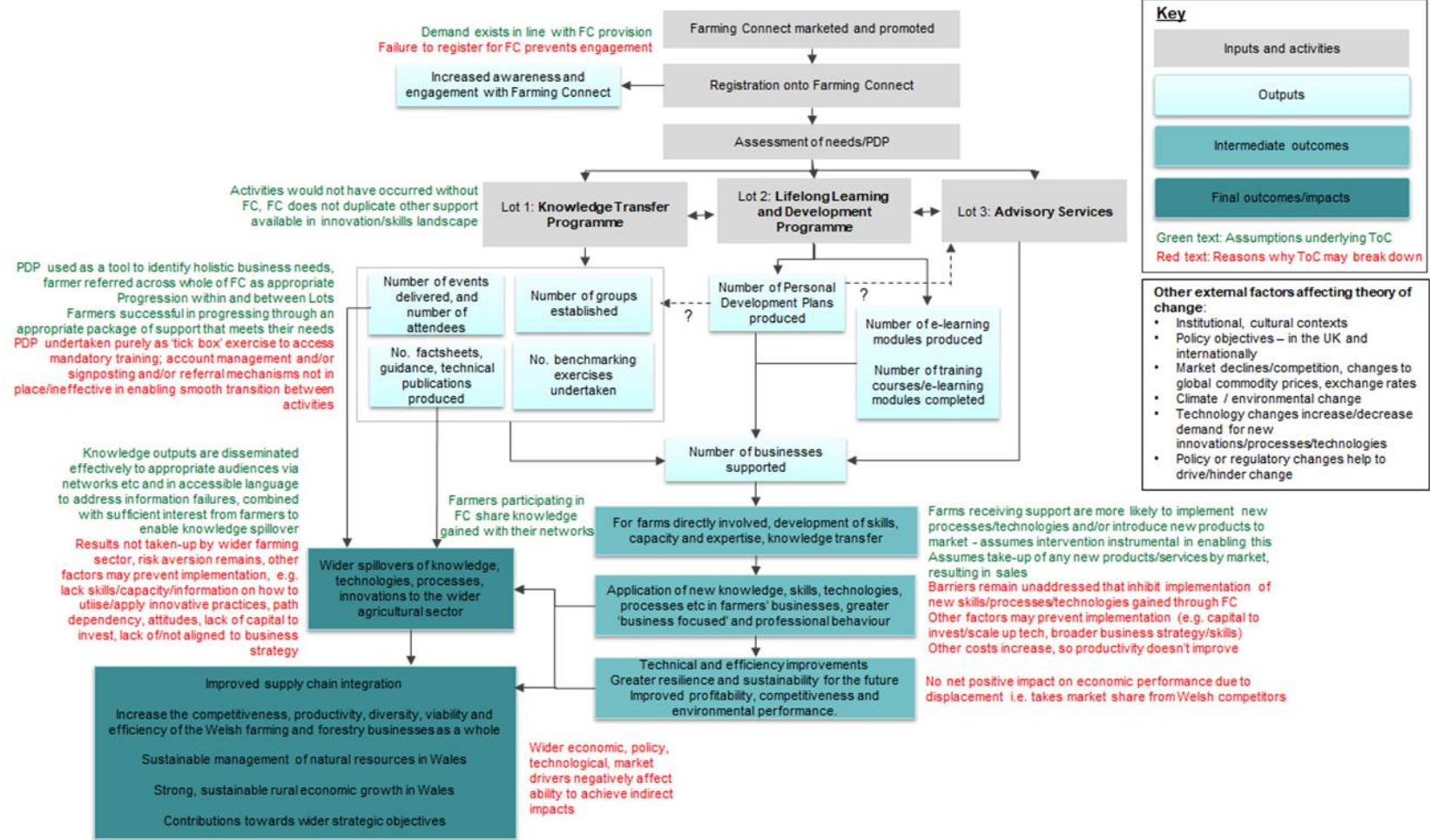
⁸ These include intermediate outcomes such as knowledge and skill gains, and subsequent effects on business performance.

Figure 2-3: Overarching logic chain for Farming Connect



Source: SQW

Figure 2-4: Theory of Change



Source: SQW. Note: in practice, the PDP has sat under Lot 2, not above all three lots. It was originally envisaged that PDPs would signpost to Lot 1 and 3, and be used as a live record of goals and objectives for each individual.

Spend and outputs profile to date

- 2.16 In this Section, we present data on spend and outputs up to end of March 2019.
- 2.17 By this point, just over £19.4m had been spent on the delivery of the current Farming Connect programme, compared to a lifetime programme budget of £27.7m by August 2019. The table below presents headline expenditure to date and targets by Lot.

Table 2-2: Overview of expenditure to date compared to forecast (£m)

	A: Total Spend to date (from programme start Aug 2015 to Mar 2019, end of 2018/19 financial year)	B: Remaining forecast spend to end of programme period (Aug 2019)	C: Total forecast spend by end of programme period (A+B)	D: Total Budget allocation	E: Difference (D-C)	F: % Difference (C/D)
Lot 1	£13,691,560	£4,823,812	£18,515,372	£19,541,080	£1,025,709	94.8%
Lot 2	£2,069,880	£327,196	£2,397,076	£2,395,076	£2,000	100.1%
Lot 3	£3,641,177	£1,180,448	£4,821,625	£5,680,064	£858,439	84.9%
Total	£19,402,617	£6,331,456	£25,734,073	£27,616,220	£1,882,147	93.2%

Source: Welsh Government, dated 10/09/2019

- 2.18 Below, we disaggregate spend to date across the Farming Connect Lots and activities.

Spend on knowledge transfer and advisory services delivered by MaB

- 2.19 Under Lot 1, nearly £13.7m had been spent up to March 2019 on the delivery of activities, accounting for 74% of total forecast expenditure by the end of the programme period. To date, programme running costs account for the majority of spend, which includes the cost of a large team of Development Officers who operate across Wales. By activity, spend on the demonstration network has been greatest to date. Under Lot 3, total spend to March 2019 was £3.6m, accounting for 76% of total forecast expenditure by the end of the programme period. Half of all expenditure has been spent on group training (51%) and a third (34%) on one to one advice. The underspend in Lot 3 was largely driven by the requirement that all businesses needed a business plan to access technical advice at the beginning of the programme period. However, in March 2017, additional access routes to technical advice were introduced, such as attendance at a specific knowledge transfer event delivered through Lot 1.

Table 2-3: Lot 1 – Total spend to date to March 2019 and forecasted spend on the delivery of Farming Connect activities

Category		A: Total Spend to date (Aug 2015 - Mar 2019)	B: % of spend to date (Aug 2015 - Mar 2019)	C: Remaining forecast spend to end of programme period (Aug 2019)	Total expected expenditure by end of programme period (A+C)
Programme Running Costs	These costs include the provision of delivery staff and service centre staff that promote and administer all of Farming Connect (across all three lots).	£9,874,485	72	£1,867,940	£11,742,425
Development and Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young leaders and business innovators • Short term visits • Action Learning • Venture • Farm and forestry management exchange • One to one farm/forestry mentoring 	£886,948	6	£478,642	£1,365,590
Technical Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstration Network • Information Hub • Discussion Groups 	£1,841,709	13	£1,204,001	£3,045,710
Events and One to one support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversification awareness events • Welsh language events • One to one surgeries and clinics • Strategic Awareness 	£846,525	6	£909,241	£1,755,766

Category		A: Total Spend to date (Aug 2015 - Mar 2019)	B: % of spend to date (Aug 2015 - Mar 2019)	C: Remaining forecast spend to end of programme period (Aug 2019)	Total expected expenditure by end of programme period (A+C)
Communication	This covers communication and marketing for the whole programme (i.e. Lots 1, 2, and 3), and includes translation costs and attending shows and exhibitions.	£241,893	2	£363,988	£605,881
TOTAL		£13,691,560	100	£4,823,812	£18,515,372

Source: Welsh Government, dated 21 November 2019

Table 2-4: Lot 3 – Total spend to date to March 2019 and forecasted spend on the delivery of Farming Connect activities

Category	A: Total Spend to date (Aug 2015 - Mar 2019)	B: % of spend to date (Aug 2015 - Mar 2019)	C: Remaining forecast spend to end of programme period (Aug 2019)	Total expected expenditure by end of programme period (A+C)
Programme Running Costs	£312,272	9%	£17,921	£330,193
One to One Advice	£1,240,249	34%	£418,270	£1,658,519
Group Training	£1,861,478	51%	£675,437	£2,536,915
EIP - Operational Groups	£194,340	5%	£68,731	£263,071
Benchmarking	£32,839	1%	£88	£32,927
Total	£3,641,177	100%	£1,180,448	£4,821,625

Source: Welsh Government, dated 10/09/2019

Spend on training provision delivered by Lantra

- 2.20 Total spend under Lot 2 has totalled £2.1m between August 2015 and March 2019, compared to a programme period target of £2.4m (86% of forecast) by August 2019. The majority of spend to date has been on short course accredited training (44%) and programme running costs (41%). An additional £327K is expected to be spent to the end of August 2019, largely accounted for by spend on programme running costs and short course accredited training. (see Table 2-5).

Table 2-5: Lot 2 - Total spend to date and forecasted spend on the delivery of Farming Connect activities

Category	A: Total Spend to date (Aug 2015 - Mar 2019)	B: % of spend to date (Aug 2015 - Mar 2019)	C: Remaining forecast spend to end of programme period (Aug 2019)	Total expected expenditure by end of programme period (A+C)
Programme Running costs	£851,456	41%	£170,455	£1,021,911
Short Course Accredited Training	£909,307	44%	£98,876	£1,008,183
e-learning	£125,277	6%	£56,740	£182,017
Personal Development Plans	£183,840	9%	£1,125	£184,965
Total	£2,069,880	100%	£327,196	£2,397,076

Source: Welsh Government, dated 10/09/2019

Profile of outputs

- 2.21 To date, good progress has been made towards achieving programme targets under Lot 1, with most targets having already being achieved or exceeded (see Table 2-6). Several outputs relating to supporting activities and information actions have been exceeded, for example, programme targets for clinics, technical articles and press notices, one-to-one surgeries and factsheets and guidance have all surpassed 200% of target. The number of

Farming Connect registrations has also been greatly exceeded, with the number of registrations currently over 500% of programme target⁹.

- 2.22 However, some programme’s lifetime targets are yet to be achieved, notably targets for Management Exchange (44%), Agri Academy (75%)¹⁰ and shows and exhibitions (75%). The 14 Management Exchanges completed to date only included individuals who have submitted their exchange report, thus there are additional individuals (c.9) in the process of completing the process. In addition, 20 proposals have been approved in the current year and candidates have been asked to complete their exchanges by end of September 2019.
- 2.23 There is no target for the number of Joint Ventures established, however, up to April 2019, there had been 182 “seekers” (114 active, 41 inactive) and 137 “providers” (65 active, 72 inactive) involved in the Venture strand. Of the 104 “seekers” and 17 “providers” fully enrolled, 37 “seekers” and 48 “providers” have found a match, with a total of 20 establishing a Joint Venture to date. This demonstrates how delivery staff have played an important role in matching, addressing the original co-ordination failures this activity was designed to address.

Table 2-6: Lot 1 programme outputs and targets¹¹

Description	Programme target (2015- 2019)	Achieved to date (March 2019)	% achieved against programme target (by 19 th August 2019)
Vocational Training			
Agri Academy	12	9	75%
One to one mentoring	280	330	118%
Supporting activities and information actions			
Demonstration Network Events*	480	554	115%
Communication**	314	695	N/A

⁹ Registration figure is taken from MaB’s progress report and covers Lot 1 only.

¹⁰ Note, interviews for Agri Academy took place at the end of April where 12 candidates were selected for each programme (source: Progress Report for Farming Connect Framework, Lot 1 – Knowledge Transfer and Innovation April 2019)

¹¹ *Knowledge Exchange - this is not a process rather than a programme target. 2 members of IBERS staff provide specialist technical and literature support to the Knowledge Exchange Hub for the technical articles, factsheets and EIP literature reviews.

**Communication – This target has reduced significantly since the previous progress report due to the removal of social media posts and e-bulletins, as requested by the Lot 1 Contract Manager.

Description	Programme target (2015- 2019)	Achieved to date (March 2019)	% achieved against programme target (by 19 th August 2019)
Shows and Exhibitions*	64	48	75%
Factsheets and Guidance	24	52	217%
Technical Publications	24	19	79%
Technical Articles and Press Notice	200	574	287%
Conference*	2	2	100%
Knowledge Exchange	2*	2*	N/A
Discussion Groups*	100	119	119%
Strategic Awareness Events*	280	385	138%
Welsh Language events	24	0	N/A
Diversification Awareness Seminars*	12	10	83%
Agrisgôp groups*	120	117	98%
One to one surgeries*	240	680	283%
Clinics*	84	374	445%
Venture	N/A	N/A	N/A
Supporting farm and forestry management exchanges			
Management Exchanges*	32	14	44%
Study Visits*	24	23	96%
Other outputs			
Total number of events (those marked with * above)	1,730	2,998	-
Number of attendees at events	N/A	-	-
Number of Farming Connect registrations	2,000	10,133	507%

Description	Programme target (2015- 2019)	Achieved to date (March 2019)	% achieved against programme target (by 19 th August 2019)
Total Businesses Registered on BAS	N/A	10,056	-
Individuals on BAS	N/A	20,431	-
Individuals on BOSS	N/A	12,467	-

Source: Progress Report for Farming Connect Framework, Lot 1 – Knowledge Transfer and Innovation April 2019.

- 2.24 The annual targets for Lot 2 are shown in Table 2-7. Good progress has been made towards achieving the annual targets for the instances of completed 1-2-1 and online e-learning training (92% target achieved), and for the completion of Personal Development Plans (76%).
- 2.25 The number of new e-Learning modules produced since the start of the programme is behind target. Whilst 18 modules have been produced in the current period, the April 2019 progress report states that further development has been delayed due to proposed new criteria surrounding the offering.

Table 2-7: Lot 2 annual outputs and targets

Description	Annual target	Progress against annual target	% achieved against annual target
Instances of completed 1-2-1 accredited training	1,500	535	92%
Instances of completed on-line e-learning		848	
Personal Development Plans	800	608	76%
New e-learning training modules produced	30	18	60%

Source: Progress Report for Farming Connect Framework, Lot 2 – Lifelong Learning and Development April 2019.

- 2.26 Annual targets and outputs for Lot 3 are detailed in Table 2-8. Where Year 4 targets are applicable, 590 group training claims have been achieved against a target of 590 and 328 one to one advice claims have been achieved against

a target of 800 (it is likely this is because of the time lag between approved applications and subsequent delivery and financial claims).

- 2.27 119 Discussion Groups have been established since the start of the programme, involving over 1,000 businesses. The 30% target of Discussion Group members benchmarking has been achieved, with 32% of businesses using Measure to Manage (M2M) and over 50% using other benchmarking methods. Similarly, over 40% of these Groups reported that have used M2M, while over 50% of groups are utilising other benchmarking methods.

Table 2-8: Lot 3 annual outputs and targets

Description	Achieved over years 1 to 3	Year 4 target	Year 4 total to date	% achieved against annual target
Supporting the use of the advisory service				
One to one advice claims	796	800	328	41%
Group training individual claims	1,053	200 ¹²	590	295%
Total number of groups claimed	283	N/A	156	N/A
Operational group – innovation	16	45 over lifetime of RDP	6	N/A
Benchmarking – measure to manage				
Progress from start of the programme				
Number of businesses in Discussion Groups		-	1,041 (161 from disbanded groups)	
Number of businesses benchmarking (M2M)				336
Number of businesses benchmarking (Other)				578
Number of businesses benchmarking (M2M) %	30% of Discussion Group Members Benchmarking			32%

¹² Note, this target originally referred to 200 groups, however, following confusion at the start of the programme, contractors took this to mean 200 individuals within groups. As group training has been more popular than expected, this target has been amended to refer to individuals within a group.

Number of businesses benchmarking (Other) %	53%
Groups (total number)	119 (96 current groups) ¹³
Groups benchmarking M2M (%)	44%
Groups benchmarking Other (%)	56%

Support the use of advisory services – Food

Food framework	N/A	3	N/A	N/A
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Support the setting up of advisory service

Set up and management of advisory services	1	1	-	-
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Source: Progress Report for Farming Connect Framework, Lot 3 – Advisory Service April 2019.

Beneficiary profiles and engagement

- 2.28 This sub-section presents the key findings from the analysis of the Farming Connect monitoring data (BAS), covering the characteristics of the individuals and businesses that have registered with the programme, and in most cases received support, as well as the types of support delivered through the programme. The monitoring data analysed covers the period up until to the end of December 2018.

