

# Attitudes and Perceptions of a Unique Knowledge Transfer Project Implemented in Food Sector Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Wales, UK.

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## INTRODUCTION

The European Union / Welsh Government Knowledge Innovation Technology Exchange (KITE) Project (2008-2015) facilitated a proactive partnership between food-sector SMEs, affiliates (graduates / individuals with industrial experience) and academic knowledge based partners. Measured end of project outputs have been reported (Redmond, 2015), including attainment of 83 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> party accreditations (including 46% British Retail Consortium (BRC) 5/6), £103.3million in new sales and creation / safeguarding of >1700 jobs (including quality assurance / manufacturing roles) in the food industry.

Assessment of partner experience was also required to evaluate project implementation effectiveness in terms of delivery, operations and perceived benefits.

**This study aimed assess KITE-project partners' attitudes and perceptions of project management, implementation/delivery, technical operations, food safety practices, benefits, impact and effectiveness.**

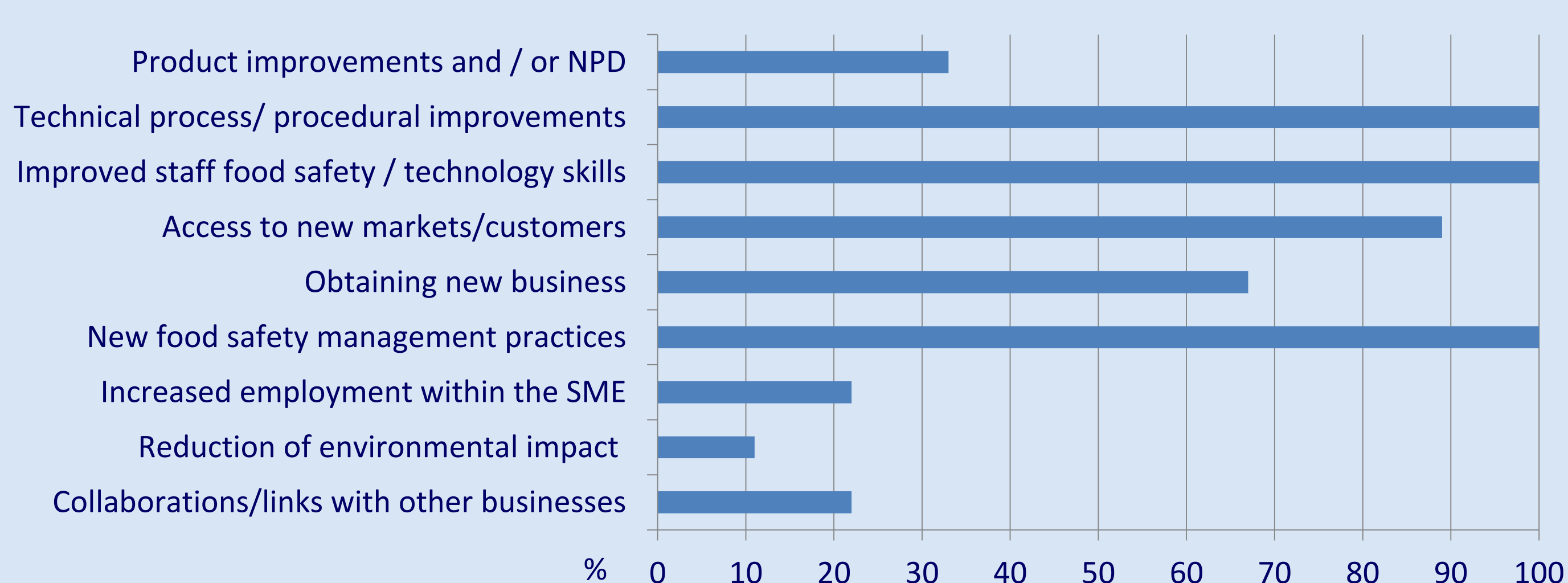
## METHODS

- Questionnaire development was based upon qualitative and quantitative KITE evaluation research and an in-depth review of KITE operational processes and methods (Redmond, 2013).
- Attitudes and perceptions towards the KITE project were determined using five-point Likert-type rating scales. The pilot process used standard procedures and measures of internal consistency were obtained for reliability.
- Qualitative responses were obtained in open questions regarding new knowledge and capabilities, programme improvements and overall perceptions of the project.
- Questionnaires (n=136) were administered to all project partners including SME Managing Directors (MDs); Affiliates and FIC Food Technologists / Technical Supervisors.
- Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis of questionnaire data was undertaken using SPSS (Version 23.0) and Microsoft Excel (2010).

## RESULTS

- All KITE project partners questionnaire respondents reported positive attitudes / perceptions of KITE implementation, improved technical compliance and improved food safety knowledge of SME management / workforce.
- All MDs indicated **improvement of workforce food safety practices** and **improved understanding of food safety/quality standards**.
- The majority of MDs (>96%) reported satisfaction with project delivery, management and outcomes and most (80%) MDs indicated that the KITE project exceeded expectations in terms of outputs and delivery.
- MDs indicated that KITE resulted in significant company benefits including improvements in technical/ procedural processes, improvement in staff food safety /technology skills and new food safety management practices (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. KITE programme benefits perceived to be 'significant' by SME MDs.



External KITE partners (SME MDs and Affiliates) reported positive perceptions of KITE (see Figure 2). In addition, MDs reported 'better understanding of BRC requirements', 'business growth and expansion', 'increased customer confidence' and attainment of BRC /SALSA accreditation resulting from KITE partnership.

Figure 2. Qualitative perceptions of KITE implementation from external partners.



Overall, SME, affiliate and FIC KITE partners reported effective operational implementation with regards to reviewing programme progress, agreeing work scope, resolving issues, providing support/advice and upskilling needs. Analysis of scored measures indicated that all partners rated each indicator of effectiveness as cumulatively, 94% of maximum attainable score.

**Affiliate attitudes/perceptions:** All affiliate respondents reported valuable work experience and increased food safety/technical knowledge;

- 94% reported transferring food safety/quality standard knowledge in SMEs
- 44% reported challenges/barriers to embedding new technical-compliance-procedures
- 81% were 'very-satisfied' in knowledge partner mentoring to achieve implementation

**FIC Technologist / Supervisor attitudes/perceptions:**

- >75% indicated overcoming technical challenges within SMEs and increasing specific sector industry knowledge.
- 94-100% believed implementation of KITE resulted in a positive impact in partner SMEs.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Data indicated positive attitudes and perceptions of KITE from SME MD, Affiliate and knowledge based partners with reported 'significant' SME benefits by MDs. 'Significant' SME benefits reported correspond with KITE project aims.
- Findings from this study can be used to inform future food sector knowledge transfer projects as a positive example of effective operational delivery and partner satisfaction to maximise project / SME outputs and outcomes.
- Combined with project outputs, the attitudes/perceptions of KITE partners further evidences the success of KITE with potential for national/international application.

## REFERENCES

- Redmond, E.C. (2013) Welsh Government / European Union Evaluation of the KITE Feasibility Project. Cardiff Metropolitan University for the Welsh Government. March.  
Redmond, E.C. (2015) Welsh Government / European Union Final Evaluation of the KITE Feasibility Project. Cardiff Metropolitan University for the Welsh Government. December.