Draft BetaDen Business Plan FY2026-27 – FY2028/29

Foreword Section

1. **Now award-winning, BetaDen is powering into its next phase of growth - driving innovation, scaling startups, and shaping the tech landscape of tomorrow.**
2. In a few short years, BetaDen has gone from a pilot tech Accelerator programme to a 2-time national award-winning tech business support programme with over 100 Alumni from different sectors and a growing community of innovators.
3. This refreshed BetaDen Business Plan sets out BetaDen's pathway to becoming an organisation less reliant on public funding, whilst continuing to deliver best-in-class support to businesses from Worcestershire and beyond.
4. As a technology business accelerator, BetaDen has made a tangible contribution to the local economy in a relatively short time. Using a mix of public-sector funding and private sector partnership, BetaDen has also established an incubator programme, BetaDen Incubate, in addition to a popular programme of public workshops on different technology themes.
5. This refreshed business plan sets out how the BetaDen team will expand its support offering and diversify its funding streams over the next 3 years.
6. Since the beginning, BetaDen has prioritised delivering high-quality support to businesses, and this is reflected in the feedback received from the participants.

"The quality of the mentors with a wealth of real-world experience is shining through, the diversity of the workshops and content and our ability to involve the whole team means that every aspect of our business will benefit."

Garland Surgical, Cohort 8.0, Accelerate

"Having access to the mentors has been a game changer for us... They're high-value individuals, and there's often a large barrier between you, so if you're just trying to reach out to them cold, you're not going to get the same result that you would on a programme like this. It's like the best warm introduction you could get."

GraftAR, Intake 1.0, Incubate

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Executive Summary

7. Having now established itself as a leading incubator and accelerator for technology businesses, BetaDen now needs to plan for a future that will encompass significant changes to the operating and financial environment.
8. Whilst it's still the only incubator and accelerator programme specialising in technology businesses in the County, BetaDen is keen to grow and extend its physical and online presence, to support economic growth and support creation of high-value jobs. Over the 3-year period covered by this refreshed Business Plan, BetaDen will be seeking to introduce income-generating products and services and evaluate their success.
9. This new phase of development brings both opportunities and risks, as BetaDen seeks to balance private and public sector requirements to reach greater financial stability. FY2025-26 will be a year of market research and product development, with a view to viable income streams being introduced from FY2026-27.
10. BetaDen's alumni success stories showcase the long-term impact of its programmes, with businesses continuing to grow and contribute to the wider innovation ecosystem by raising millions of £ in investment, winning awards, and creating valuable jobs. For example, Prizsm Technologies (Cohort 4.0) have secured further investment, expanded their team significantly, and become Entrepreneurs in Residence after graduating from BetaDen. Optimec Systems (Cohort 7.0) received invaluable advice on their funding processes, which has resulted in a complete shift in their strategy. Therefore, they chose to self-fund their growth through strong cash flow, rather than seek external investment, which has enabled them to launch a new product and expand their team. Garland Surgical (Cohort 8.0) have also recently become BetaDen's Entrepreneurs in Residence, after securing significant investment of over £2.5M to scale their operations and are now looking to expand their team. The programme's influence is extending further, with three successful Incubate alumni earning places in Cohort 9.0 - demonstrating how BetaDen is creating a clear pathway from early-stage innovation to sustainable, scalable business growth.

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Overview of Priorities and Medium-Term Objectives by the End of FY 2028-2029

PRIORITIES

FY 2025-2026

Immediate Priority

- Deliver current programmes commitments to cost and quality
- Develop Partnership income for Cohort 9.0 and/or Tech Fest 2026
- Development of BetaDen AI LLM service
- In-year funding bids to reduce FY2025-26 outgoings
- Co-working space income (Kidderminster) (with WFDC)

FY 2026-2027

High Priority

- Paid-for Online Programme(s) cost model and market research
- BetaDen Community / Portal (paid-for elements)
- Podcasting (potential sponsorship revenue)
- 3D Printing lab (potential access fee)
- BetaDen consultancy fees

Low

- Bootcamps
- Soft Landing Service (inward investment)
- Post-programme support through alumni networks