Profile of individuals

- 2.29 Nearly 20,000 individuals were registered with the Farming Connect programme by December 2018¹⁴. Their key characteristics are as follows:
- Reflecting the nature of the sector, nearly two-thirds are male, but encouragingly 30% of registered individuals are female
 - Just under three quarters of farmers registered identify their language preference for correspondence as English.
 - The programme has attracted individuals across all age groups from aged 16 to 75 plus. The categories used for recording age are not

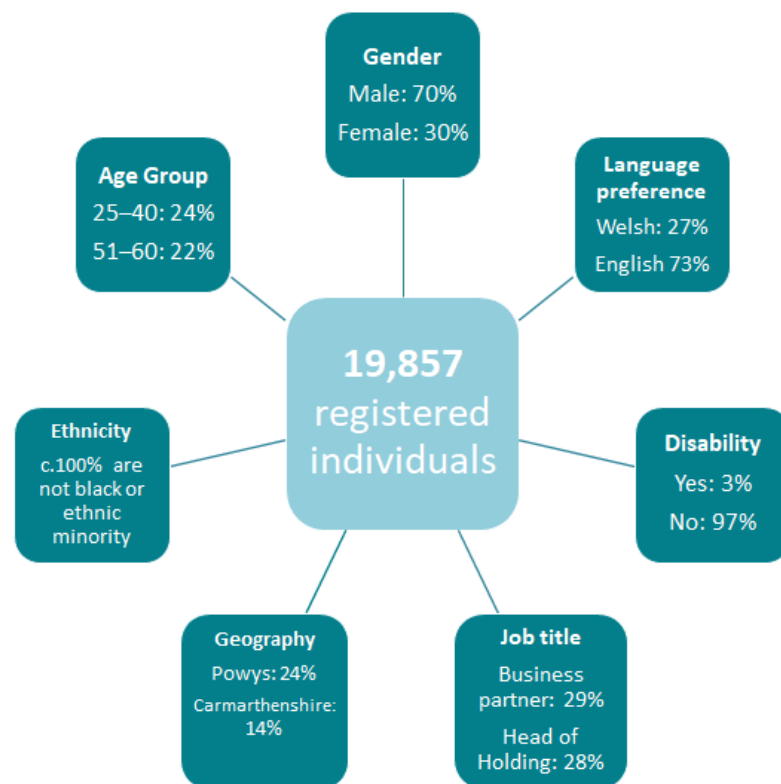
¹³ 119 is the total number of groups that have been established since the start of the programme – 23 have been disbanded or have amalgamated as two groups.

¹⁴ This figures includes students and contractors.

evenly scaled but the highest represented groups are those aged between 25-40 (24%) and 51-60 (22%)

- Individuals whose role is a “business partner” or “head of holding” account for over half (57%) of registered individuals, but “partners” and “sons” also constitute a substantial proportion of those registered at 15% and 14% respectively
- The largest counties by geographic size also have the greatest number of registered individuals. Those from Powys constitute nearly a quarter (24%) of all registrations, with those from Carmarthenshire constituting 14% while Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Gwynedd each account for 10%
- On average, two individuals have registered per business, but this figure varies substantially with some businesses having many individuals registered (in one case, 31 individuals). Considering only those who have actively engaged, the average number of individuals who have engaged per business is less than two (1.7) and the maximum is 21 individuals.

Figure 2-5: Characteristics of individuals

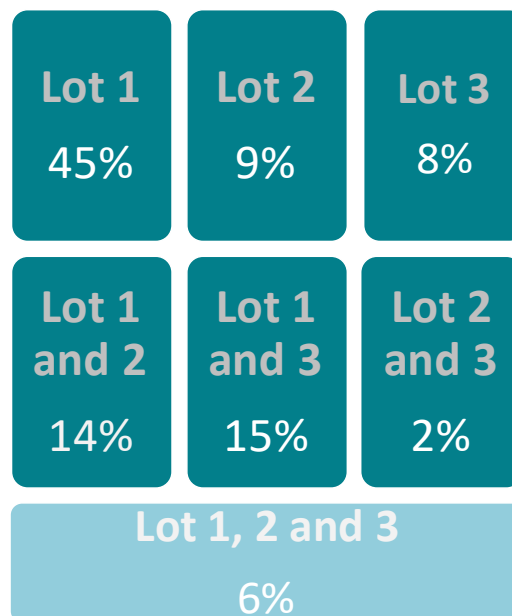


Source: SQW analysis of BAS data

Intensity of engagement

- 2.30 **Over two thirds (69%) of registered individuals have engaged with programme activity.** The remaining 31% of individuals have not yet engaged. Engagement varies by job title, with individuals whose role is either a “student¹⁵”, “spouse” or “daughter” having the lowest rate of engagement at 44%, 43% and 41% respectively.
- 2.31 Among those who have been actively engaged, the majority have engaged with one Lot only (63%), nearly a third (31%) have engaged with two Lots, and only 6% have engaged with activity under all three Lots. The proportion of individuals who have engaged with each Lot is shown in Figure 2-6. Nearly half of individuals who have engaged with some activity, have engaged with Lot 1 only (45%). In comparison, a small proportion of individuals have engaged with Lot 2 or Lot 3 only, at 9% and 8% respectively. Where individuals have engaged with more than one Lot, individuals commonly complete activities under Lot 1 in combination with Lot 2 or Lot 3.
- 2.32 Engagement by Lot varies by job title, for example, most “students” have engaged with Lot 2 only (79%), in comparison, most individuals whose role is a “business partner” or “head of holding” have engaged with Lot 1 only at 54% and 51% respectively.

Figure 2-6: Support accessed by *individuals* registered



Source: SQW analysis of BAS data

¹⁵ This finding should be taken with caution because the total number of students is small (n=25).

Profile of businesses

- 2.33 **There are 9,576 unique businesses/holdings registered with Farming Connect**, representing one-quarter of all agricultural holdings across Wales¹⁶. The number of unique businesses registered is significantly lower than the number of individuals registered because often more than one individual is registered per business. Most businesses operate within the Agriculture sector (95%), primarily the Beef (37%) and Sheep/Goats sectors (36%)¹⁷. As would be expected, business geography closely reflects where individuals are located, with most registered businesses based in Powys (23%) and Carmarthenshire (14%). Most businesses are eligible for Farming Connect as a “farming business” (92%), with a small proportion of businesses eligible as a “student” (5%).
- 2.34 At the point of registration, half of businesses had a turnover of between £10K and £100K, and a significant minority (17%) had a turnover of less than £10K. The majority of businesses (81%) manage less than 200 hectares, with over half (57%) managing less than 100 hectares. Just 2% of businesses manage over 500 hectares¹⁸. Approximately two-thirds of registered businesses (64%) have no employees. Of the 36% (c.3,400) of businesses who have employees, 40% have one full-time employee, and 35% have one part-time employee¹⁹. Considering only those businesses who have engaged, business characteristics are similar to the Farming Connect population. The majority of businesses manage less than 200 hectares (80%), have a turnover below £500K (94%) and no employees (63%)²⁰. The size of Farming Connect businesses is comparable to the size of agricultural businesses across Wales; in 2016/17, the average farm business income (FBI) was £25,000 and the average holding size of farms in Wales at June 2017 was 48 hectares²¹.

¹⁶ Source: Farming Facts and Figures, Wales 2018, Welsh Government – across all farm types there were 38,470 holdings in 2017. Note, the figure used is the number of holdings, however, some businesses have more than one holding number associated with the business, therefore the total number of eligible businesses is lower than this figure. A more accurate figure would be the number of customer reference numbers (CRNs) rather than holding numbers. Whilst this limitation was acknowledged, a more appropriate figure was not available at the time.

¹⁷ These categories are mutually exclusive, farmers must select one main sector only in BAS

¹⁸ According to DEFRA et al. 2017, Agriculture in the UK the average holding size with ≥ 20 ha in Wales at June 2017 was 99ha, compared to 139ha in England, 292ha in Scotland and 62ha in Northern Ireland.

¹⁹ Note, this data is provided at the point of registration and is therefore subject to change overtime

²⁰ Note, that firms with no employees may still have agricultural workers such as sons/daughters/spouses who are not formally paid as an employee but often form part of the partnership.

²¹ Source: DEFRA, 2018, [Agriculture in the United Kingdom 2017](#).

Engagement with Farming Connect

Lot 1 and 3 (knowledge transfer and advisory services)

- 2.35 **Under Lot 1 the most commonly attended event is on “strategic awareness”**, accounting for 29% (c.12,900) of total engagements with Lot 1. “Discussion Groups” (17%) and “Demonstration Events” (14%) have also constituted a substantial proportion of overall engagement with Lot 1 activities, followed by “Agrisgôp” (8%) and “1-2-1 Surgery”²².
- 2.36 In comparison, some activities only constituted a small proportion of overall beneficiary engagement, for example, “1-2-1 Mentoring” (n=491 engagements by n=144 beneficiaries), “Agri Academy” (n=376 engagements by n=139 beneficiaries), and “Venture Workshops” (n=135)²³. The average number of events attended per individual is four, with a maximum of 66 events attended by one individual.
- 2.37 **To date, there have been over 3,400 advisory applications submitted under Lot 3, of which, 2,183 (63%) have been claimed to date**²⁴. Support has been spilt between group (55%) and one-to-one (43%) advice²⁵. To access support under Lot 3, most individuals have attended a specific Knowledge Transfer event (49%) or developed a business plan through Farming Connect (38%) to show how the advice received could be taken forward. The remainder had completed a business plan under the previous Farming Connect programme (8%) or drafted one themselves / privately with support from elsewhere (6%).
- 2.38 Businesses operating in the Beef and Dairy sectors constitute the greatest proportion of businesses who have received support to date at 35% for each sector. “Technical – grassland & crop management” has been the most frequently completed category of advice, however, this varies by advisory type – for one-to-one advice, “business planning” has been most frequently completed, whilst for group advice, “technical – grassland and crop management” has been most frequently completed. The most common cross-cutting theme has been ‘Sustainable Management of Natural Resources’.

²² Note, these figures refer to the total number of engagements with each strand of activity under Lot 1, not the total number of unique beneficiaries who have engaged.

²³ We understand from MaB that 400+ people have shown interest in Venture to date, which appears compatible with the figures quoted for active follow-up in para 2.22, above but the BAS data shows only 6 venture events with 135 attendees.

²⁴ Note, this figure includes applications which have been claimed to date only, the overall application-to-claim ratio figure is c.80%.

²⁵ Plus 1% group – joint ventures.

Lot 2 (lifelong learning and development)

- 2.39 Under Lot 2 there had been 5,924 training applications submitted until the end of December 2018. **The average number of training applications per individual is two**, with a maximum application number to date of eleven.²⁶ Over three-quarters of these applications have been completed/supported to date.
- 2.40 **An average of one training course has been attended per individual**, with a maximum of seven courses completed by one person. Of the c.3,200 training applications which have been completed, “machinery and equipment” is the most common training category (50% of completed training courses) followed by “technical” support (35%). In comparison, “business improvement” has accounted for 14% of the courses completed to date.
- 2.41 **Training has been spread across 53 different courses**, with “Level 2 Award in the Safe Use of Pesticides (PA1) & Safe Application of Pesticides Using Vehicle Mounted Boom Sprayer Equipment (PA2)” and “Level 2 Award in the Safe Use of Pesticides (PA1) & Safe Application of Pesticides Using Hand Held Equipment (PA6)” the most frequently completed courses accounting respectively for 18% and 10% of all completed courses.
- 2.42 Course type varies by business sector. For example, “business improvement” courses constitute the majority of completed training courses amongst individuals working in the Agriculture - Pigs sector, whilst Forestry owners/holders most frequently complete “machinery and equipment” training courses. Agriculture, forestry and horticulture students have most frequently completed “machinery and equipment” courses.
- 2.43 Coleg Sir Gar has delivered the greatest number of training courses to date (12%), followed by Jimmy Hughes Services Ltd (11%) and Simply the Best Training Consultancy Ltd (11%). Most providers deliver more than type of training course, with seven providers delivering over 20 different courses. Jimmy Hughes Services Ltd has delivered the greatest range, with 33 different courses.

²⁶ Figure only includes individuals who have completed one or more applications.

3. Implementation

- 3.1 In this Section, we present findings on the Farming Connect offer and the effectiveness of delivery through the customer journey, including aspects of the programme that are working well (or not) and why. We also assess the programme's internal integration and the ability of beneficiaries to navigate the offer, and the effectiveness of communication activities. Finally, we present feedback on management and governance arrangements, and the extent to which Farming Connect works effectively with partners. The material presented below draws on consultations with management, delivery and governance staff and external partners, alongside our focus groups and case studies.

The Farming Connect offer

- 3.2 A wide range of support is on offer, **designed to reflect the differing needs of farmers**, their stage of business/career, experience of innovation, and preferred styles of learning and development. Farming Connect is a large and multi-faceted programme – which has implications for the level of management and co-ordination required - but consultees appreciated the way in which it offers a “one stop shop” and “something for everyone”. That said, there was some concern amongst external stakeholders that the programme was so broad it lacked coherence for those who were less close to the programme, and the “blanket” approach diluted impact (we explore this in more detail below).
- 3.3 Crucially, it was perceived to offer the **opportunity for progression** towards more innovative and transformational change as individuals' confidence grows. The longevity of FC has been important in providing this continuity of support through the farmers' journeys. Consultees described how Farming Connect is “well known”, “trusted” and “well respected” across Wales. Consultees also agreed there were ongoing challenges in encouraging farmers to engage in external support and that the farming context was sufficiently distinct to justify a differentiated approach to business support (rather than expecting farmers to use a generic offer, provided to all business sectors).
- 3.4 As well as knowledge transfer of **practical advice and technical skills development** etc, changing attitudes towards **business management is a key theme** throughout many of the activities (and seen as important in enabling change). The activities have been designed to be complementary internally (within the programme) and externally (with other support on offer). Some relatively minor areas of duplication within FC (e.g. business

development courses in Lots 1 and 2) have been removed in the current programme.

- 3.5 The **aims and objectives** of Farming Connect (FC) appear to be well understood amongst delivery bodies and partner organisations. Across the customer base, there was some concern amongst external stakeholders that, whilst farmers were well aware that support was available through Farming Connect, some had lost sight of the underpinning aims and rationale for the programme. For example:

“FC is part of most farmers’ ethos, but they don’t understand the wider aim”

- 3.6 There is a subtle difference between considering the *aim* to be “provide support” (i.e. engage in activities) compared to “improve business performance” (i.e. drive change in outcomes). MaB goes to great lengths to promote the potential impact of taking part, but stakeholders were still concerned this was not always the primary factor driving engagement in the programme and some farmers were taking part “because it was available” rather than as a route to change. There were concerns that farmers were attending Farming Connect activities on a speculative basis without real motivation to change, before and after support. Where this prompted farmers to think or act differently, even where farmers didn’t realise change was needed until they had taken part, it was not perceived to be an issue by consultees. However, there was more concern where farmers were engaging with the programme without an end goal in mind to drive through to impact. (This is also discussed in more detail below).

Effectiveness of the customer journey

Marketing, awareness raising and demand

- 3.7 Farming Connect uses a variety of materials and mechanisms to raise awareness of the offer across the farming community. This was informed by earlier research to segment the programme’s target audiences and differentiate the marketing approach (i.e. materials, messages, mechanisms) accordingly. On the whole, consultees felt that the promotion of Farming Connect was strong:
- The multi-pronged approach was deemed important, given the diversity of the programme’s target market.
 - The programme makes good use of social media, which has attracted a strong and growing following (especially among younger people). At the same time, advertising in trade press etc remains important.

- The programme works with some partners and intermediaries to utilise their networks/access to the farming community (although more could be done here, see below). This has been helped by including key organisations as part of MaB's consortium rather than these bodies being in competition with Farming Connect. Also, MaB has recently trialled breakfast meetings with intermediaries (e.g. accountants, solicitors, bank managers) which have been well attended and provided access to their customers.
- Development Officers' presence in the local community is seen as critical in raising awareness: targets to hold 12 open events, leading to 60 enquiries each to Farming Connect per year, have helped to boost engagement.
- Widening the eligibility criteria, e.g. to students and contractors, and introducing attendance at Farming Connect events as a pre-requisite for grants, have helped to widen reach (although there was a slight concern that widening eligibility has also engaged more hobby farmers who are potentially less interested in substantial change, see below).

3.8 **Widening the reach of Farming Connect remains a challenge.** Some external stakeholders questioned whether the aim should be to widen engagement in support (by spreading the offer wide and thin) or to deliver real impact by focusing efforts where there is more potential for change. Farmers consulted through the focus groups and case studies also suggested there might be little value in continuing to pursue those who continue not to engage, as the programme is so well-known. As one focus group concluded, given scarcity of resources, public funds should not be spent '*wasting time chasing those who don't want to be helped*'. That said, some consultees argued many of these types of business may benefit most from support and may need to be supported in different ways, particularly as the changes to policy created by Brexit may lead to structural change in the industry.

