

Strategic and tactical continued growth platforms in a devolved nation of the United Kingdom: the development of food sector small to medium enterprises

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Introduction

Food and drink sector sustainable growth was reported as critical to improve competitive advantage for the United Kingdom's (UK) slow rising economic labour production in the Food and Drink Manufacturing and Processing (FDMP) sector (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2006). The UK Government's response was to create a sustainable growth strategy for the sector (Mayho *et al.* 2020).

In Wales, a devolved nation of the UK, the Welsh Government's Economic Research Advisory Panel (2006) recorded that the nation's FDMPs experienced a small growth trend, and reported that in order for businesses to grow and prosper, they would require active support and pledged to encourage small and medium enterprise (SME) and business development to thrive in a positive climate (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). Between 2008-2020, in recognition of the need for knowledge transfer of necessary technical and food safety/science skills to the FDMP sector, the Welsh Government with an objective of a 30% food sector growth by 2020 (Welsh Government, 2014), engaged in four strategic and tactical, small to medium sized enterprise 'Triple Helix' growth programmes. The resultant Knowledge Innovation Technology Exchange (KITE) Project, Food Innovation Rapid Response Programme (FIRRP); Barriers to Accreditation (BTA) and Project HELIX were designed to aid business innovation, growth and sustainability, via facilitated technical competence/compliance with food science/safety regulation and engagement with 3rd party quality management certification.

Purpose

This study aimed to identify the impact of strategic and tactical development growth platforms for continued technical and food science/safety facilitated knowledge transfer support, associated with the Welsh FMDP sector.

Methods

- Extensive literature review undertaken of national and international published and unpublished growth platform strategy.
- Project and programmes local management and business review meetings were evaluated to determine intervention data.
- Semi structured interviews were conducted with SME Managers and ZERO2FIVE Technical and Operational Managers to determine experiences and benefits of working with the strategic projects and programmes.
- Media and UK Government reports associated with strategic growth objectives for the FDMP sector were analysed to determine the wider impact of the 'Triple Helix' partnerships.
- Data was analysed using a content analysis approach (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) to ascertain themes associated with facilitated strategic and tactical growth components.

Significance of study

The development of continued growth platforms created an effective knowledge transfer mechanism tailored to the specific needs of FDMP SMEs. It facilitated embedded technical and food science/safety knowledge for improved technical compliance, increased innovation and potential economic growth.

The findings illustrate that 'Triple Helix' strategic and tactical growth platforms result in tangible measurable primary outputs and secondary outcomes that are aligned with Government strategy (Welsh Government, 2014).

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Results

The results of the study highlighted that the use of the tactical 'Triple Helix' platform initiatives continued knowledge transfer delivery in line with the Welsh Governments' strategies for food sector growth, during the 2016 transition period between the longer-term strategic growth platforms in order to deliver continued knowledge transfer in line (Figure 1).

Findings suggest that the cumulative key outputs of FDMP SME engagement with the four continual 'Triple Helix' growth platforms were:

- Sustained employment, **n=2,317 jobs safeguarded.**
- Product innovation for added value, **n=1,767 new products developed.**
- Improved competitive position, **n=129 new markets accessed.**
- Increased jobs, **n=906 jobs created.**
- Increased growth, **n=£207.5m economic contribution.**

The results of the study indicate an upward trajectory of economic growth between 2008 and 2020, that contributed to the achievement of Welsh Government food and drink sector objectives. The cumulative key outcomes and performance indicators (Figure 2.) of the 'Triple Helix' projects and programmes were achieved by the delivery of n=513 technical and food science/safety facilitated knowledge transfer interventions to n=251 FDMP SMEs. included skills mentoring and training; provision of technical information and facilitating 3rd party food safety certification such as SALSA (Safe and Local Supplier Approval), British Retail Global Consortium Standards (BRCGS) (formally British Retail Consortium Standards (BRC)).