MEDIUM-TERM OBJECTIVES

BY THE END OF FY 2028-2029

Objective	Measure of Success
• To grow BetaDen's business model in a way that increases its attractiveness for private sector investment and reduces reliance on public sector funding	• Increase in the % of private sector funding in cash or in-kind over the 3 years of this business plan, reaching 50% in FY2028-29)
• To review existing processes and adjust as necessary for the development of more commercial 'offerings', whilst remaining compliant with public sector regulations	• Introduction of 'BetaDen-generated' income stream by FY2028-29 (currently £0) • Satisfactory audit reports
• To recruit and support at least 30 technology companies or entrepreneurs annually through Incubate and Accelerate	• Registration and participation of 90 founders into the Incubate and Accelerate programmes
• To achieve 50:50 ratio of public sector and private sector by FY2029/30	• To reduce total public sector economic development income % to 50% by FY 2028-29
• To provide tangible evidence of stimulating and adding value to Worcestershire's technology ecosystem	• Independent evaluation to provide evidence of ROI for BetaDen programmes and impact on Worcestershire *a)* technology ecosystem and *b)* GVA
• To develop new strategic alliances with industrial partners, universities and research organisations to improve access to technology facilities and (joint) funding	• Agreement(s) in place offering BetaDen founders access to new facilities

Business Overview and Context

11. BetaDen is a delivery team within the Worcester Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP). The BetaDen Accelerate programme was created in alignment with the vision and objectives of WLEP's *Plan for Growth* and its focus on creating high value jobs in key growth sectors. Sectors identified as Key Growth are: Cyber, IT and Defence; Agri/Horti-Tech; and Advanced Manufacturing. Cornerstone sectors in the County are: Business and Professional Services; Construction; and Health and Care.
12. BetaDen was established in 2018 and originally funded through the European Regional Development Fund as a pilot project. The purpose of the pilot was to establish whether Worcestershire could both support and benefit from having its own technology accelerator - and if the benefits to the business ecosystem would justify the public sector investment. This gave rise to the programme now referred to as '**Accelerate'**. Accelerate aims to support existing tech companies who wish to grow rapidly.
13. In its first six years BetaDen achieved demonstrable success, gaining external recognition by being named in Autumn 2022 and again in 2024 as the 'Best Technology Accelerator' at the UK Business Tech Awards. An independent economic evaluation report credited BetaDen's first 6 Accelerate cohorts with delivering a Cost-Benefits ratio of £6.60 for each £1 spent.
14. From FY2023-24 BetaDen continued Accelerate delivery supported by a mix of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership funding; and from Summer 2024 delivery expanded to include the **Incubate** programme, supported by a combination of Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership and Barclays Eagle Labs. Incubate is aimed at pre-starts and early-stage technology companies. Independent evaluation of the first four Intakes of BetaDen Incubate suggested by the end of delivery ROI had already reached £4.40 for each £1 spent – with a **projection** to 2030 of a ROI of **£26.40** for each £1 spent on Intakes 1.0-4.0
15. The third strand of current BetaDen delivery is the Workshops programme – a series of workshops on different technology topics of interest, delivered at different locations around the County. The workshops are aimed at different levels of technology understanding – for example there are different AI workshop offerings aimed both at complete beginners and at those working in the industry.
16. In FY2025-26 BetaDen programme work is funded by a mix of extended UK SPF funding, WLEP programme funding, a grant from Wychavon District Council and some funding generated through partnerships. The delivery plan for this year has been agreed by the WLEP Board and is in progress.

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17. BetaDen's target market is technology businesses from pre-start through to scale-ups who wish to develop and bring to market new technology products and services, with the aim of creating improved GVA for the County and to support the creation of high-value jobs.

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Mission Statement, vision and objectives

18. **BetaDen's core purpose is *to drive acceleration of tech businesses, to impact the business community and to generate economic growth in Worcestershire*.**
19. From our research, most businesses have stated that BetaDen has helped them in bringing new or improved products or services to market, instilled added confidence about the potential for their business and helped them explore future collaborations and opportunities within the current technology sectors. This is true both for our early-stage Incubate founders and our growth-stage Accelerate founders.
20. As we move forward, our vision will be to offer new BetaDen products and services to generate income to fund the programmes, and to inspire our stakeholders and partners to actively engage with and support a growing BetaDen community that reaches beyond the County boundaries.
21. Our medium-term objectives are:

Objective	***Measure of Success (by end FY2028-29)***
To grow BetaDen's business model in a way that increases its attractiveness for private sector investment and reduces reliance on public sector funding	• *Increase in the % of private sector funding in cash or in-kind over the 3 years of this business plan, reaching 50% in FY2028-29)*
To review existing processes and adjust as necessary for the development of more commercial 'offerings', whilst remaining compliant with public sector regulations	• *Introduction of 'BetaDen-generated' income stream by FY2028-29 (currently £0)* • *Satisfactory audit reports*
To recruit and support at least 30 technology companies or entrepreneurs annually through Incubate and Accelerate	• *Registration and participation of 90 founders into the Incubate and Accelerate programmes*