3.9 Assuming that widening and renewing reach remains a priority for the programme (especially the need to remind current businesses in the sector and transfer knowledge to the next generation and new entrants), consultees suggested that more could be done to:

- **utilise partner and intermediary networks to encourage more referrals**, and explore options for further joint marketing. One consultee described much of the promotional material as "passive" and dependent upon the farmer to express interest – however, if intermediaries are involved, they could play a greater role in encouraging take up, leading to more engagement and better

outcomes. Linked to this, there is scope to work more closely with partners to “translate” the Farming Connect offer into appropriate language for the partners’ client base. For example, there was a concern that the programme is seen as “too corporate” and daunting for younger farmers who are reluctant to phone/email people they don’t know; tailored awareness raising through trusted intermediary routes may be more effective

- **enlist Farming Connect beneficiaries who are seen as “key influencers”** to play a greater role (discussed in more detail below, also in relation to disseminating learning from Farming Connect to a wider audience)²⁷
- **tailor and target marketing materials more effectively.** There was a sense that often all materials are pushed out to all groups with the hope some of it resonates with the reader, but in practice farmers feel overwhelmed by the volume of information they receive and often ignore it. As one external stakeholder noted, “it is easy to reach saturation point”, and some stakeholders felt that the offer was so broad and complex that it confused farmers
- **re-contact those who have registered but not engaged** to demonstrate the relevance of Farming Connect to their business. For example, one external stakeholder suggested that larger-scale farmers/land-owners who engaged with Farming Connect many years ago but have not done since may think the programme has little relevance to them, and may under-estimate how it could help take their business “to the next technical level”. It should be noted that a campaign was implemented last year to engage businesses who have registered but not engaged, but the consultee was not aware of this event.

3.10 Large cohorts of farmers also lack IT skills and confidence and/or experience poor broadband coverage/speeds, which means that more traditional marketing materials remain important. However, there are still challenges around online registration and ongoing engagement with the offer. External consultees were concerned that, even for those who are IT literate, the registration process, BOSS system and compulsory PDP (for those wishing to apply for training) act as “a barrier to entry”.

²⁷ Note, this has since been implemented post-consultation.

“Entry points” and assessment of needs

- 3.11 There are multiple “entry points” into Farming Connect, but the Development Officers and open events are both seen as critical first points of contact with the programme. Increasing the number of Development Officers in the current programme, allowing more intensive coverage of smaller areas, has been very helpful in this respect.
- 3.12 The extent to which farmers’ needs are assessed at the outset is variable.
- Some farmers have an “informal” discussion with a Development Officer, who then signposts to relevant support within the programme. This can be a one-off or ongoing dialogue with the farmer. Development Officers were commended for their proactive approach to this across the community, providing a continuously “open door” and helpful guidance.
 - Some farmers come directly into the programme via the website and self-select the most appropriate support to meet their needs.
 - Some activities within the programme include an assessment of need at the beginning – which can be very narrowly focused on a specific issue (for example, in the case of some Advisory Services) or more broadly discussed (e.g. in the context of an Agrisgôp group theme, or general business challenges covered by mentoring support).
- 3.13 On the whole, this flexibility is considered appropriate – some farmers need more support than others in assessing their needs and finding the most appropriate offer within Farming Connect, and some activities require a more detailed assessment of specific problems than others. However, we would make two observations.
- First, it appears largely down to the farmer to initiate this exercise and, as illustrated in the case studies, an absence of guidance at this stage can lead to a mismatch between need/support and limited impact (see training case studies below).
 - Second, there appears to be limited read across *between* the various points at which delivery staff assess farmers’ needs. Whilst signposting takes place, some consultees felt they had to explain their situation multiple times; there may be a missed opportunity to create a more effective package of support (this is explored in more detail below).

3.14 The introduction of a Personal Development Plan (PDP) has had mixed success. It was originally anticipated that farmers would complete a PDP when they first registered with Farming Connect. In theory, this was designed to encourage farmers to reflect on their needs and identify the most appropriate support. In practice, whilst Lantra has encouraged farmers to complete and revisit their PDP, most consultees agreed it has proved an ineffective mechanism. A number of issues were identified.

- The PDP has tended to focus on assessing specific training needs, rather than a more holistic and rounded assessment of need for the individual and business as a whole.
- Many farmers have found the online form difficult to complete, even for those who are IT literate, and it has required a substantial amount of “handholding” from Development Officers which has been a “drain” on their capacity. Farmers and some of the delivery staff consulted felt the system was not intuitive to use and overly complex.
- The PDP is predominantly seen as a necessary “hoop” to jump through in order to access training, rather than a valuable tool.
- The recommended support signposted by the PDP is not sufficiently tailored.
- The PDP is rarely revisited by a farmer, because it is difficult to access (e.g. forgotten passwords, difficulties in finding their personal development page etc) and because it has not been found useful.

3.15 Where the PDP process has worked better, the form is completed in conversation with a Development Officer, the support is personalised in response, and the form is then revisited in discussion with the same facilitator to look at distance travelled (e.g. see Agri Academy case study below). In these instances, the PDP has a clear and useful purpose, and the process of using it over time is supported (rather than just being a tick box exercise/formality at the outset).

Delivery of activities

- 3.16 Table 3-1 presents a summary of what works well (or not) across the activities covered by our case studies²⁸, drawing on feedback from delivery partners, beneficiaries and external stakeholders: the full case study reports are provided in a separate Appendix). It is important to note that these are the findings from the case studies undertaken, based on the views of those consulted, and not necessarily representative all groups/instances of support under each type of activity. Where perspectives differ from MaB or Lantra's wider feedback on the activity, we have highlighted this in a footnote.

²⁸ To note, not all Farming Connect activities were covered by the case studies.

Table 3-1: Summary of feedback on each activity covered by the case studies, drawing on consultations with management and delivery staff, case studies and external stakeholders

What works well	Challenges / Opportunities to improve
Advisory services	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good fit with wider FC offer, other FC activities feed into the advisory service well (e.g. events, discussion groups, Agrisgôp , demonstration farms), where ideas/issues are uncovered elsewhere and need 1-2-1 advice to implement/address • Advisory clinic/surgeries were a helpful precursor to 1-2-1 advice, allowing farmers to discuss ideas/issues in brief and test the suitability of the adviser before having to contribute towards the cost of 1-2-1 advice • Personal, tailored and bespoke advice, with clear, practical and affordable options for the farm, is critical to success. External validation also helpful • Confidential, encouraging farmers to open up about challenges faced – important if effective change is to be made • Generally high quality advisers – experience, expertise, practical understanding of the farming context, seen as “trusted” advisers • Some “informal” aftercare to support implementation, and signposting to other support • Examples of good partnership working with external bodies, with referrals into the Advisory Service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some evidence of variable quality in advisors, with some poor experiences resulting in unwillingness to invest farmers’ own funds in advice • Subsidy important where farmers new to external advice/uncertain of benefits (in line with rationale) but intervention rate not tested for current programme nor adjusted depending on instances of support received. • Some (limited) evidence of interference with private sector market, leading to deadweight (discussed below) • Managing flow of demand (vs adviser capacity) and use of “allocation” (with some farmers in greater need exhausting theirs) • Lack of finance available to implement advisory service recommendations, not aligned with grant programmes (timing/scope)

What works well	Challenges / Opportunities to improve
Agrigôp	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus is flexible and tailored to each group, where members collectively agree a focus “bottom up”, which secures buy-in • Peer-to-peer support in small group setting that is confidential and “non-threatening” • Action learning, equipping participants the “foundations for change” – i.e. the ability/capacity to reflect, changing attitudes, discuss and test options, and build the confidence to implement. There is a focus on action/change in a supportive/collaborative environment, which consultees felt was “empowering” and motivational. Participants come to their own conclusions (rather than being told what to do) which consultees argued leads to better outcomes. • Adaptability in delivery (e.g. frequency and intervals for meetings) • Facilitation is key – nudging, guiding, effective questioning and challenging to ensure progress is made and focus maintained. Personal and continuous contact is important to maintain momentum, build trust and rapport • Informal signposting to wider support, “open door” for informal/wrap around support in between meetings • Access to speakers to bring in specific expertise and inspiration • Works well with other aspects of FC, e.g. Agrigop group discuss <i>how</i> to address issues highlighted in benchmarking exercise, 1-2-1 advice following discussions at Agrigop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited awareness of budget allocated to Agrigôp group/number of sessions funded²⁹ • Possible need for more flexibility in number of funded sessions, depending on need / potential for impact. Currently perceived lack of flexibility, but some groups more self-driven than others³⁰. • Dissemination/sharing knowledge beyond/across groups a challenge, given confidential nature of this activity. Dissemination not seen as responsibility of the group • Inconsistency across facilitators, especially regarding informal signposting, wrap around support, use of FC materials. Limited budget available for facilitator role • Could improve effectiveness if more closely aligned with in-depth 1-2-1 support as needed during implementation of change (possibly more effective if delivered by trusted Agrigôp facilitator, expertise permitting?)³¹

²⁹ Note, this should be discussed with groups from the outset, however there appears to be variable knowledge of the budget across groups.

³⁰ From MaB’s perspective there is flexibility especially if there is potential for impact.

³¹ From MaB’s perspective this is already encouraged and does occur.

What works well

Challenges / Opportunities to improve

Agri Academy

- The competition approach is helpful to secure commitment and ensure participants value their place, quality of applications is high, with individuals keen to make the most of the opportunity
 - Successful in engaging young farmers and women
 - Intensive programme but well-structured and focused, with opportunity to meet like-minded peers/networking opportunities
 - This activity was seen to have clear purpose and focus on outcomes.
 - Strong focus on identification of needs (using PDP and business plan) at start of activity, progress assessed at end of support.
 - Overseas tour helps to “think outside the box” and generate new, innovative/diversification ideas
 - Hands on, practical expertise of developing business plans (for example) with advice from specialist was helpful alongside ideas/practical experience from peers
 - Ongoing informal peer group networking, sharing ideas and supporting each other, collaborative problem-solving (cohort by cohort)
 - Sufficient flexibility to enable tailored support and focus on key areas of interest/importance for participants
 - Some evidence of participants sharing learning/experiences more widely because “they are proud to be part of it”
 - Complementary to wider FC offer, e.g. mentoring to help with implementation of new processes/ideas gained at Agri Academy
- Variable relevance of overseas tour across participants, and in some cases innovative ideas difficult to apply to more traditional farming practices
 - Opportunity to share learning across cohorts and more broadly across FC programme/farming communities – e.g. alumni taking on a greater ambassadorial role
 - Opportunity to better – and possibly more formally - link with other aspects of FC to ensure implementation (e.g. mentoring)
 - Next steps in terms of support for the most progressive/innovative farms (within FC and beyond) are not clear

What works well

Challenges / Opportunities to improve

Demonstration site

- Practical implementation on a working farm is helpful to change attitudes and demonstrate *how* changes can be implemented on the ground
 - High quality speakers at events works well, alongside the relaxed environment with the opportunity for open discussion
 - Well-respected farms within local communities and an openness to change are key success factors
 - Dissemination beyond events includes technical articles, blogs and videos on Facebook – the latter are particularly effective in engaging younger people.
 - Good alignment with the wider FC offer (e.g. alongside discussion groups, follow-on to e-learning modules or 1-2-1 advice). Demonstration farms often seen as a “catalyst” to generate an idea, and then farmers may seek further FC support to take the idea forward. However, beneficiaries still appear reliant on Development Officer to navigate through the offer.
- Capacity challenges for the demonstration farm owner, to run their business and demonstration farm events

Discussion groups

- Effective for knowledge sharing with like-minded individuals
 - Focus of groups are self-defined by participants, and important to have a common and shared high-level goal. Participants chose their own topics to discuss and therefore learn about topics that are of most interest to them.
- Some challenges around attendance due to unexpected issues arising on farms
 - No formal mechanism or responsibility to disseminate knowledge gained at discussion groups to wider audiences. Also an opportunity for facilitators to share learning on ‘what works’ with facilitators of other discussion groups.
-

What works well

- Flexibility is important – both to respond to changing contexts and needs, and to hold sessions at times (of day/year) that suit participants, in order to maximise attendance
- Opportunities to learn from peers *and* expert guest speakers. Knowledgeable, engaging and neutral speakers who combine theory and practical discussion works well.
- Facilitation critical to stimulate discussion, and building trust with participants helps with retention.
- Incentive budget helpful - £250/300 per farm pa, allowing participants to try something different and discuss at next discussion group session
- Small groups work well (c.8-10 participants), helpful to have a mix of farms/characters in each group
- Good alignment with other aspects of FC, e.g. benchmarking most effective when discussed at sessions, 1-2-1 follow-up advice from speakers or skills training. However, facilitator/DO plays crucial role in helping to navigate wider offer.

Challenges / Opportunities to improve

- There are some concerns about the capacity of Development Officers to set up/facilitate more groups to meet targets, and potentially an over-emphasis on quantity rather than providing more support to groups in most need/with most potential for impact³².

Focus sites

- Focus sites provide the opportunity to experience first-hand the practicalities of implementing new approaches etc, alongside access to expert advice, and learn lessons from the focus site's experience.
- Assessment of participant needs not assessed through this activity.
- Finding good quality and appropriate speakers has been the most challenging aspect of this case study.

³² Note, Development Officers will facilitate three rather than five discussion groups in the refreshed programme which should help alleviate capacity concerns.

What works well	Challenges / Opportunities to improve
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good attendance to date, including by farmers who are keen to gain knowledge and ideas, with the intention of replicating new approaches etc. • Focus site farmer's motivation, enthusiasm and helpfulness has been key to success. • Learning from the site disseminated more widely through technical articles, blogs and videos on social media and the FC website (videos are considered particularly effective). • Focus sites are often followed by support to help farmers realise/implement new ideas, e.g. via the advisory service. Support from the Development Officer valuable in navigating wider offer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A concern that some attendees appear to attend out of curiosity but are unlikely to implement change.
<h4>Management exchange</h4>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness of reports on FC website, participants struggled to locate reports on website³³
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An expectation of disseminating learning to wider industry is explicitly built into this activity – clear responsibility for the participant, in exchange for a £4000 travel scholarship. Participant produces report which is shared on FC website and social media platforms (video clips particularly effective) and presents at FC events (e.g. at focus farm events). • Evidence of alignment with wider FC offer, e.g. management exchange seen as next step after mentoring, Agri Academy and Agrisgop (although reliance on Development Officer/MaB to navigate FC offer), management exchange participants become mentors or host focus sites. 	

³³ From MaB's perspective the new website should resolve this issue.

What works well

- Competitive application process to ensure commitment, ability to disseminate learning, and alignment of support/farmer needs. Shifting application window to less busy farming period has been helpful.
 - Hands off approach by MaB, farmer given flexibility to tailor overseas visit(s) to meet needs.
 - Helpful to use part of scholarship to pay for on-farm replacement staff during overseas visit.
-

Challenges / Opportunities to improve

Mentoring

- Flexibility to use the allocated hours of mentor support to best suit mentee, allowing support to be tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of individual participants
 - Provides practical advice from a trusted source with relevant experience
 - Mentee driven - mentors support mentees in the direction the mentee wants to go, rather than instructing which direction they should take. Often mentors provide reassurance, in addition to advice in a practical, “everyday” context
 - Mentors provide informal support in between allocated hours, and signpost to wider FC offer. Mentors and mentees often remain in touch after the 22.5 hours of support, for further informal advice
 - Mentors played a role in looking across mentee needs and co-ordinating group advisory services via FC
 - Some alignment with wider FC offer – e.g. mentoring enables delivery of business plan, by identifying actions needed
- Mentoring open to wide range of uses, including farmers who are looking to maintain lifestyle/hobby businesses rather than grow commercial ventures
 - Challenge in managing variable need within the 22.5 hours allocated to each mentor/mentee pair. Some can use this very quickly and would benefit from more support, others don’t need the full allocation if issues can be resolved quickly
 - Mentoring under-utilised to date³⁴, with a lack of understanding of its potential value and a “taboo”/image issues around having a mentor
-

³⁴ At the time of the research, in early 2019.