Figure 2: Continued 'Triple Helix' growth platform cumulative key outcomes and performance indicators

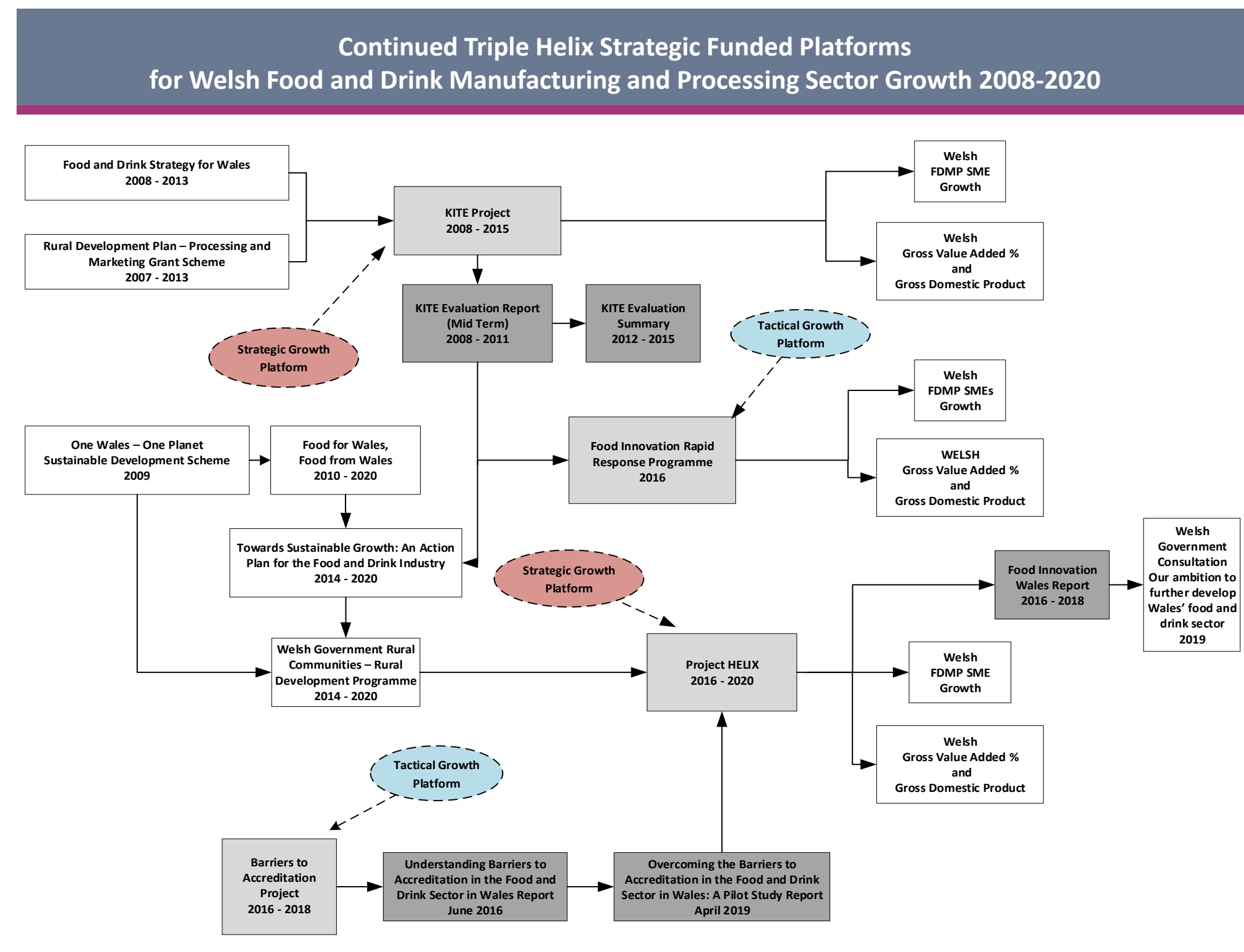
109 SALSA and BRC/BRCGS certifications facilitated

89 Food safety quality management interventions

251 FDMP SME partner company engagements

513 Knowledge transfer interventions

Figure 1: Strategic and Tactical Triple Helix Road Map for FDMP SME Growth 2008 - 2020



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