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To achieve 50:50 ratio of public sector and private sector by FY2029/30	• *To reduce total public sector economic development revenue income % to 50% by FY 2028-29 (from anticipate 80% in FY2025-26)*
To provide tangible evidence of stimulating and adding value to Worcestershire's technology ecosystem	• *Independent evaluation to provide evidence of ROI for BetaDen programmes and impact on Worcestershire a) technology ecosystem and b) GVA*
To develop new strategic alliances with industrial partners, universities and research organisations to improve access to technology facilities and (joint) funding	• *Agreement(s) in place offering BetaDen founders access to new facilities*

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Market Analysis

22. BetaDen sits geographically in the NUTS1 (West Midlands) Region but outside of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Area. This has implications for access to funding as the WMCA routinely excludes organisations from outside their geography from accessing funding under their control. Proximity to Birmingham means there are a significant number of alternative incubate/accelerator/ tech business development programmes available within a reasonable commute. We do attract applications from Birmingham-based firms, as well as those further afield, which is testament to our reputation and quality of delivery – but there is no doubt but that some high-potential companies choose competitor options in Birmingham to avoid the travelling time and cost.
23. BetaDen is developing closer links with CyNam (Cyber Cheltenham) in neighbouring Gloucestershire, which does not offer directly competing incubator/ accelerator offerings, and has a focus on 'cyber' rather than 'technology'. Elsewhere in Gloucestershire, BetaDen also has contacts with the Royal Agricultural University (Cirencester) which runs Farm 491, and Tech Box at Hartpury University, but to date no suitable collaboration opportunity has arisen.
24. Closer to home, BetaDen is developing stronger links with the University of Worcester (especially their growing Computer Science department) and with the local Colleges. To date there have not been any suitable funding opportunities identified for a joint project with the University.
25. BetaDen runs the only technology-business focused incubator and accelerator programmes in the County, and attracts more applicants than we have places for. The team reviews the programme content and structure regularly, to ensure we remain relevant.
26. BetaDen has earned a reputation for quality delivery of tailored support, having won both regional and national awards for its programmes.

"The impact of BetaDen and the Proof of Concept Grant support has been massive. Having top-up grant funding at those key points de-risked our projects." - ChangeMaker3D, Cohort 5.0

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"This has been an extremely worthwhile programme to have attended. It has added a lot of important information into the mix and given me a brilliant sounding board to refine my ideas and solidify the direction I am taking the new business." - Flowmonics, Intake 2.0

"You can learn something new every day. BetaDen has helped us see opportunities we may not have considered before, and we've already started implementing some of those ideas. If you can commit, the resources, mentors, and opportunities are fantastic." - FreeAgent247, Intake 4.0

A huge thank you to BetaDen, the mentors, and the entire Cohort 8.0 for the collaboration, insights, and support along the way. It's been an amazing experience working alongside some fantastic innovators!" - Marketing+Technologies Group, Cohort 8.0

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People, Management & Governance

27. Worcestershire County Council is the Accountable Body for the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP). WLEP is not a legal entity, but is a partnership bringing together the public, private and education sectors to benefit the local economy.
28. Over the next 3 years, it is difficult to predict what the new BetaDen Business Model will look like in terms of its core funding, its mix of programmes and possibly its locations. Therefore, we need to ensure our business model, its structure and governance, evolves over this period especially in attracting additional private sector funding and what could be described as an "investible business structure".

People

29. WLEP staff are employed by a range of employers including WCC, the local Chamber of Commerce and a local district council. Staff are then seconded onto the WLEP programmes of work.
30. Currently the BetaDen delivery team sits within the WLEP structure.
31. The current BetaDen delivery team comprises 4 full time and 1 part time members of staff, totalling 4.6 FTE.
    - Programme Manager (full time)
    - Director of External Affairs (full time)
    - Marketing and Communications Manager (full time)
    - Events and Marketing Executive (full time)
    - Incubate and Administration Lead (0.6 FTE)
32. BetaDen recognises that significant change to the current local government structure is on the horizon, with plans to replace the two-tier system of county and district councils with unitary authorities. This may be expected to affect the governance of BetaDen from FY2027-28 onwards.