What works well

Challenges / Opportunities to improve

Skills courses – Category 1 (Business Improvement)

- Variable delivery mechanisms, - courses delivered locally in community settings, and a series of on-farm learning sessions with self-directed learning in between, work well. Ease of access important, as many lack the time to travel
 - In general farmers able to access courses needed in a timely and convenient manner.
 - “Homework” ensures learning is applied
 - Development Officers play “pivotal role” in signposting to course, alongside personal approaches by training providers
 - High quality, credible and trusted training providers with knowledge and experience in farming to contextualise training material and tailor for specific accounting requirements for this sector
 - Lantra’s dedication to working with participants and help to support in the best way
 - The higher intervention rate has been helpful for younger farmers and those with fewer financial resources to draw upon for match funding
- Encouraging uptake of business improvement courses has been an issue, with farmers failing to see this as a priority
 - Convenience and accessibility is key to uptake, but some evidence of cold-spots in training delivery
 - Application windows are more efficient from a management point of view, but have proved challenging from the farmer perspective, especially for courses that are not offered frequently. Acting as a “brake” on learner recruitment and inadvertently detrimental to those having to cancel places owing to caring responsibilities, illness or other unavoidable circumstances
 - FC seen as the main provider of training for farming sector, and a concern this is limiting other private provision
 - Referral mechanisms not in place / not effective in enabling smooth transition between FC activities
 - PDPs seen as a necessary “hurdle” to access training rather than valuable exercise to assess learning needs.
-

What works well

Challenges / Opportunities to improve

Skills courses – Categories 2 & 3 (Technical and Machinery Use)

- Demand for some training has been driven by legislative changes.
 - Provision works best where providers can discuss farmer needs before registration onto courses. Training providers value initial contact with farmers to review their needs and ensure training offer is tailored appropriately.
 - Free PDP group sessions were helpful in identifying needs/appropriate training, otherwise PDPs seen as necessary (but not particularly useful) step to access funding for training.
 - Flexibility to spread attendance at multi-day courses over longer time periods, rather than consecutive days.
- Examples of farmers willing to pay (where certification is a legal requirement) being re-directed to FC. Whilst this has encouraged new registrations to FC and accelerated training uptake, there is a risk it also distorts the market. Some concern that training taken up due to low cost rather than real need, resulting in failure to take up approved funding/course places.
 - Some issues of farmers registering for inappropriate training (where needs are not discussed with training providers first), in part due to confusion in understanding website.
 - Narrow windows for some training a challenge, some issues in managing the availability of course places vs availability of participants.
 - FC funding only supports basic certification (in shearing) despite demand for higher level training. Practically training is delivered to accommodate varying abilities, but this limits benefits for some participants who would be worthy of a higher certification.

E-learning

- Most e-learning users take part in compulsory health and safety courses; this provides a route in to wider e-learning for some
 - Inclusion of videos and interactive content works well
- PDP recommendations not sufficiently personalised
 - E-learning lacks visibility and awareness
-

What works well	Challenges / Opportunities to improve
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive feedback on content, but concern that simplicity dilutes usefulness for those looking for more advanced material • Ease and flexibility of access helpful, used at a time to suit user. Especially attractive for younger farmers, parents, small-scale businesses with limited capacity/resource to travel to events • Entry route / complementary to wider offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BOSS challenging to access, difficulties in navigating e-learning offer • High engagement with H&S courses not fully leveraged to encourage wider engagement • Limited integration with wider FC offer, wider reading (from reputable sources), practical tools. Provision of related support seen as piecemeal and difficult to find • Wider evidence shows that e-learning on its own is effective for only a very small proportion of beneficiaries; in most cases it needs to be part of a a 'blended' learning package which also involves face-to-face learning

Source: SQW analysis of consultation evidence

3.17 Looking across the activities, there are a number of features that have worked well across a range of activities.

- **Addressing *what* needs to change and *how* to change:** across the offer, there are complementary activities that seek to (i) change *attitudes* towards making changes and raise *confidence* to implement these changes, and (ii) provide the technical/practical *skills and knowledge* of how to change.
- **Encouraging self-help and action:** equipping farmers with the capabilities to reflect, challenge themselves, consider options and identify solutions. Action learning and “homework” ensures a focus on action/change.
- **Close alignment with self-defined needs:** many of the activities encourage participants to define their own goals, individually and/or as part of a group, which helps to secure ownership and buy-in to the activities.
- **Practical, farm-based and peer-to-peer support:** many of the activities provide the opportunity to observe and learn from real world settings where advice/support is delivered in a “common language” to which beneficiaries can relate.
- **The combination of group support and 1-2-1 advice:** the former is particularly helpful in generating ideas and sharing knowledge and experiences, whereas the latter provides tailored, farm-specific advice often on specific topics.

‘the advice was down-to-earth, proposing easy and inexpensive fixes that had a big impact.’
Focus group beneficiary
- **Flexibility:** the ability to shape and adapt the focus of an activity in response to changing conditions (e.g. *within* a discussion or Agrisgôp group) and to arrange activities which suit the working patterns of the sector (e.g. meetings at certain times of the year/day) is helpful. Localised delivery is also highly valued by beneficiaries with limited time/resource to travel long distances for training or support.
- **Facilitation:** the facilitator plays a key role in providing structure, momentum, challenge etc, to ensure that beneficiaries progress.
- **Personalised and relevant advice:** this arguably makes it easier for beneficiaries to apply to their business (compared to generic information)

- **High quality and “trusted” delivery team:** the commitment and enthusiasm of facilitators/Development Officers etc has energised beneficiaries: as one beneficiary noted “*it is the individuals that make Farming Connect*”. The speakers/trainers/facilitators are generally considered to be respected, knowledgeable and credible, providing “objective” support to the sector.
- **Competitive approach:** where more intensive activities are delivered through competitions, participants have been clearly committed ensuring that the activity leads through to positive changes within the business.

3.18 Consultees were asked specifically whether they had engaged with Farming Connect’s benchmarking, soil sampling and nutrient management plans and, if so, whether these were effective. Many of those consulted had undertaken benchmarking, and some had done soil sampling and nutrient management plans. Overall, the feedback was very positive from farmers and external stakeholders. **These exercises were seen as critical in helping farmers understand how their practices impacted upon their financial performance – which in turn was a primary driver of changes in behaviour.** Benchmarking often worked best where it was done as part of a group, where peers share experiences/lessons about how to improve performance, and/or in conjunction with specific 1-2-1 advice to address issues identified.

3.19 The evidence also points to some challenges in delivery to date.

- **Variable quality and inconsistency** in the approach of facilitators/advisers etc to (what is often perceived as “informal”) signposting/wrap around support.
- **Training application windows and restrictions:** application windows are more efficient from a management point of view, but do not always meet the needs of farmers.
- **Challenges in managing the use of “time limited” support:** this relates to activities where the blanket application of a pre-determined “allocation” of support (e.g. mentoring hours, instances of advisory support, Agrisgop group session) is used quickly and insufficient for farmers in real need or who are looking to make transformational changes, and under-utilised for farmers who are able to address their challenges with minimal support. It was an explicit management decision to limit the instances of support available to each farmer under some aspects of Farming Connect. However, greater flexibility (on

discretion) may be helpful looking forward to use resources more efficiently and effectively.

3.20 There are also some missed opportunities:

- **Provision of sufficient opportunities for farmers who want to progress and “push ahead”.** This was raised in a number of contexts:
 - Both case study and focus group consultees suggested the programme could take a more “inspirational” lead, through inputs from industry/innovation experts – the majority of activities being led/defined “bottom up” by farmers, which is important to secure buy-in and tailoring to their needs, but some of the progressive farmers consulted were looking for more inspiration around completely new and innovative approaches to move their business forward.
 - Some beneficiaries felt there was limited choice of training courses, and in some instances the offer was insufficiently advanced. The case studies revealed examples where the offer was found to be too basic, and could not have the hoped-for level of impact.

“I find myself limited by the courses on offer. I have advanced qualifications in accountancy and would’ve liked a more advanced training course to further use these advanced skills within my farming business.”
Focus group attendee
- **Missed opportunities for wider knowledge transfer:** both between groups, and beyond those directly involved in Farming Connect. Management exchange appears to be the only activity where the responsibility for disseminating learning is clearly defined (knowledge spillovers are effectively built into the support and an obligation for the beneficiaries). Whilst dissemination is clearly not appropriate for all activities (such as confidential advisory services or Agrisgôp groups focused on sensitive issues), there may be some missed opportunities to build dissemination into the process where beneficiaries receive intensive support (e.g. encouraging agri academy alumni to act as “ambassadors” within their communities) and/or to facilitate more consistent knowledge sharing across delivery staff (feeding back into the groups they support).

- 3.21 Our agricultural expert has found the two points above are being discussed in similar contexts across Europe. A different approach for proactive early adopters could be appropriate, working intensively in partnership with them to develop and implement new technology, coupled with an explicit commitment from the outset that in return for this intensive support, members of this group agree to help disseminate what they have learnt to other farms through demonstration events, workshops and the media.

Activity additionality

- 3.22 A key question for the evaluation is the extent to which farmers would have engaged in these activities anyway, in the absence of Farming Connect. On the whole, consultees agreed that **many farmers would not otherwise have accessed generic business support** (owing to lack of awareness of how to access the support, a reluctance to seek external advice, and an inability to apply); there was also a clear view that this generic support would not be relevant to the farming sector. External stakeholders argued that **Farming Connect in its current form is much better aligned with agricultural support provided by other bodies** (such as levy bodies) particularly as MaB has included many of the relevant partners *within* the Farming Connect delivery consortium. Where there was a degree of overlap, Farming Connect was seen to provide substantially greater capacity to support farmers.
- 3.23 However, there is some evidence to suggest **a small degree of deadweight in the programme that could distort the private sector market**. The case studies found examples where farmers approached private sector providers for advice/training and were willing to pay for this, but were re-directed to Farming Connect in order to receive support for free/at a subsidised rate. However, the management team argued this occurs in a small minority of cases. External stakeholders also suggested that the use of private sector consultants was more prevalent in some farming sectors than others (for example, the dairy sector typically uses consultants, with higher margins and larger farms making the cost of external input economically viable, compared to beef and sheep farms with a tighter margin were less able to afford consultant advice) but Farming Connect did not take prior experience of private sector support or financial means into consideration. In addition, the intervention rate for advisory services had not been re-tested at the start of the current programme, nor was it adjusted to reflect the number of times the beneficiary had received advice in the past (all farmers receive four instances of advice for the duration of the programme at the same intervention rate). Whilst we recognise changing these approaches would involve significant implementation challenges, the programme could be delivered more efficiently if it was not subsidising farmers who were willing and able to pay. This

suggests intervention rates should be retested, and potentially a more graduated system introduced as farmers take up more instances of support (rather than adopting a blanket approach of four instances for the duration of the programme 2015-2022).

Gaps in provision

3.24 On the whole, the Farming Connect offer was considered to be comprehensive, offering different types of support and delivery mechanisms to suit different needs and learning styles. However, there were three areas where consultees thought the offer could be strengthened:

- First, a number of beneficiaries argued that **the programme lacked an appropriate capital fund to enable them to implement new ideas/processes**. The “incentive budget” for discussion groups, which allows participants to try something different and bring the results to the next discussion group session, is a limited move towards this, and the Welsh Government has also introduced the new Farm Business Grant (not part of Farming Connect, but attending a Farming Connect-led “Farming for the Future” event was a pre-requisite for applying for the grant). While the latter was seen as helpful, frustrations were expressed around (i) demand far outweighing the resources available, (ii) the timing of grant windows and perceived slow application process meant farmers could not necessarily access finance when needed and/or it meant market opportunities were missed, and (iii) a perceived mismatch between what was eligible under the grant, which was focused on the provision of “traditional” equipment, and the needs of businesses. Some beneficiaries suggested there would be merit in a flexible and accessible resource to allow farmers to test more innovative processes/equipment, which are often high risk for small-scale farmers but could potentially have substantial impacts on the performance of their business. Few funds are available for this type of investment (beyond farms involved in the demonstration network). It was argued that EIP provides finance for this type of activity – however, this is relatively limited and focused on more transformative innovation, and so is unlikely to fully meet the need described above.
- **Second, a need to expand the offer around diversification opportunities**. For example, focus group consultees cited opportunities arising from contributions to meeting environmental/ecosystem needs, such as carbon capture storage and

woodland carbon credits, and diversification into non-farming activities to bring resilience to farming businesses³⁵.

- **Third, facilitating access to buyers** (i.e. supermarkets, abattoirs, auctioneers, buying groups and procurement officers). For example, one of the focus groups felt that more access to buyers would be extremely valuable, helping farmers to understand their specifications, what drives these, how grading systems work, and how best to meet them – currently they felt this is very opaque. Without this knowledge, they reported that it can be really difficult to meet market requirements and optimise price³⁶. They also said that they needed support in building the skills and confidence to talk to buyers. Some suggested that buyers are often open to this, but others felt that having structured opportunities through Farming Connect would be very beneficial.

Internal integration and navigation through the offer

3.25 As discussed in Section 2, some farmers are intensively involved in multiple aspects of Farming Connect and progress through the offer as they become more confident. The case studies provided examples of customer journeys (see Figure 3-1) and where activities are particularly complementary. These include:

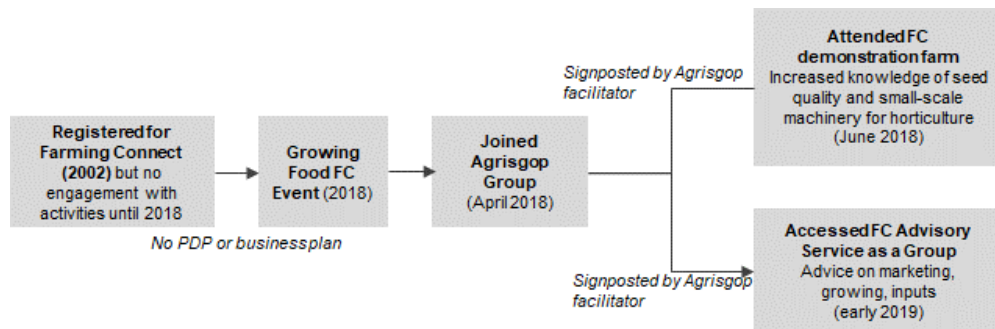
- Open events, demonstration farms and group sessions with expert speakers which prompt ideas and introduces farmers to advisers, and which are often followed by 1-2-1 advisory services that provide tailored and context-specific support to a business
- Agri Academy encourages reflection and innovation, which is then followed by mentoring support to implement new processes
- Discussion groups often visit demonstration farms, access group advisory services and undertake benchmarking exercises as a group, where there is the opportunity to discuss/test ideas and issues raised with a group of like-minded peers
- Agrisgôp groups give farmers the confidence to engage with other aspects of Farming Connect, such as the Agri Academy or mentoring support.

³⁵ At the time of writing, a Diversification and Innovation Show was planned for September 2019.

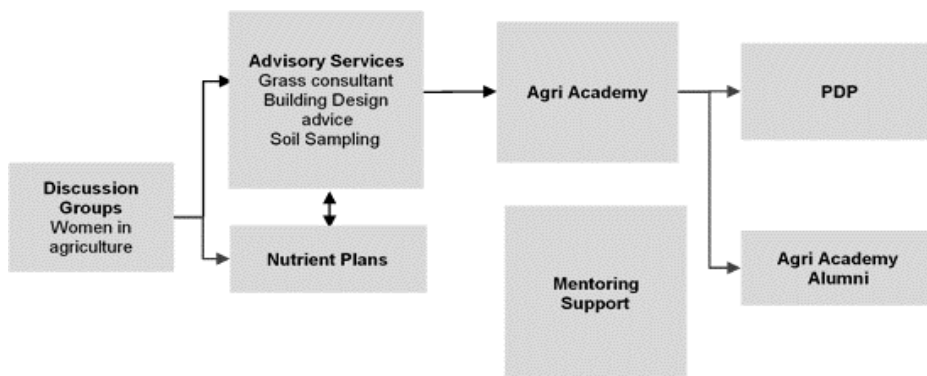
³⁶ Note, pilot work with processors is ongoing and will continue in the refreshed programme.

Figure 3-1: Illustrations of beneficiary journeys

Example 1³⁷



Example 2



Source: Case studies

3.26 There is no formal “end point” in the Farming Connect programme – once registered, farmers are able to engage with the programme as much and for as long as they wish. However, the data suggests many beneficiaries do not take full advantage of the offer and engagement across the three lots is limited. Some of the most progressive beneficiaries we consulted were also left asking “what next” after they had completed an activity (see example in the adjacent box). Given the offer – and the growing pressure to improve the performance and resilience of the sector, particularly in the context of Brexit – there is potentially a missed opportunity to add more value/deliver greater impact by supporting more farmers through the customer journey. A key

“I felt I was left hanging at the end a bit. That’s it, there’s no continuation or progression, or maybe there is but it’s not as obvious as it could be. It’s about linking up, because Farming Connect are already doing much of these things – I think they need to link together far better.”
Case study beneficiary

³⁷ Note, in the first example, the farmer would have needed to re-register for the current Farming Connect programme sometime after October 2015.

question posed for the evaluation was whether farmers can navigate through the support available, and the factors that help or hinder this.

