

Women in Business NI
Member's Support Survey:
COVID-19
Analysis



SUMMARY

As the backbone of the Northern Irish Economy, the future of small businesses is very uncertain and challenging due to the current economic climate that COVID-19 has presented us with. In addition to this concern, the extra burden that women carry due to caring responsibilities adds even further to the pressure faced by female entrepreneurs. Following a very successful Year 1 launch of our female entrepreneurs programme Yes You Can last year it would be remiss of the government to forget about all those women we encouraged to start up their businesses.

In order to understand and to support our members during this crisis, qualitative research was carried out and a survey was also circulated from 24th-27th March 2020, achieving a robust 14% response rate. The survey asked our members how Women in Business NI could support them, what members can do to help their fellow members, and what the Government must do to support the economy of Northern Ireland. Feedback was also provided on how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting members in terms of their business, careers and personal family circumstances.

The aim of this survey was twofold. Firstly, to understand the needs of Women in Business NI members during this time so that we can deliver for our valued members, and secondly, from the issues raised, we also intend to collate and present the feedback directly to Government; ensuring our members voices are heard.

What can Women in Business NI do to help you during this crisis?

The following points were the four key themes that emerged, which Women in Business will now action:

1. **60% of Women in Business NI members require weekly updates** based on clear and frequent Government guidelines. This can include signposting businesses to relevant Government business schemes/ grants/ loans

2. As many businesses adapt to working from home, **51% of members require webinar training** to support their continued development and adapt to new ways of working

3. Concerns surrounding the impact of social distancing on our **mental health and well-being is at the forefront for 49% of our members.** Women in Business must provide virtual meditation, mindfulness and well-being activities

4. To further the previous point, **online networking support is desired by 45% of members.** Online communication methods can help to support members who share similar personal and professional concerns

Other suggested areas to be explored are:

- Book & Movie recommendations to then be virtually reviewed
- Alternative activities for children
- Physical exercise support
- Recipes and Meal plans

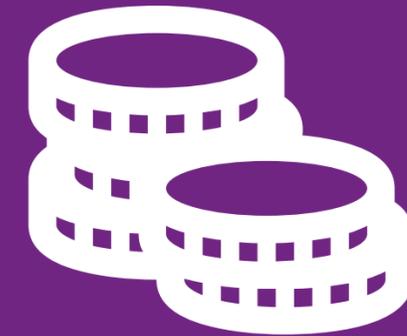
What further information do you require over the coming months?



**Digital Marketing &
Ecommerce Support - 46%**



**Community Support
Initiatives – 44%**



**Access to Business &
Financial Support – 49%**

What specific actions could Government take to help you?

The following points were the four key emerging themes for the Government to take action on:

- 1.** **Support for *all* the self employed in NI.** In light of recent updates that will support self employed workers, further emphasis needs to be placed on the **support of workers who have recently become self-employed.**
- 2.** **Clarity on when financial support will be available.** Clear guidelines and a designated source of information needs to be provided on all the financial support that will be available. Specific dates throughout support processes need to be stated immediately to assist businesses with their future financial planning.
- 3.** **Create the availability of business grants, rather than the current business loans.** The option of smaller business grants could avoid the possibilities of failure or prolonged debt for some businesses.
- 4.** **The Government must address growing concern surrounding the mental health of our isolated community members.** Alternative access to mental health services must be provided to the most vulnerable.

With renowned community spirit, the members of Women in Business NI provided details on how they wish to support their fellow members through this uncertain period. Recurrent themes included the following:

Communications Consulting

on aspects of digital marketing through local resources. In addition to organisational support in creating live webinars and online training



Business Mentoring to help small business to understand their entitlements, alongside Human Resourcing advice

Overall mental and physical well being support from nutritional advice to physiotherapy and fitness exercises



WHAT OUR MEMBERS SAY

“As a self-employed sole trader – I started my business in September 2019 – I am one of these people who are totally left behind by the government in terms of financial assistance”

“When I was starting my business the message from government was about encouraging people to be entrepreneurial but you really have to question what Rishi Sunak’s message is to the newly self-employed – is it that they are not worth a penny of financial support?”

“Is there help for single parents who need to work from home but also need to support their child’s home learning?”

“Govt URGENTLY need to support self employed businesses that have been forced to temporarily close”

“I’m currently very busy but the impact for me will be 6/12 months down the line when clients are really struggling so need to think about how I might manage this”

“This is really a depressing time and I am a coach. I can only imagine what others are feeling”

“Working from home is restrictive and means work really invades your home space. Hard to switch off”

What Women in Business will do next...

Share member feedback with Government– To ensure each member has a voice we will share feedback with the Government to make necessary changes



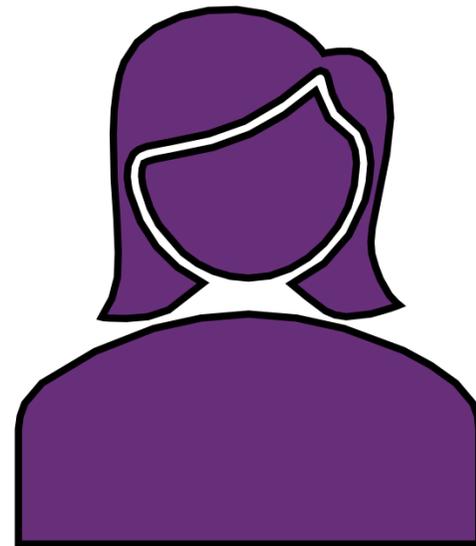
Introduce well-being activities, networking and webinars – We will introduce a new schedule of virtual events which will encompass the key areas of support requested by our members

Weekly Updates- Based on feedback we will provide weekly updates regarding the pandemic and how this will impact both member's personal and professional lives, as well as share good news stories



Our new female entrepreneurs hit hardest...

Mostly sole traders and /or
micro businesses with no or
limited reserves



Caring responsibilities
prohibits work on business

Most businesses have had
to stop trading

New businesses do not qualify for
any financial support

**WIB call for a government commitment to a post Covid 19
Start Up Again Grant Fund**



Should you wish to discuss this survey further please contact info@womeninbusinessni.com