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Management

33. BetaDen operates under the strategic and executive direction of the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP). WLEP's executive team collaborates closely with BetaDen, ensuring alignment with the County's principle economic development goals e.g. Worcestershire's Plan for Growth 2020 – 2040.
34. WLEP is subject to public sector rules and oversight, with regular audits arranged by the WCC county team. BetaDen is one team within the WLEP - BetaDen is not currently a standalone legal entity.
35. Other operating models, that take BetaDen out of the WLEP partnership structure, such as CIC / charitable/ social enterprise models, have been considered at various points. **To date, the benefits of being a standalone legal entity have not outweighed the stability and support offered from within the WLEP/ WCC structure,** however this must remain under review as the significant changes affecting the local government and funding frameworks become better understood.
36. The BetaDen operational team has direct reporting lines to the deputy CEO and CEO of the WLEP. The current governance framework provides the necessary oversight and support to ensure the BetaDen operates efficiently, fosters innovation, and delivers long-term value to startups, scale-ups, investors, and the broader tech ecosystem. This will be reviewed during FY2025-26, however, in the light of the need for BetaDen to develop commercial offerings.

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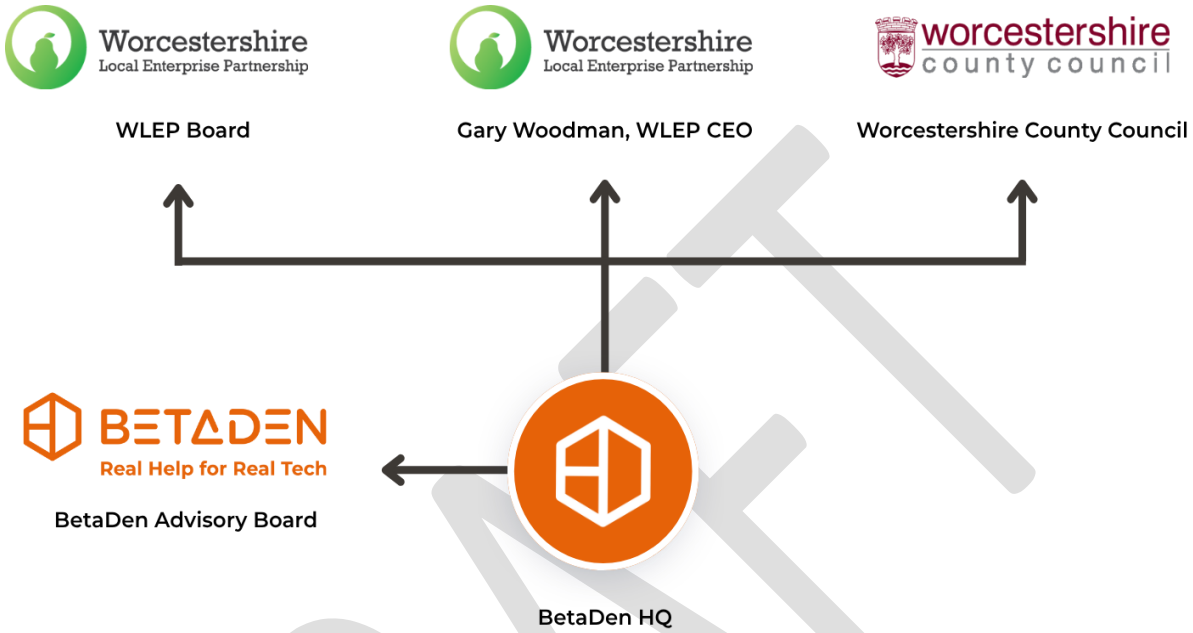

Governance

37. BetaDen funding from WLEP funding sources is approved by the formal WLEP Board, and updates on progress or significant developments are also reported to WLEP Board.
38. Funding also comes from other sources, mainly under contract to deliver specific outcomes for District Councils. Different contracts bring different Key Performance Indicators and targets, and these are agreed by the Programme Manager and reported to funders appropriately.
39. BetaDen also seeks strategic partnerships, to bring both expertise and money to the programme.
40. Decisions on admittance to a BetaDen programme are made by the delivery team, and consider:

fit to County; (existing or proposed links to the County,	fit to the Programme (existing stage of technology business and development potential for its	KPI requirements from the funders	fit to Community (how the business could contribute to

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potential for high value job creation)	technology, what impact BetaDen support could have on the business' growth)		the wider technology ecosystem)

41. The application process for Accelerate includes a formal application form, followed by initial sifting by the BetaDen team, with interviews for up to 15 shortlisted candidates. The interview panel includes a BetaDen delivery team member, a member of the Advisory Board and suitable technical expert. Incubate does not currently require a formal interview.