- 3.27 There was a consensus across consultees that the **Development Officers have played a key role in facilitating farmers' journeys through Farming Connect** – as one consultee commented, Development Officers are the “glue” that holds Farming Connect together. However, there were concerns that Development Officer capacity is often stretched and therefore their ability to steer farmers through the offer as their needs change can be variable. Focus group participants noted that they have to be proactive in engaging the “busy” Development Officers, and these discussions were often informal and ad hoc. *Within* each activity, **advisers/facilitators also signpost farmers to other relevant support** which beneficiaries found extremely helpful – although, as noted above, feedback suggests this can be inconsistent across delivery staff.

“The more you do with FC, the more you find out about other services that they offer”

Case study beneficiary

- 3.28 **Navigating through the offer is also down to the beneficiaries themselves** – either by proactively approaching Development Officers/delivery staff or via the website. Consultation feedback suggests that some were able to do this, but the majority found it difficult (even those who are heavily involved in the programme). Farmers expressed frustration at the lack of a single point of contact within Farming Connect and having to explain their issue every time they spoke with someone (for example, a focus group attendee commented ‘*you have to keep repeating yourself*’). Moreover, most consultees found the website extremely difficult to navigate and were unclear on the full offer. In some instances this was an IT literacy issue, but the website was still a challenge for farmers who were confident with IT – for example, it was not clear where to start, how activities were complementary, where to find materials. These findings were corroborated by external stakeholders, many of whom felt the offer difficult to navigate. Typically the complicated “wiring” of a one-stop-shop is hidden, but with Farming Connect the wider offer is not visible to beneficiaries – some have received support from Development Officers/others to do this, but it appears some do not.

It was “a bit of a nightmare ... and I consider myself fairly savvy, as I’m on the computer every day and it’s something I’m comfortable with. I found it more difficult to find things than it should be. I found myself clicking here, there and everywhere – it was a bit of a random approach to how I found things and some people might be put off by this, which is a shame.”

Case study beneficiary

- 3.29 Both farmers and external stakeholders consulted suggested there was **scope to provide more “personalised” and “holistic” support through the customer journey** to better integrate Farming Connect activities. Crucially, it was argued that Farming Connect needed to develop “*a true package of support*” for beneficiaries (combining knowledge, skills and investment) in order to deliver real impact and the “step change” needed in the sector. This could be achieved, at least to some degree, by a more proactive/formalised/consistent referral mechanism and improvements to the website etc. However, a number of stakeholders suggested that more fundamental change was required - with a more holistic assessment of needs and a flexible package of support, clearly facilitated and targeted at individual farmers’ needs. This would clearly have substantial resource implications, and difficult choices would need to be made in the design of future programmes (for example, as to whether the emphasis is on wide/shallow or deep/narrow support).
- 3.30 Finally, for some, the **key barrier to more engagement with Farming Connect was time/capacity constraints**. In response, MaB were investigating less intensive/more flexible mechanisms for learning, such as videos, webinars, blogs and podcasts that could be accessed at a time to suit the farmer – these were certainly welcomed and highly valued by consultees. That said, as noted elsewhere in this report, these were seen by most as supplementary, only effective if delivered alongside other more personalised/intensive interventions,

Dissemination and knowledge sharing within and beyond Farming Connect

- 3.31 Consultees felt that delivery partners worked hard to share learning within and across the programme through a range of mechanisms. Social media, webinars, blogs and videos were particularly popular, allowing farmers to engage with easily accessible messages/knowledge at a time to best suit them. This was supported by the Press Data analysis (see Annex C) which shows that Farming Connect has a following of just over 9.1m on Twitter and nearly 3m on Facebook, and some of Farming Connect’s top “influencers”³⁸ are partner bodies with large followings themselves. Indeed, other European knowledge exchange programmes have found blogs, videos and webinars are used most actively and effectively by the most progressive and engaged farmers³⁹.

³⁸ i.e. those within the top 25 people/organisations producing content relating to “Farming Connect”.

³⁹ Our agricultural expert.

3.32 Material from the Knowledge Hub (factsheets, technical articles etc) was seen by the management team as a good way to accelerate knowledge transfer from academics to farmers, by cascading materials out through the Farming Connect activities. The Knowledge Hub was originally intended to be a two-way process, with academics transferring knowledge to farmers, and farmers feeding back to inform research agendas – although it is unclear how much of the latter is taking place. Delivery staff appear to utilise the Hub’s material in the delivery of support and found this useful, but there was very little knowledge of the Hub’s work across the farmers and external stakeholders consulted (some thought this was “hidden” on the website). Without much knowledge of the materials, it was difficult for those consulted to comment on its relevance. External stakeholders suggested making greater use of intermediaries and delivery partners to “translate” these materials, and better targeting towards intended audiences. Also, as the volume of material grows, cataloguing and designing an effective way to quickly navigate the system will quickly become essential.

Management and governance arrangements

3.33 **Overall, the management arrangements currently in place appear to be working well.** The Welsh Government and MaB/Lantra have active working relationships, with regular, open, two-way and generally positive exchange. External stakeholders praised the contractors who deliver Farming Connect and highlighted their experience and capability to deliver the programme as well as possible.

3.34 MaB and Lantra place a **strong emphasis on feedback and continual improvement** to maximise the effectiveness of Farming Connect in real time. MaB is seen as responsive and proactive in recognising emerging issues and listening to feedback from delivery staff, partners and beneficiaries, and adapting the offer, e.g.

- MaB gather feedback from beneficiaries after events and about further help needed which is then followed up by Development Officers.
- Some activities were not working as well as hoped (e.g. venture and mentoring) so research has been undertaken to understand why, and the offer adapted in response (e.g. workshops to build confidence in venture, changing perceptions of mentoring)
- MaB has gathered feedback to improve on already successful activities to make them as useful as possible, e.g. agri-academy

- MaB also gathers on-going feedback from partners (although there are issues in this regard, as discussed below)
- Clinics are demand led – Development Officers have resource to provide clinics on topics in response to local feedback/need
- Farmers regularly suggest topics for Discussion Groups, Agrisgôp Groups, Demonstration farms etc, as discussed above
- Lantra has conducted course review to ensure training courses remain relevant, high quality, fit for purpose, and meet farmer needs.

3.35 In terms of governance arrangements, management consultees felt that the Strategic Advisory Board (SAB) and Sub-Groups in their current formation provide a useful sounding board and feedback. Members of the SAB consulted for this evaluation found their involvement useful both in terms of providing a platform to promote and integrate their own activity, as well as learn about the latest developments elsewhere. The Welsh Government, SAB, MaB and Lantra also work closely to ensure that EU funding requirements are clearly understood and targets are met.

3.36 However, **governance arrangements are not sufficiently inclusive of industry interests to provide on-going strategic guidance to help evolve the future offer**. The lack of external industry-led advice, strategic challenge, and wider view on emerging opportunities and threats, changing agendas etc to inform the shape and focus of Farming Connect was a significant concern for management staff and external stakeholders. An Industrial Advisory Board for the programme was established but was disbanded after a few meetings. MaB liaises with industry representative groups bilaterally for feedback, but this was acknowledged by MaB as not the most efficient approach. There were also ad hoc examples of strategic/external partners informing the focus of activities delivered – e.g. lamb vaccination issues identified by vets incorporated into events programme. However, some of the external stakeholders consulted were disappointed that they have had no direct role or a clear route to help guide programme design and delivery – there was a sense amongst some that Farming Connect was not being delivered as a partnership with industry. They also argued that the lack of direct, higher level industry input to the design of Farming Connect had reduced its effectiveness, and had resulted in a lack of focus on future industry needs and how farming needs are changing. There was a perception that the direction of Farming Connect is driven “top down” by Welsh Government priorities, with very little strategic input from industry on programme design to ensure it meets real needs. Instead, one consultee argued that Farming Connect must innovate and update its offer to reflect the

way in which the industry is changing, based on evidence and feedback from the industry. Addressing this issue will be essential looking forward, especially in the context of Brexit where the rate of change will accelerate and given the potential exposure of the Welsh farming sector⁴⁰.

3.37 Consultees also highlighted a small number of other areas where management, governance and monitoring could be strengthened, including the following:

- The membership of Strategic Advisory Board overlaps with the sub-groups, and therefore the **SAB hasn't provided an independent strategic view** and advice on where to focus attention, horizon scanning and future strategic direction that some management and governance consultees felt would be valuable. More frequent input might be required to do this.
- Whilst **IT systems** have improved considerably since earlier programmes, there are some issues relating to the management of the website. The Farming Connect content is hosted by Business Wales - because this is a public-facing platform for the Welsh Government, they need to verify all content before MaB are able to upload materials. MaB's lack of control over the Farming Connect website has made the process of changes very slow⁴¹.
- **Welsh Government decision-making** could be accelerated to enable MaB/Lantra's to better adapt support in response to changing need.

Partnership working

3.38 On the whole, external stakeholders thought that partnership working had improved over recent years, and Farming Connect complemented the wider offer. Internally, MaB encourages their delivery staff to make links to other business support and wider partner offers, and has sought to increase the number of joint events with partners over recent years. That said, there remained room for improvement. In line with the discussion above, some consultees indicated that communications between industry partners and Farming Connect were "ad hoc" or "sporadic", and more regular communications between partners would broaden everyone's understanding of possible complementarities and encourage a more seamless link to other business support programmes. Beneficiaries attending two of the four focus

⁴⁰ The Welsh Government have since confirmed that the farming unions will be members of the refreshed SAB from September 2019.

⁴¹ MaB has control over the written material that is uploaded onto the website, but not the functioning, format and style of the website.

groups also suggested that connections between Farming Connect and other bodies (e.g. YFC, Grassland Society and farming unions) could be improved. They argued that more joint working/events could be useful both to reach those who are not currently engaged, to cross-publicise each other's' events and activities and to add value to each other's services⁴².

⁴² Going forward, communications should be more formalised and effective given the addition of the farming unions to the SAB.

4. Outcomes and impacts

- 4.1 In this Section, we explore the extent to which farmers are implementing change as a result of Farming Connect, and factors that are helping or hindering this, and progress towards impacts. We also present evidence on the outcomes and impacts arising from Farming Connect, and the extent to which these are additional (i.e. would not have been achieved without Farming Connect).

Implementing change

- 4.2 A key question for the evaluation is whether beneficiaries are actually implementing the new skills and knowledge gained through Farming Connect within their businesses – in order to realise the outcomes/impacts that the programme is seeking to deliver.

- 4.3 The case study and focus group evidence suggests that, on the whole, Farming Connect is leading to small-scale, incremental changes within many businesses from the specific elements of support they have received.

Nevertheless, collectively these incremental changes have the potential to generate impact greater than the sum of their parts. In many cases changes were immediate, in others they comprised lots of small changes over a longer period of time. In some

A focus group participant had received soil and nutrition advice, which had led to them cutting the costs of feeding ewes from 20p to 6.5p.

Focus group beneficiary

instances, FC has provided reassurance that current practices or new plans are appropriate, and so did not lead to changes within the business (examples provided from e-learning and Agrisgôp). It can also provide a platform for more transformational change in future (for example through the international trade Agrisgôp group). Also, important to note is that some of the businesses consulted were very small-scale and did not have growth ambitions, so changes arising from FC were small-scale and affordable, focused on business sustainability and environmental improvements. Table 4-1, below, presents specific examples from the case studies of changes made by beneficiaries.

Table 4-1: Case study evidence

Activity	Examples of implementation
Advisory services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rapid, small change and affordable changes, such as introduction of new slurry storage facilities so nutrients are no longer wasted; introduction of water cannons
Agrisgôp	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Small-scale, incremental changes over a long period of time, e.g. changes to the type and scale of seed purchased and planting processes; tool sharing and cooperative purchasing to reduce input costs; selling produce through new avenues; reduction in use of pesticides
Agri Academy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction of new techniques and changes to the way in which the business is managed, e.g. changing cattle feeding and soil management regimes, diversification of activities and adding value to produce (such as opening a butcher's shop), introduction of performance recording
Demonstration site	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changed approaches to minimise antibiotics use; introduction of precision farming in terms of fertilizer application; introduction of new animal health plans, new hygiene practices and metabolic profiling of ewes; introducing rotational grazing; changing beef feed and manure storage practices
Discussion groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changes implemented included: various measures to improve the calving intervals; reducing antibiotic usage; better controlling mastitis by reducing the number of cows kept in each pen; silage pit management; and changing foot-bathing policy to reduce digital dermatitis
Focus sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diversification and investment in new equipment as a result of observing on focus site
Management exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changes made to feeding strategies for pigs; introduction of rotational grazing; new approaches to hedgerow management; introduction of flexible electric fences; changes to density of planting crops
Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practical advice and guidance has enabled new practices to be implemented immediately• Avoided taking uninformed and inappropriate decisions which would have led to costly mistakes – for example, without the support from a mentor, the farmer may have purchased land that may not have completely suited his needs
Face-to-face skills courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improvements in safe practices

Activity	Examples of implementation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical skills that could be applied to “everyday work” • Applied new marketing plan, developed through the support, to now actively market the business using social media
E-learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to farm account management and introduction of online accounting; changed approaches to grassland management, reseeding and thistle control

Factors enabling or hindering implementation and progress towards outcomes

4.4 The case studies also explored factors that have helped or hindered farmers’ ability to implement new ideas or skills they had gained through Farming Connect, and to improve the performance of their business. Overall, it appears to be the combination of i) inspiration and confidence to consider changes identified through Farming Connect, and ii) the skills and practical capability to make these changes (and do so sooner). Wider factors that make a difference include the availability of investment capital, capacity issues, succession and decision-making within the business, alongside external regulatory, political and market conditions.

Table 4-2: Case study evidence on factors that help or hinder implementation and progress towards outcomes

Enablers

Support-related issues

- Practical advice and guidance
- Observing relevant, first hand examples on working farms
- Discussing and refining plans in discussion with others (mentors, peers)
- Learning from experiences of others and experts
- Farm-specific, tailored advice and recommendations
- Reaching “key influencers” within a business to change mindsets, attitudes and behaviour
- Low cost, affordable and easy to implement ideas/solutions
- Grant funding to purchase new equipment
- Aligned support and messaging from other trusted intermediaries, e.g. vets and agronomists

Internal business-related issues

- Farmer motivation, willingness to learn and skills
- Borrowing new equipment from FC peers to test value before full investment

External factors

- The buoyancy of some sub-sectors, such as forestry, attracting interest in diversification
 - Brexit, prompting farmers to think about change and exploring options
-

Barriers

Support-related issues

- Some information (e.g. e-learning) “too simple”, general and bite-sized to have substantial impact
- The “drip drip” approach to support will take longer to deliver change
- Lack of appreciation of the offer
- A reluctance by some to ask for further help to make things happen, e.g. mentoring, skills development

Internal business-related issues

- Insufficient funds and access to finance for growth, new and innovative products/equipment etc
 - Challenges in accessing finance via banks
 - Slow grant application/approval processes, with the risk of missed market opportunities
 - Grant application windows, remit and minimum thresholds not aligned with need
- Changes not cost-effective given small business size
- Diversionary issues, e.g. firefighting within very small businesses, need to address more pressing legal/regulatory issues
- Time and capacity of farmers to introduce new processes/equipment etc, recognising that most beneficiaries are small businesses
- Business structures and succession issues, whereby decision-makers resist change
- Technical challenges associated with implementing new systems

External factors

- Absence of local market for some products, e.g. woodchips for biomass energy
 - Wider economic uncertainty, e.g. high price volatility within the sector, Brexit holding back investment decisions, policy changes (e.g. waiting for forthcoming environmental grants, and therefore don't want to invest their own cash)
 - Farmers waiting until new regulatory frameworks come into force
 - Timing in terms of seasons and weather
 - Poor rural broadband inhibiting abilities to introduce new technologies or undertake e-commerce.
-

Source: Case studies, focus groups and consultations

- 4.5 Wider research has also been undertaken recently by AHDB into factors that influence farmers' decision-making behaviour, based on a review of over 170 papers (see summary in Table 4-1, below). The factors that encourage changes in behaviour, such as face-to-face knowledge exchange, opportunity-led messaging, activities that demonstrate the value and ease of adoption, were similar to those identified in this study. The areas highlighted in the AHDB review where (based on the evidence in Section 3) Farming Connect could strengthen its offer, include more targeted messaging, the importance of sustained engagement, and the need to involve informal and formal networks and partners to reinforce and spread knowledge exchange.

Figure 4-1: Key messages from AHDB report (April 2018) on “understanding how to influence farmers’ decision-making behaviour: a social science literature review”

This reports reviews lessons learned from existing behavioural change work in agricultural (reviewed 171 papers). The following recommendations were made in the literature with the aim of influencing farmer behaviour:

- **Target messages carefully** – it is vital to identify the audience before communicating with them and in general, farmers respond better to optimistic messages which stress the benefits of adopting particular behaviours.
- **Fund and encourage knowledge exchange activities** – face to face knowledge exchange and education initiatives were identified as key factors in influencing behaviour. Knowledge exchange must involve continued and sustained engagement, not one-off events.
- **Prove the value and ease of adoption** – farmers will not adopt new practices/technologies if they do not perceive any added value. It is easier to encourage farmers to adopt new ways of working if they can be embedded in their existing work patterns and address relevant needs/tasks.
- **Incentivise behaviour change**– there is evidence of positive change following incentives, however, this change may not be sustained in the long-term.

The key message from the literature review was that action should move beyond the immediate focus on influencing individual farmer behaviour, to stimulating wider social and organisational change across their sector. Relevant recommendations for Farming Connect included to: involve multiplying the numbers of actors involved in knowledge exchange, including friend and families; communicating with farmers through existing formal/informal networks; a investing in trained facilitators to increase the extent of face to face knowledge exchange.

Source: SQW review of AHBD report

Outcomes and impacts

4.6 The process of being involved in Farming Connect, alongside the changes described above, are leading to a range of benefits for those involved. Figure 4-2 summarises – in headline terms – the types of outcomes evident across the case studies. Two ticks indicate strong evidence of the outcome, and one tick illustrates some evidence of the outcome and/or the outcome as a secondary effect. It is important to note that the ticks are not indicative of the relative scale of impact from one activity to another. Also, an absence of a tick against an outcome does not mean the activity does not have an impact against this outcome at all – rather that, in the examples covered by case studies, this outcome was not identified.

4.7 In looking across the case study evidence, we highlight three key observations.

- Farming Connect is having an **impact on farmers’ personal development** across the board, particularly in the way it develops greater confidence and willingness to change, effectively creating the “foundations” for change (although many beneficiaries described this as the “start of the process” to change).
- Farming Connect is **influencing decision-making, providing inspiration and options** to consider and, in many cases, encouraging farmers to focus attention on “what matters”.
- The support is **providing beneficiaries with the skills and knowledge of how to change** their business, which is translating into financial benefits. These impacts may appear to be relatively small-scale in aggregate, but could lead to significant impacts given the size of the businesses, as shown in the adjacent box.

Benchmark data on calving interval was discussed at a DG. The beneficiary farm performed poorly. He therefore implemented changes, such as changing the timing and frequency of artificial insemination, to reduce the calving interval. By reducing the calving interval by 40 days across a herd of 150 cows, a saving of c.£18k per year has been generated.

Discussion group case study

4.8 The case studies also found that, where beneficiaries had engaged with more than one aspect of Farming Connect, it was often **the combination of complementary support from different parts of Farming Connect that made the real difference** to business performance overall, re-emphasising the importance of Farming Connect’s broad offer and the ability to navigate it. In addition, some of the more

intensive aspects of support appeared to be particularly important in delivering change, such as Agri Academy, mentoring and Agrisgôp.

Figure 4-2: Outcomes evident across case studies

	Advisory services	Agrisgop	Agri Academy	Demonstration site	Discussion groups	Focus sites	Management exchange	Mentoring	Face-to-face skills courses	E-learning
Improved knowledge and skills (business and technical)	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Changes in mindsets and attitudes towards change		✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Raising awareness of new ideas	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓
Improved confidence and ambition to change	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓		
Mental health benefits	✓	✓						✓		
Increased trust in external advice	✓									
More professional approach	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓✓	✓✓	✓
Networking benefits (during and after support)		✓✓	✓✓		✓	✓		✓		
Business performance (costs, productivity, turnover, profitability)	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	
Sustainability/Viability of business	✓	✓	✓		✓✓		✓	✓✓	✓	
Environmental improvements	✓✓				✓		✓			

Source: SQW

4.9 In the paragraphs that follow, we explore and illustrate outcomes in more detail.

Improved knowledge and skills, both business and technical

4.10 All the activities appear to be improving knowledge and skills through a variety of approaches. Agrisgôp, for example, is helping to improve knowledge and skills in a number of ways: through the collective/shared intelligence of the group, by bringing in guest speakers with outside perspectives, and through “learning by doing” as a group. External stakeholders consulted agreed: for example, one consultee argued that Farming Connect’s chainsaw handling course had “undoubtedly” improved farm and woodland management safety.

Changes in mindsets and attitudes towards change, raising awareness of new ideas and encouraging ambition

- 4.11 In the beneficiary focus groups, participants discussed how the impact of Farming Connect was subtle and associated with a **change in how they view themselves and their business**: their engagement had made them look at certain aspects of their business in a different way. Whilst this is important, some external stakeholders were concerned that – if this was the only impact of Farming Connect for some - it was “not enough” to deliver the degree of change needed in the sector.

“It is the change in mindset and attitude ... this has a gradual but longer-term impact on the business. Gives you that helicopter view of your own farm business”

“You pick up things here and there and network with likeminded people who are willing to share knowledge and experience”

Focus group participants

- 4.12 For others, the benefits of Farming Connect in terms of **personal development, confidence and ambition** were more substantial.

- 4.13 For example, through Agrisgôp’s action learning approach, farmers learn how to think ahead, reflect, set goals, consider options and define solutions – and by doing so, Agrisgôp is helping to understand how to change their business. Encouraging cultural change appears to be a key benefit of Agrisgôp. One beneficiary gained the confidence to discuss succession planning and diversification opportunities at home; another beneficiary described how it has given them a “voice” and “stark” personal development; and one had gained confidence to attend an agricultural conference in London. Beneficiaries also described how they felt more “in control” of their business’s future. In the Agrisgôp case study, the leader acknowledged that no two groups were the same, each has a different focus that will lead to different outcomes (e.g. dairy, crops, environmental issues). However, cutting across each one was the “huge” degree of personal development for those involved.

- 4.14 Agri Academy also appears to perform well in this respect, particularly in terms of raising ambition (for example, see the adjacent box). Here, the case study found farmers previously felt limited to continuing

“It changed my whole mindset, I felt like I could conquer the world!”

Agri Academy case study

with traditional farming practices or that the farming practices that they adopt were dictated by the land and resources that they have access to, whereas through Agri Academy they gained the ideas, confidence and access to wider network support to enable them to make change in the future. Beneficiaries found the support extremely useful, particularly in terms of inspiring, raising ambitions and sharing ideas with like-minded people. As with Agrisgôp, the

leader argued that cohorts vary each year but gaining the confidence to try something new and/or progress to greater achievements was a common feature amongst the Agri Academy alumni.

- 4.15 In the case studies, beneficiaries also described how taking part in Farming Connect activities had “***broadened horizons***” and **introduced them to new ideas, from experts in the field and/or discussions with peers**. Most of these ideas focused on small-scale changes that were new to the farms, such as changes to crop planting density and animal feeding strategies (e.g. management exchange case study), metabolic profiling of ewes (e.g. demonstration site) and soil management regimes (e.g. Agri Academy) as discussed in paragraph 4.3. However, there are also examples of more transformational ideas influencing farmers’ practices, including diversification into biomass as a result of attending a focus site, and focusing on different types of livestock to better suit land as a result from mentor advice.

Mental health benefits

- 4.16 For some beneficiaries, Farming Connect is providing a clear, practical and affordable way forward for farmers which is reducing (often internalised and longstanding) stress and anxiety. This benefit was not anticipated in the programme’s original aims but demonstrates how Farming Connect has a crucial – and often unappreciated – impact on the health and wellbeing of those involved in the sector. The implications for farmers of isolation are now widely recognised, and beneficiaries in the advisory services case study described how they had been internalising the stress associated with the compliance issues they were facing for months, and because solutions are perceived to be very expensive, farmers often struggle to see a way out. The advice had given beneficiaries “peace of mind” that a viable and affordable way forward was possible. In this context, it is worth noting that all Farming Connect delivery staff receive Mental Health First Aid training.

Increased trust in external advice

- 4.17 There is some evidence that the Advisory Service is increasing farmers’ trust and willingness to engage in external advice, and in some cases their willingness to pay for this. For example, the adviser has found that some farmers subsequently pay privately for design consultancy. Farming Connect helps by demonstrating the benefits associated with external advice (aided by the subsidy) and introduces farmers to credible advisers (addressing the farmers’ lack of awareness of where to go for advice).

More professional approaches

4.18 Across many of the case studies, it is clear that Farming Connect is playing a key role in encouraging a more professional approach to business management and development, particularly in the use of business plans, and (as discussed above) giving farmers the skills and confidence to implement these effectively. The mentoring case study provides good examples of this.

- One beneficiary noted that he had been on a '*massive learning curve*' through the mentoring process and had learnt something new every time he had been in contact with his mentor. The mentor had reviewed his business plan and encouraged him to consider priorities, which began with the mentor supporting the mentee to negotiate a milk contract with a local dairy, deciding which breed of cows he needed to stock and the type of buildings and equipment he needed for organic dairying. By discussing and refining his ideas with the mentor, the beneficiary had confidence to put these ideas into practice sooner rather than later.
- Another beneficiary had not yet achieved his aim of purchasing additional land, but felt the mentoring support ensured he avoided taking uninformed decisions that could have led to costly mistakes. In his view, without the support of the mentor he may have purchased land that may not have totally suited his needs, and now felt in a position to turn the land purchase into a cost-effective venture.
- A third beneficiary had received help from the mentor to improve cash flow management and projections, helping to ensure bills were anticipated and paid on time.

4.19 Improving the professionalism of the sector was also evident in the training case studies. For example, one of the beneficiaries of the Farm Finance e-learning course discussed how this had improved his ability to manage his accounts.

Networking benefits

4.20 Farming Connect activities are developing and strengthening networks between farmers, both during and after support. For example, Agrisgôp groups and Agri Academy cohorts often continue to support each other informally afterwards – this includes sharing problems and successes with the rest of the group, asking peers for advice and even setting up joint business ventures together. Many of the consultees argued these networks would not exist had it not been for Farming Connect.

Business impacts

4.21 Many of the beneficiaries consulted had made **cost savings** as a result of support they had received through Farming Connect, which had for the most part been quick to realise and in some cases were quite substantial. Many aspects of the programme appear to be effective in identifying cost savings, as illustrated below:

- **Discussion group:** After discussing silage pits at a discussion group meeting, one beneficiary had changed the covering on his silage pit to reduce wastage. This has improved the quality of forage and, by reducing wastage, has also reduced the amount of bought-in silage by £200 per week.
- **Benchmarking:** One of the Agrisgop beneficiaries had also received this support in 2018, which led to changes in the use of protein pellets on their farm. This has already led to cost savings for the business (although the consultee was unable to quantify these).
- **Management exchange:** After observing different grassland management practices overseas, a beneficiary had implemented changes on his farm, leading to a reduction of £5,000 per year in expenditure on fertiliser.
- **Mentoring:** one beneficiary consulted had accessed soil sampling on the advice of his mentor, which outlined phosphorous deficiencies that were having adverse effects on his herd's fertility and calving. Without the support of the mentor he would not have considered this as a potential issue and, it is likely that he would still be experiencing calving problems and losing money.

After attending knowledge transfer events at the Demonstration Site, the three beneficiaries, with help from their local development officer and guidance from experts, implemented changes on their farms. This has led to a reduction in antibiotic use, improved flock performance and improved profitability in the longer-term.
Demonstration farm case study

- **Training:** one consultee had improved his approach to mixing and diluting pesticide products that improved the cost effectiveness of its use.

4.22 There is also evidence demonstrating how Farming Connect is leading to increased productivity, revenue and profitability across the farms supported. In the case studies, the scale of impact varies. For many it is small-scale - for example, one of the Agrisgôp beneficiaries now has the confidence and marketing skills to sell home-grown vegetables locally.

4.23 In some instances, financial impacts were not yet evident at the time of consultation but were expected to come through in the longer term – and had potential to be significant, not only for the farmers involved but also the wider sector in Wales, as illustrated in the adjacent message box. Another example included the Management Exchange case study where, after the overseas visit, the farm had changed his planting strategy for 2019, which was expected to lead to an improved quality product (although the return period for this crop was around five years).

One of the beneficiaries consulted was in an Agrisgôp group focused on increasing international trade in agricultural businesses. Agrisgôp enabled individuals with an interest in this area to come together, which the consultee argued would not have happened at all without Agrisgôp, discuss ideas with experts, and develop networks with exporting businesses. As a result, a business has been created to provide advice to farmers (e.g. on legal frameworks associated with exporting farm product) and the group is looking at doing a roadshow later in 2019 to raise awareness of exporting opportunities across Wales.
Agrisgôp case study

Creating a viable, sustainable business

- 4.24 Linked to the points above, Farming Connect is also helping to improve business resilience and viability. Consultees argued that, because many of the improvements were relatively quick to implement, they were able to create a more sustainable business swiftly. These were not necessarily transformational changes in the business, but as argued by beneficiaries in the Agrisgop case study, they created sustainable businesses that could then be taken forward for the next generation. Retaining young people and viable businesses in rural areas was seen as important for community sustainability (even if the businesses did not have large-scale growth plans).

Environmental and animal health improvements

- 4.25 Across many of the case studies Farming Connect advice has led to environmental improvement and animal health benefits. For example:
- As a result of advisory service support, one beneficiary had introduced water cannons which has reduced water wastage, and many others have improved their slurry management
 - Discussion group beneficiaries had learned from their peers how to reduce antibiotic usage, better control mastitis, and change foot bathing policy to reduce dermatitis
 - Demonstration site beneficiaries had also learned about hygiene practices, reduction in the use of antibiotics and improving animal health plans
 - One of the training beneficiaries had become more efficient as a result of the safe use of pesticides course, which has had a positive impact on the wildlife environment on the farm

A learner had completed a business plan and a marketing plan for their new venture which was to develop an existing low-key campsite into something more substantial and sustainable. Market research helped them to define their business niche and find new partners. The learner said that they found their business plan a really useful document because “you tend to forget some of your ideas and it’s helpful if it’s down there in black and white”. The new business is growing steadily, and in the longer term they hope their child will be able to take over the business which in turn will “support the future of our home and our smallholding”.

Business skills training case study

- A beneficiary of an e-learning course on body-scoring the condition of cattle had a starting point for discussions with her vet; this led to her further exploring and then adopting benchmarking (as the calving period was still underway, she was unable to say whether these changes had achieved a positive impact).

Wider spillovers and indirect outcomes

- 4.26 There is limited evidence of knock-on benefits for those not directly receiving support, such as knowledge spillovers or improved supply chain intervention. At a strategic level, MaB and Lantra take part in key agricultural events across Wales, and knowledge exchange materials are freely available on the website. Also, the demonstration site farmer has disseminated learning across Wales and more widely (e.g. at a conference in London).
- 4.27 As discussed in Section 3, the extent to which learning from Farming Connect activities/groups are disseminated more widely has varied, depending on the type of support received (and, for some, the importance of confidentiality). Management Exchange includes a formal requirement for knowledge exchange more broadly, with participants required to produce a report and give presentations to others. Agri Academy encourages participants to share learning, for example, by speaking at events, but this is not a formal requirement. For the majority of the wider Farming Connect offer, the programme assumes that knowledge spillovers will take place organically through word of mouth, and so is largely dependent upon the farmers themselves (and the extent to which they are open to sharing knowledge and have good networks in the community). There may be an argument to effectively “buy in” spillovers through more formalised mechanisms included in the design of other Farming Connect activities, for example, where appropriate, making it a requirement (in return for intensive support).

Additionality

- 4.28 The extent to which outcomes observed to date are additional (i.e. would not have occurred in the absence of Farming Connect) varies across the programme and its beneficiaries. Overall the evidence indicates that the support is leading to changes for most beneficiaries that would not otherwise have happened, or not as quickly or in a different form.
- Fully additional outcomes are associated with no other similar support being available, or where beneficiaries would not have sought external advice. For example, one of the advisers described how regulatory changes are perceived to be too expensive so no action is taken and the farm goes out of business. In the demonstration site case study,

two of the three beneficiaries argued they would not have implemented changes at all without Farming Connect.

- Where outcomes have been accelerated, the way in which Farming Connect has facilitated progress (e.g. via facilitated discussions, action learning approaches) has been critical in maintaining momentum. Activities designed to improve the confidence of farmers, alongside giving them the skills to change, have also accelerated the pace of change – for example, in the Management Exchange case study, where one of the beneficiaries felt they may have been able to implement some of the changes without support, but Management Exchange brought the timing forward because he made more confidence in the changes. The adjacent box also demonstrates the dynamics of change, whereby other changes follow once the change process starts, because the beneficiary has become more open to new possibilities, and their business is in a different position.
- The programme has also raised the quality and effectiveness of changes, compared to what might have happened anyway, which is important in terms of creating viable businesses looking forward. For example, one of the advisers argued that Farming Connect support ensures that farmers adopt the most cost-effective approach to addressing challenges faced within the business.