BetaDen Advisory Board

42. The BetaDen Advisory Board group was set up at the start of the pilot project, with representatives from the WLEP, WCC and the private sector. Membership has changed over the years, but the Advisory Board allows the BetaDen operational team to seek advice and to extend its reach. The BetaDen Advisory Board plays a role in guiding strategic direction, and Board members act as ambassadors for BetaDen across the County and their wider business networks. Unlike a governing board, the Advisory Board group does not have decision-making authority but plays a crucial role in shaping strategies, identifying challenges, and offering informed perspectives.
43. An Away Day was held in January 2025 to help shape BetaDen priorities. Some of the key points that emerged from the Away Day included:
    - The importance of maintaining quality standard – whatever the programme or service delivered. BetaDen has developed a reputation for a quality service that shouldn't be compromised.
    - The future of a paid-for online offer. How would BetaDen online offer meet the needs of potential paying customers?
    - Bootcamps - the Advisory Board decided it would not be a top priority for development in FY2025-26.
    - Developing further a Soft-Landing Service (i.e. offering a gradual and smooth transition for a foreign company establishing operations in the County) will also not be a top priority for development this financial year.

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- The Business Plan identifies several challenges and opportunities. Therefore, BetaDen needs to reflect these developments in its programme offer. Whatever our future offers include, at the core will be strategic advice and guidance, access to critical resources, and a collaborative ecosystem that fosters innovation.

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Financial Update and Development of Future Support Products/ Services

44. BetaDen is still primarily funded by the public sector, through a mixture of grants (WLEP) and contracts (e.g. with District Councils to deliver specific targets for UKSPF). The contracts to date have relied on economic development revenue funding streams from national government, such as the UK SPF.
45. BetaDen will work towards a funding ratio of **50% public sector: 50% private sector.** Our research into other Incubators and Accelerators indicates that it is **unrealistic** for BetaDen to expect to reach 100% private sector funding without:
    - loosening the links with County (and locally realised benefits); or
    - the ability to generate rent from co-working space – a key income stream currently outside BetaDen's gift; or
    - a local University generating a large annual group of technology graduates looking to develop new technology innovations into businesses/ able to enter joint funding bids for public funds.
46. The UKSPF will end this FY, and no replacement has yet been announced. National government priorities will affect future funding stream decisions, presenting some new opportunities that BetaDen will aim to take advantage of. The priority sectors for government include overlap with *Plan for Growth* and BetaDen priorities e.g. Artificial Intelligence. However, the Spending Review of 2025 leans strongly towards funding capital projects, which is obviously not helpful for a revenue project such as BetaDen.
47. BetaDen has already started to explore different sponsorship and partnership models with a range of Professional Services and technology companies, and will expand this work during FY2025-26, with the intention of introducing new support offerings and operating models from FY 2026-27 onwards. BetaDen will be considering market opportunities both within and outside of its current geographic area of operation, including online.
48. Currently, with the limited resources we have available, we need to prioritise our programmes where we think those will have the most impact and return on investment. A key component in the decision-making process relating to BetaDen's Programme offer was the January 2025 Advisory Group Away Day. The topics that framed our priorities were:
    - financial viability;
    - the importance of meeting the needs of the current and potential customers; and

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- the availability of funding for the individual programmes.

49. Future Income is hard to predict at this stage, as we have not yet been through the process of assessing commercial viability of future products and services, and we do not yet have clarity from government on economic development and research and development funding opportunities. We hope to have an agreed financial plan during Autumn 2025, working in collaboration with the Accountable Body.

    Working presumption include:

    - 2x Incubate Intakes of up to 15 founders per Intake per annum
    - 1x Accelerate Cohort of up to 8 founders per Cohort per annum
    - A workshops programme of 20-24 workshops per annum (including BetaDen Tech Fest workshops)
    - No increase to the team size
    - No increase in rent at MHSP
    - No increase in costs for The Old Court Kidderminster
    - No increase in costs for WCC to process Proof-of-Concept grants on behalf of BetaDen
    - Return to a Proof-of-Concept grant level of £10k per founder
    - Workshops and Events costs include Accelerate Showcase and the Workshops programme
    - Annual salary increases for core BetaDen team
    - Some increase in rates charged by Contractors and Venues
    - Some increases in HQ team costs as we research and develop the new products