“We would still be farming in the same way as dad without FC. We would’ve made some changes, but there wouldn’t be as many, and we wouldn’t have improved the business the way that we have without FC. We would be years behind, through the various aspects of FC that we’ve used, we would be so far behind”

Agri Academy case study

- 4.29 There is also evidence to show that additionality varies across the outcomes, and appears to be particularly high in relation to softer outcomes around confidence, attitudes and mindsets for some of the activities (e.g. the Agrisgop case study).
- 4.30 There were a small number of examples of deadweight in the case studies, where farmers would have paid privately for advice or training, but were steered back to Farming Connect by the adviser/training provider in order to receive the support for free/at a subsidised rate. This appears most common where regulatory changes would have forced change in some areas (e.g. slurry management, safe use of pesticides). That said, some beneficiaries argued that the funding enabled them to take up training sooner, and as a result they have introduced safer and more efficient practices more quickly.

4.31 The overall finding was that, notwithstanding a small degree of deadweight, the Farming Connect is leading to faster, better quality and more sustainable change in the sector.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 In this final Section, we reflect on the key messages against our original research questions for the evaluation, and we revisit the original theory of change for Farming Connect to test how this has been delivered in practice and factors that have helped or hindered progress. We also set out lessons to consider in the design of future policy.

Summary of key findings

What activities have been delivered to date, compared to expectations?

- 5.2 Farming Connect was intentionally designed to offer a broad range of support, reflecting the differing needs, stages of development and preferred learning styles across the farming sector. This includes group support and 1-2-1 advice, and both peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and external expertise from others. Together, the activities are designed tackle attitude-based barriers to change, build confidence *and* equip farmers with the know-how and skills needed to implement change. It also offers the opportunity for progression towards more innovative and transformational change as individuals' experience and confidence grows. The programme is "well known", "trusted" and "well respected" across Wales, and the longevity and continuity of Farming Connect has been important in this respect.
- 5.3 Good progress has been made against output targets to date across all three "Lots"⁴³. Some targets (to 19th August 2019) have already been exceeded, including mentoring, demonstration network events, discussion groups and one-to-one surgeries, group advice and the proportion of discussion groups benchmarking. Targets for factsheets and technical articles have already been exceeded by double or more. However, progress towards management exchange targets has been slower. Overall, therefore, the programme has performed well in terms of engagement, and specifically the volume of farmers involved and activities delivered.

How intensively do farmers engage with the programme and progress through the offer, and what drives this?

- 5.4 Nearly 20,000 individuals had registered with Farming Connect by December 2018, which covers just over 9,500 businesses. Just over two-thirds (69%) of registered individuals had actually engaged with the support available. Of those who have engaged, nearly two-thirds have engaged with one "Lot" only

⁴³ Lot 1: Knowledge exchange; Lot 2: training; Lot 3: Advisory Services.

(and most of these have engaged with knowledge transfer activities only⁴⁴) and nearly one-third have engaged with two “Lots” (where there appears to be cross-over between knowledge transfer and training⁴⁵ or advisory services, but very little between training and advisory services). Very few have engaged with activities under all three “Lots”.

- 5.5 Consultation feedback also suggested that a smaller group of beneficiaries are engaged intensively with multiple aspects of the programme and progress through the offer as they become more confident and ambitious. However, for many, engagement with the offer can be relatively narrow and/or light touch. In part this is due to the time constraints of farmers, but navigating the offer and knowing where to go next after receiving support from one aspect of the programme appears to be an issue for many. Development Officers have played a key role in facilitating some farmers’ journeys through Farming Connect, but this is often down to the farmers themselves to navigate and many found this a challenge. Beneficiaries expressed frustration with the lack of a single point of contact within the programme and difficulties in navigating the website (even for those who are very IT literate). Both farmers and external stakeholders suggested there was scope to provide more “personalised” and “holistic” support through the customer journey to better integrate Farming Connect activities. Crucially, it was argued that Farming Connect needed to develop “*a true package of support*” for beneficiaries (combining knowledge, skills and investment) in order to deliver real impact and the “step change” needed in the sector.

How effectively and efficiently is the programme being delivered, managed and governed?

- 5.6 Farming Connect adopts a multi-pronged approach to promotion, using a variety of materials and mechanisms that reflect the diversity of the target market. Its social media presence has a strong and growing following, allowing farmers to access knowledge/advice at a time that suits them. Development Officers’ presence in the local community is seen as critical to facilitate access to the programme, and expanding the eligibility criteria and introducing attendance at events as a pre-requisite to grant support have helped to widen reach. Widening engagement remains a challenge for the programme, but some external stakeholders and beneficiaries questioned whether this should continue to be the aim (or whether intensifying support where there is potential for real change should be the priority). That said, consultees suggested there is scope to utilise partner and intermediary

⁴⁴ Many of whom have attended strategic awareness events.

⁴⁵ Across those engaged in training, on average one training course has been attended per individual.

networks more effectively, enlist beneficiaries who are seen as “key influencers” to promote the programme, and tailor and target marketing materials more effectively.

- 5.7 Farmers needs are assessed at the outset in a number of ways in order to signpost to the most appropriate support. Development Officers also play a key role in this, through informal discussion with farmers in their community. Some activities within the programme also assess need, although this tends to be narrowly focused on the specific issue in question. Personal Development Plans have not been particularly effective – too often, they are seen as a “tick box exercise” to access training rather than a more rounded assessment of needs, and we found that these are rarely revisited by farmers. The PDP process worked better where the form was completed and revisited with support from a facilitator.
- 5.8 Across the Farming Connect activities, there are a number of features that have worked well to date, including self-help and action learning approaches, encouraging beneficiaries to self-define goals to ensure a close fit with their needs and ownership of the process, practical, farm-based learning and peer-to-peer support, and flexibility to adapt the focus of an activity in response to changing conditions and to suit the working patterns of those involved. The combination of group support *and* 1-2-1 bespoke/confidential advice has also been important, alongside activities that address *what* needs to change and *how* this can be done. Facilitators in group activities play a key role in providing structure, momentum and (where necessary) challenge to ensure that beneficiaries move forward, alongside input from high quality and “trusted” advisors/speakers to provide inspiration and expertise. Some of the more intensive activities are delivered through competitions rather than open access and, whilst this approach is not appropriate for all aspects of Farming Connect, this approach does appear to secure strong commitment to the support and subsequent change. Benchmarking activities have also been very helpful in helping farmers to understand how their practices impact upon their financial performance, which is a key driver of change in behaviour. Again, benchmarking appears to be most effective where undertaken in discussion with peers or facilitators.
- 5.9 There have been some delivery challenges, including reported variability in the quality and consistency of facilitators/advisers (especially in relation to signposting/wrap around support), the capacity of Development Officers, the use of training application windows, and managing the use of “time limited” support. Consultees also suggested there may be missed opportunities for farmers who want to push ahead, with more inspirational and advanced activities and clear pathways for the most progressive farmers. Finance was

highlighted as a key gap in the current Farming Connect offer and, as discussed below, lack of capital was identified as one of the most important barriers to implementation. Specifically, consultees argued that a flexible and accessible fund for farmers to test and implement new/innovative ideas would help to facilitate more substantial change in the sector. Whilst the new Farm Business Grant is helpful, consultees raised concerns around the scale, timing and focus of the funding available through this mechanism.

- 5.10 There is also some concern that Farming Connect is “taken for granted” by many in the sector, with take-up driven by the presence of free support rather than a real need/motivation to change (and as a consequence, some argue this reduces the programme’s impact). Also, there is evidence to suggest a minority of beneficiaries would have paid privately for advice or training, but were re-directed to free/subsidised support, particularly where regulatory change is on the horizon. But we also found examples where Farming Connect has encouraged farmers to prepare for these changes more quickly than would otherwise have been the case (see findings on additionality below).
- 5.11 In terms of management, the arrangements in place appear to be working effectively. The day-to-day delivery is managed well by MaB and Lantra in close liaison with the Welsh Government. MaB and Lantra place a strong emphasis on feedback and continually improvement to maximise the effectiveness of Farming Connect in real time. However, the lack of strategic and external, industry-led strategic challenge and input to the design and delivery of Farming Connect was a concern shared by many consultees, particularly given the pace at which the sector needs to change. At an operational level, partnership working has improved considerably over recent years, but consultees felt there was scope to strengthen relationships further, especially with regard to joint marketing, common messaging and seamless referrals/signposting.

To what extent are changes implemented on farms, leading to intended outcomes and impacts?

- 5.12 Overall, Farming Connect plays a crucial role in creating the “foundations for change”, with a substantial impact on personal outcomes – such as changes in mindsets, attitudes, confidence and ambition - evident across many of the activities reviewed in detail for this evaluation. Farming Connect also has a (recognised but often under-appreciated) impact on the mental health of farmers, by helping to identify clear and affordable solutions to issues that had caused considerable stress and anxiety.

- 5.13 In terms of implementation, for many farmers, the support is leading to small scale, incremental changes over a period of time, often through introducing more professional approaches to business management and health and environmental improvements. This incremental approach reflects the fact that many very small businesses are capacity and resource constrained, so changes need to be affordable and manageable. It may also reflect the way in which engagement with Farming Connect (and navigation of the offer) and the definition of goals within many of the activities are farmer-led. We found that these marginal gains across many aspects of the business are, on aggregate, helping to create more viable and sustainable enterprises in the longer term. In addition, for some of those involved, Farming Connect has had a more transformative impact on the business, through significantly reducing costs, diversification and new business ventures.
- 5.14 Overall, Farming Connect appears to be delivering outcomes that would not have been achieved at all, would have taken longer, been lower quality or less sustainable, in the absence of the programme. Where beneficiaries engaged with more than one aspect of the offer, it was often the combination of complementary support from different parts of Farming Connect that made the real difference to business performance, re-emphasising the importance of having a broad offer and being able to navigate it.
- 5.15 The way in which Farming Connect has been designed and delivered has generally been conducive to encouraging change (e.g. providing practical advice, learning from first hand experiences of peers, etc), in line with good practice. However, there have been a number of barriers to implementation, including time/capacity/firefighting issues within very small businesses, the lack of capital to invest and succession issues, alongside external factors such as markets, broadband provision and weather conditions. Some external stakeholders also argued that, whilst Farming Connect had led to behavioural and attitudinal changes, the broad (and in some many cases light touch) support has diluted the programme's impact.

What are the key lessons to inform ongoing delivery and design of future interventions?

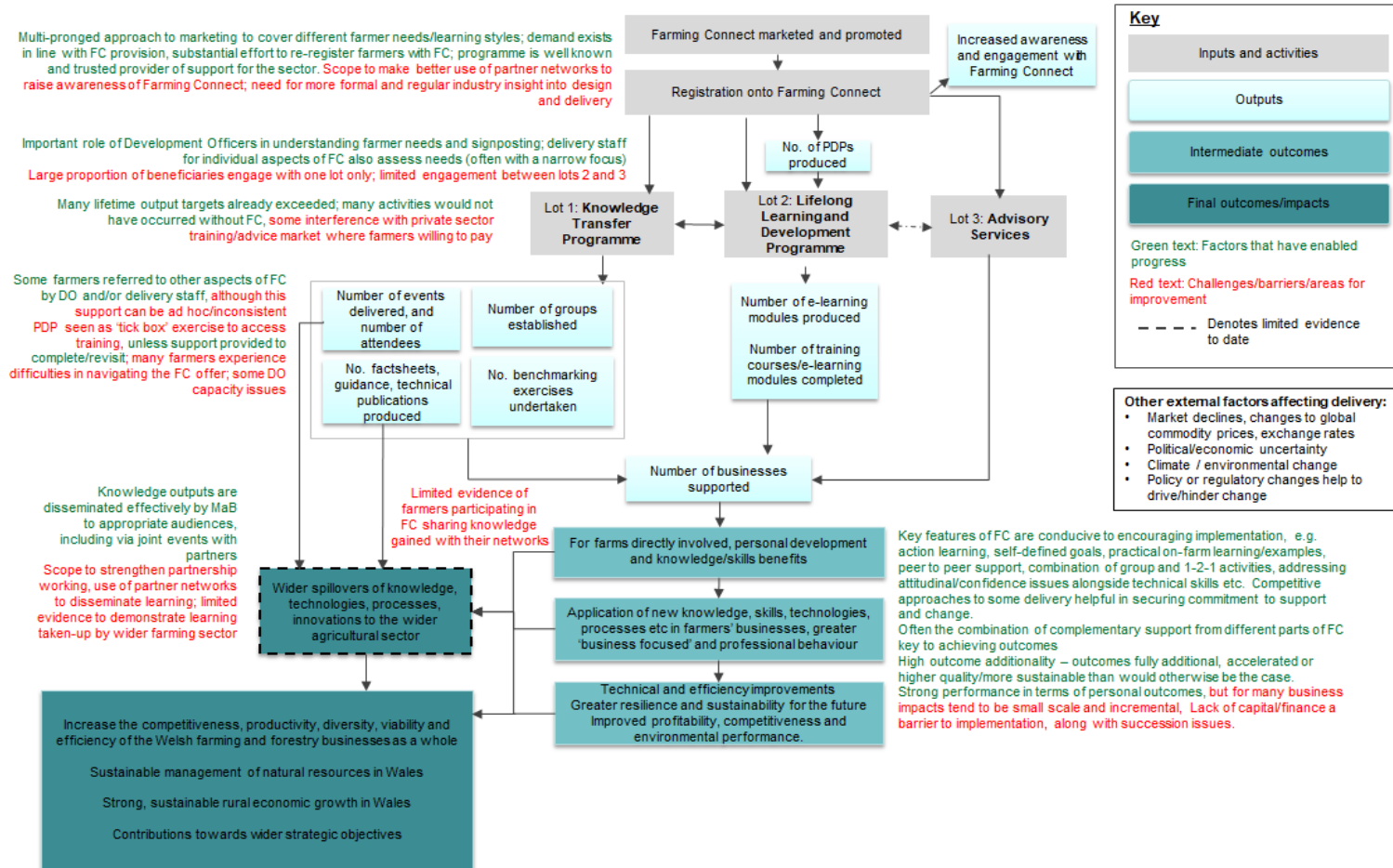
- 5.16 There was consensus across the various stakeholders and beneficiaries consulted that support to help the farming sector adapt and remain competitive will become even more critical in the immediate future and beyond, and that the current programme provides a strong, and widely appreciated, platform for this. The findings of this evaluation do, however, raise some questions that we believe the Welsh Government and partners should consider in the design of future programmes.

- First, there is scope - and evident demand from some farmers - to introduce more inspirational ideas and external challenge into the programme to really drive new thinking. This raises a strategic question for around the balance between peer-to-peer, beneficiary-led and externally-led knowledge development in the design and delivery of this type of programme.
- Second, strategic industry input into design and delivery is essential, working closely, formally and regularly with key partners in the process. Linked to this, there is scope to strengthen partnership working to make better use of partner networks to raise awareness/reach of the offer, disseminate knowledge further, ensure consistent messaging, and enable more effective signposting. Given demand, and the changes likely in a period of economic and institutional uncertainty, the Welsh Government might consider inviting key partners (for example, those who would have been involved in the Industrial Advisory Board) to join the SAB⁴⁶, giving partners a voice and influence, but also ensuring that there is up-to-date insight from industry shaping the offer.
- Third, with limited resources, there is a strategic question as to whether the future emphasis is placed more on focused in-depth assistance rather than on quantity/reach. Whilst the rationale remains strong to raise awareness/share knowledge with the farming community as a whole, there is growing evidence to suggest that a more intensive, personalised and integrated offer for those with most potential/in most need/most willing to change may lead to greater impact overall. This will clearly have resource implications – for example, if Development Officers adopt a more consistent/formalised role in client liaison.
- Fourth, the routes to impact on the wider community (beyond those directly supported by the programme) tend to focus on marketing activity by MaB/Lantra and written materials on the website. The responsibility for dissemination by beneficiaries themselves is rarely “baked in” to the activities, although word of mouth and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing is often flagged as one of the most effective mechanisms for this sector. There may be scope, for example, for farmers who receive more intensive support to be explicitly required to help disseminate what they have learned to other farmers. In effect, the programme would be “buying in” spillovers as part of the offer.

⁴⁶ Correct at the time of the research, however, since then such partners have been invited.

- 5.17 These issues will be explored further in the next phase of the evaluation, alongside a greater emphasis on outcomes and impact as this programme draws to an end.
- 5.18 To summarise the key messages from this evaluation, we have revisited the Farming Connect theory of change to illustrate – in headline terms - how the programme has performed against the anticipated outputs, outcomes and impacts, and to highlight the factors that have helped or hindered delivery at each stage of the process.

Figure 5-1: Theory of change ... in practice



Source: SQW

Annex A: Overview of case studies

Figure A-1: Overview of case study activities and approach

Farming Connect activity	Overview of activity	Case Study overview
Discussion Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Groups typically involve 8-10 members who raise the same animals/grow the same crops in the same locality and thus face similar challenges and opportunities. • Each Group is facilitated by a FC member of staff, often a Development Officer, who arranges the meetings and books speakers. Each meeting covers one topic and lasts around two hours, including a presentation from an expert speaker. • An incentive budget of £250/300 per farm per year is provided to allow farms to try something different on their farm. • Discussion Groups were introduced at the start of the current FC programme. 	<p>Focus: Diary Discussion Group</p> <p>The case study involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a consultation with the Group facilitator • attendance at a Group meeting and a subsequent focus group session with all attendees • an in-depth follow up consultation with one Group attendee
Demonstration Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrations Sites form part of the wider Demonstration Network. The twelve current Demonstration Sites have been selected to demonstrate examples of best practice, innovative techniques and new technologies. Sites implement and demonstrate a range of projects that focus on the integration of new technology and/or new approaches to management, improving 	<p>Focus: Demonstration Site</p> <p>The case study involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a consultation with the FC delivery lead (Technical Officer) • a consultation with Demonstration Site lead • consultations with three beneficiaries

Farming Connect activity	Overview of activity	Case Study overview
	<p>efficiency and increasing profitability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sites are chosen and managed by a FC member of staff (normally a Technical Officer) and supported by industry specialists. • Sites hold regular open-days and progression events to disseminate knowledge and encourage wider take-up of new practices/technologies. • Earlier iterations of the FC programme included Demonstration Sites, but the broader Demonstration Network is new to programme. 	
<p>Focus Site</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Sites form part of the wider Demonstration Network. The purpose of Focus Sites is to deliver one off projects and trials across a wide range of topics. • Learning is disseminated by on-site events and publications, and often site owners also provide additional ad hoc advice and opportunities for site visits. • Focus Sites are set up and managed by FC Technical Officers but heavily involve the Site farmer. • Focus Site activity, in its current form, was not included in FC prior to 2014. 	<p>Focus: Focus Site</p> <p>The case study involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a consultation with the FC delivery lead (Technical Officer) • a consultation with the Site owner • consultations with four beneficiaries (plus a brief consultation with an additional beneficiary)

Farming Connect activity	Overview of activity	Case Study overview
Agrisgôp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agrisgôp brings together small groups of like-minded people to develop the capabilities of those involved, improve existing businesses and explore new opportunities. • The aim of Agrisgôp is to change the mindsets, attitudes, confidence and the capability of the individuals who take part, which will help farmers to identify and progress ideas and opportunities in their businesses. • Support is delivered flexibly through an action learning and participatory approach. The facilitator is typically assigned MaB and is responsible for co-ordinating and facilitating discussions in each group meeting. • Groups are (usually) self-selecting, and have a small budget to cover 10 meetings, venue hire and speakers. • Originally introduced in 2003. 	<p>Focus: Two Agrisgôp groups</p> <p>The case study involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consultations with each of the group facilitators • consultations with five beneficiaries across both groups
Agri-Academy (Business and Innovation Programme)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed to enable development and learning within the agriculture sector in Wales. • Individuals must complete an online application form and applications are reviewed by a panel of experts. • The programme provides training, mentoring, support and guidance over 3 	<p>Focus: Business and Innovation Programme</p> <p>The case study involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a consultation with the Agri Academy leader • consultations with two Agri Academy alumni who participated in the 2016 programme.

Farming Connect activity	Overview of activity	Case Study overview
	<p>intense residential sessions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Academy has three distinct elements within fully subsidised programmes: Rural Leadership Programme; Business and Innovation Programme; Junior Programme. Established in 2012. 	
Management Exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management Exchange provides a travel scholarship of up to £4,000 to enable farmers to learn about different ways of working outside Wales. Beneficiaries can travel to other parts of the UK or elsewhere in Europe to explore ways to improve one aspect of their current business or to diversify. Applicants are assessed over two application forms and a final presentation, where they must be explicit about how the activity fits their needs. Management Exchange is overseen by MaB but beneficiaries themselves are responsible for finding farms outside Wales to visit, making contact with the farmers, and arranging their visits. On return, beneficiaries are expected to disseminate learning more widely. 	<p>The case study involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a consultation with the MaB lead consultation with four scholarship beneficiaries
Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mentoring Programme was established to enable farmers and foresters to 	<p>Focus: Mentoring</p> <p>The case study involved:</p>

Farming Connect activity	Overview of activity	Case Study overview
	<p>receive guidance and advice from their peers on a wide range of topics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible mentees can access 22.5 hours of fully funded mentoring services (flexibly delivered) with their chosen farming or forestry mentor, over an 18-month period. The mentees chose their mentors from the profile lists included on the Farming Connect Mentor Directory. • Completion of a PDP is a prerequisite of accessing this support. • The mentoring scheme is a relatively new programme, established in 2016. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consultations with two mentees and their mentors
<p>One-to-one advice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Advisory Service (Lot 3) offers one-to-one advice (up to 80% funded) and group advice (100% funded). • Bespoke advice is available across a range of topics, including business planning, forestry management, new entrants, livestock, woodland management, horticulture and diversification. • Beneficiaries typically receive support - typically face to face on the farm visits by the adviser followed by a written report containing potential solutions and recommendations - over a month. 	<p>The case study involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a consultation with an advisor • consultation with four beneficiaries

Farming Connect activity	Overview of activity	Case Study overview
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The subsidised advisory services have been under the Farming Connect umbrella since 2008. 	
Face-to-Face training course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FC offers the opportunity to access funding for short accredited training courses. Over 30 training courses are supported within the Lifelong Learning and Development Programme delivered by 23 training organisations located across Wales. These training courses fall within one of the following categories: Business Improvement; Technical Courses and Machinery and Equipment Use. Those eligible for the support, can access funding for up to three training courses per annum, with under 40 years old eligible for up to five per annum. Individuals who attend training courses funded through Farming Connect are required to complete a PDP. The safe use of pesticides course is delivered over three days usually within the training provider's centre. The machine sheep shearing courses are delivered over two days, focussing on different shearing techniques each day. 	<p>Safe Use of Pesticide courses the Machine Sheep Shearing courses (categories 2 and 3 respectively).</p> <p>The case study involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consultations with two training providers that deliver the Safe Use of Pesticide courses and a training provider that coordinates and delivers the Machine Sheep Shearing courses in-depth consultations with three of the training participants, two of which had participated in the machine sheep shearing course and the other from the safe use of pesticide courses brief consultations with one other participant of the safe use of pesticide course and two other participants of the machine sheepshearing course

Farming Connect activity	Overview of activity	Case Study overview
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face training is a long-established programme activity. 	
E-Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The e-learning currently consists of 74 courses hosted on BOSS, which have been developed by the Institute of Biology, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) at Aberystwyth University with support from Lantra and MaB. • The most common route into e-learning followed the completion of a PDP. Upon completing the PDP, Farming Connect users are presented with a long list of courses expected to be relevant to their situation, which is based on normalised competencies. • Courses are intended to offer 'bitesize' introductions to a wide variety of topics and take 15-30 minutes to complete. • New element of the 2014-2020 programme. 	<p>The case study involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consultations were held with 13 people – the leads at IBERS and Lantra plus 11 users: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • six of the user group had completed both Farm Finance and Grazing Management; • three had completed Farm Finance; and • two had completed Grazing Management. <p>The case study also includes some of the views expressed in focus groups with farmers which ran in Autumn 2018.</p>

Source: SQW

Annex B: Consultees

Management and delivery staff consultees

- Einir Davies (Development & Mentoring Manager, Menter a Busnes)
- Eirwen Williams (Director of rural programmes, Menter a Busnes)
- Sara Jenkins (Development Manager - Farming Connect Knowledge Transfer Programme, Menter a Busnes)
- Sian Tandy (Marketing Manager, Menter a Busnes)
- Delyth James (Service Centre, Menter a Busnes)
- Dewi Hughes (Technical Development Manager, Menter a Busnes)
- Nerys Hammond (Development Officer, Menter a Busnes)
- Geraint Jones (Forestry Technical Officer, Menter a Busnes)
- Sarah Lewis (Project Manager, Lantra)
- Phillipa Gregory (Farming Connect Delivery Manager, Lantra)
- Rhys Pugh (Agriculture – Sustainability and Development Division, Welsh Government)
- Laura Griffiths (Head of Agriculture Business Support Branch, Welsh Government)
- Llinos Roberts (Agricultural Business Support, Welsh Government)
- Mark Alexander (Deputy Head of Agriculture – Sustainability and Development Division, Welsh Government)
- Martine Spittle (Project Manager - Distance Learning, IBERS)
- Professor Wynne Jones (Strategic Advisory Group Chair)
- Professor Mike Gooding (Lot 1 Sub Group Chair)
- Peter Rees (Lot 2 Sub Group Chair)
- Euryrn Jones (Lot 3 Sub Group Chair)

Focus groups

- 22 beneficiaries, anonymous

Case studies

- 14 delivery staff, anonymous
- 53 beneficiaries, anonymous

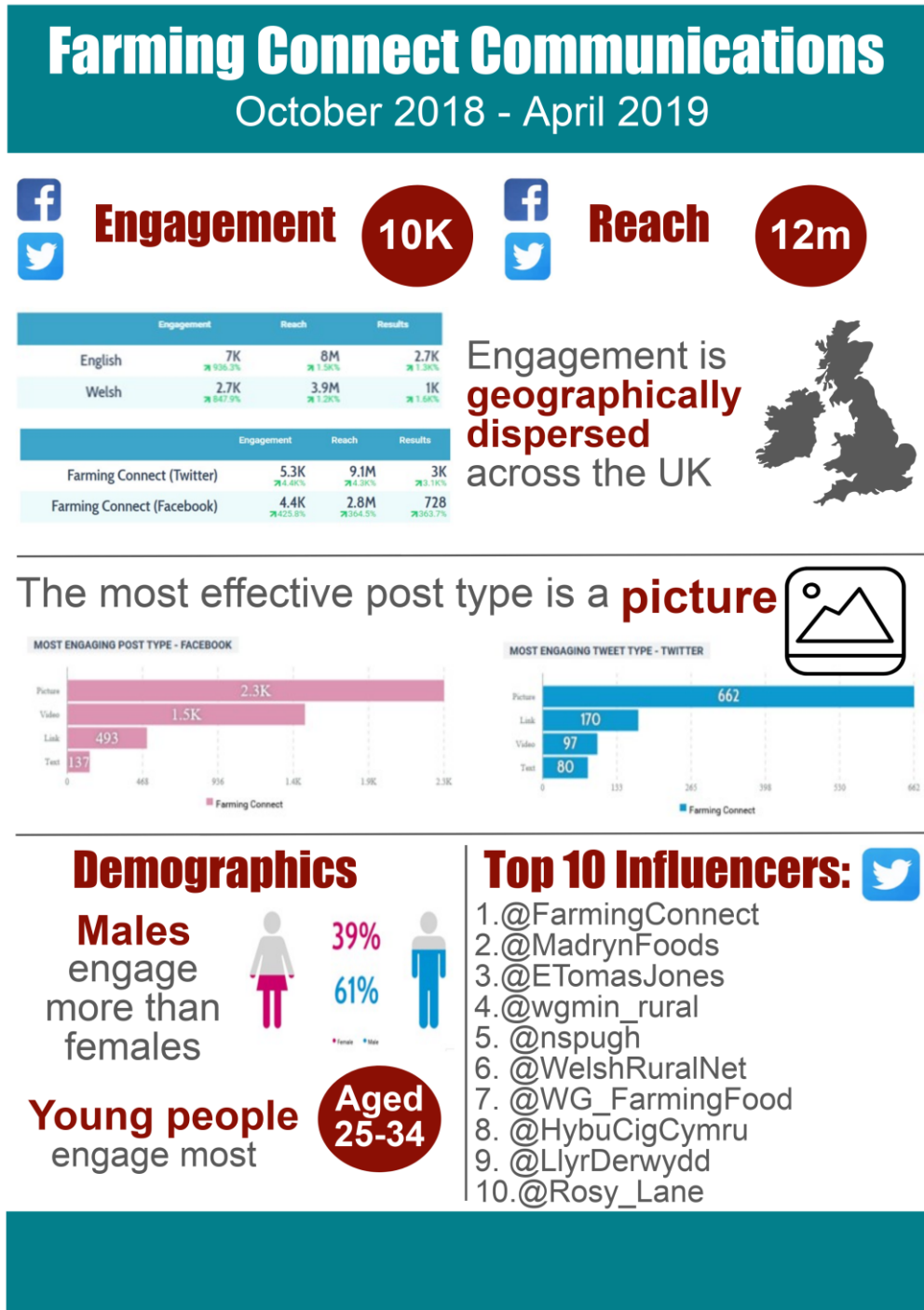
Wider stakeholders

- Innovative Delivery Team, Welsh Government
- Business Wales
- AHDB
- Wales Federation of YFC
- HCC
- NRW
- Coed Cymru
- CLA Wales
- Agricultural Advisory Board
- NFU

Annex C: Social media activities



















































C.1 Press Data have undertaken a review of social media activity, which will then be tracked and updated in the second annual report next year. The results are presented in Figure C- below.

Figure C-1: Social media activities



Source: SQW presentation of Press Data information

Figure C-2: Farming Connect's 25 top influencers

Influencers	Posts	Sentiment	Reach	Reach per mention	Engagement	Engagement per mention
 Farming Connect @FarmingConnect	484 ↑ 4.3K%		2.2M ↑ 4.5K%	4.5K ↑ 3.7%	1K ↑ 6.2K%	2.1 ↑ 43.9%
 Geraint Hughes @MadrynFoods	101 ↑ 2.4K%		463.4K ↑ 2.7K%	4.6K ↑ 12%	320 ↑ 2.4K%	3.2 ↓ 2.5%
 Dr Edward Thomas Jones @EThomasJones	43 ↑ 4.2K%		34.8K ↑ 4.6K%	810.4 ↑ 9.4%	111	2.6
 Lesley Griffiths @wgmin_rural	41 ↑ 1.3K%		371.3K ↑ 1.3K%	9.1K ↑ 4.2%	22 ↑ 175%	0.5 ↓ 79.9%
 nigel pugh @nspugh	30		141.6K	4.7K	46	1.5
 Jessica Williams 🇬🇧 @WelshBlackGB	29		17.8K	613.4	161	5.6
 Wales Rural Network @WalesRuralNet	25		35.9K	1.4K	17	0.7
 WG Farming & Food @WG_FarmingFood	25		41.2K	1.6K	16	0.6
 HCC @HybuCigCymru	25		93.7K	3.7K	34	1.4
 Llyr Derwydd 🇬🇧 @LlyrDerwydd	24		42.6K	1.8K	132	5.5
 Rosy Lane Holsteins @Rosy_Lane	23		37.1K	1.8K	7	0.3
 Aled Rhys Jones @AledTyllwyd	23 ↑ 1.1K%		51.7K ↑ 1.1K%	2.2K ↑ 5.5%	50 ↓ 18%	2.2 ↓ 92.9%
 NFU Cymru 🇬🇧 @NFUCymru	21 ↑ 950%		125.4K ↑ 1K%	6K ↑ 5.8%	48	2.3
 Grŵp NPTC Group @NPTCGroup	20 ↑ 900%		84.3K ↑ 945.4%	4.2K ↑ 4.5%	0	0
 Elizabeth Westaway @EWestaway	19		99.2K	5.2K	7	0.4
 Jones Crisps @JonesoGymru	18		478.5K	26.6K	0	0
 Woodland Trust Cymru @CoedCadw	16		45.4K	2.8K	27	1.7
 Gareth Wyn Jones @1GarethWynJones	16		331.2K	20.7K	2	0.1
 Food&Farming Futures @FarmingFutures	15		336.1K	22.4K	17	1.1
 IBERS_Aber @ibers_aber	15 ↑ 650%		45K ↑ 685.7%	3K ↑ 4.8%	0	0
 RABI Cymru, Wales @RABICymru_Wales	14		15.3K	1.1K	0	0
 Sara Pedersen @SaraPedersen3	14		34.6K	2.5K	25	1.8
 Horticulture Wales Garddwriaeth Cymru @HortWales	14		30.4K	2.2K	0	0
 LLM Farm Vets @LLMteam	13		29.6K	2.3K	25	1.9
 Huw Llandre @Llandre	13 ↑ 1.2K%		22.6K ↑ 1.3K%	1.7K ↑ 5.7%	11	0.8

Source: Press Data