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Priorities FY2025-26

50. FY2025-26 is a year of both scheduled delivery to meet contract obligations and the start of some product development for future income.
51. BetaDen has identified some potential products and services and will need to go through standard market / fit assessment processes and consider likely commercial viability. The table below sets out relative priorities, as agreed at the Away Day. Elements in *italics* are not current commitments, but will be put forward for market research etc. Only existing commitments are currently funded. The team does not have capacity to take forward all product ideas for further development in FY2025-26, so this work will extend into future years, according to the priority allocated at the Advisory Board Away Day

Immediate Priority (FY2025-26)	**High Priority (FY2026-27) (development)**	**Lower Priority (FY2026-27) development**
Deliver current programmes commitments to cost and quality	*Paid-for Online Programme(s) cost model and market research*	*Bootcamps*
Develop Partnership income for Cohort 9.0 and/or Tech Fest 2026	*BetaDen Community / Portal (paid-for elements)*	*Soft Landing Service (inward investment)*
Development of BetaDen AI LLM service	*Podcasting (potential sponsorship revenue)*	*Post-programme support through alumni networks*
In-year funding bids to reduce FY2025-26 outgoings	*3D Printing lab (potential access fee);*	
Co-working space income (Kidderminster) (with WFDC)	*BetaDen consultancy fees*	

52. During FY2025-26 BetaDen will implement a process to guide which product ideas to take forward for further development whilst maintaining compliance with relevant public sector guidance or rules. This process will include consideration of public sector values, fair access to opportunities and the potential Return on Investment.

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Operational Information

53. BetaDen currently delivers its Accelerate programme from the Malvern Hills Science Park, and this will continue with an updated Cohort 9.0 programme starting in September 2025. Accelerate starts with several weeks of compulsory Face to Face workshops and 1:1 sessions and then offers a hybrid engagement model – with founders free to opt for online delivery of 1:1 support. We bring the Cohort back together Face to Face for Pitch Practise sessions, and we deliver a Face-to-Face Showcase event to celebrate the end of the Programme.
54. The Malvern Hills Science Park venue offers office space for the BetaDen delivery team, alongside fellow WLEP teams, NexGWorx and Midlands Cyber. It provides co-working space for Accelerate Cohort founders, as well as space for Entrepreneurs in Residence. There are meeting rooms, meeting pods, and space for holding small events such as Pitch Practises.
55. After a successful launch from a venue in central Worcester, in April 2025, the Incubate programme moved to a new base at Wyre Forest District Council in Kidderminster, with one Intake delivered so far and another scheduled for October 2025. The Incubate office at The Old Court, Kidderminster has office space for the BetaDen delivery team, separate co-working space for founders on our Incubate programme, a separate workshops room, a podcasting suite and a 3D printing room, in addition to a large room for holding larger events.
56. The third strand of BetaDen delivery – the public workshops programme – will continue to be delivered at different locations across the County, allowing greatest possible access to workshops on topical technology themes including AI.
57. Future access to suitable facilities will be essential to BetaDen, as we do not anticipate a time when we will only offer online support. We have found that our founders value access to the facilities, in addition to the Face-to-Face interaction. Access to prototyping facilities such as the 3D printer along with marketing facilities such as the podcasting suite form a key element of our 'offer' to our entrepreneurs. Having a 'reason' to come to office spaces is a key factor in building and strengthening the technology ecosystem in the County.

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Conclusion

58. Whilst delivery costs for existing programmes (Incubate, Accelerate and the Workshops programme) are considered stable, the key priorities for the BetaDen HQ team in FY2025-26 will be to:
    - Ensure delivery of contracted deliverables
    - Continue to focus on in-year costs management to free up funds for in-year product development
    - Review the governance and processes for assessing future product deliverables for commercial viability and market fit
    - Start with product development for the products identified as highest priority

    Part of the assessment process will consider the staffing requirements for delivering additional products and services, and how this will impact on the commercial viability.
59. The 3-year period FY2026-27 to FY 2028-29 will be one of considerable changes to governance and funding opportunities. BetaDen will need to remain flexible to in-year changes and will need to assess whether the target of 50% public/ 50% private sector funding is realistic as a long-term funding model. BetaDen will also have to consider the most suitable structure for allowing commercial exploitation of new products as well as access to non-economic development revenue funding streams.
60. The core assumptions for FY2026-27 – FY2028-29 are that BetaDen will continue to deliver its established programme elements: Accelerate, Incubate and the Workshops Programme, and then introduce new products when they've been assessed for financial viability and market fit. This may require expansion of the existing delivery team, which must be costed into the new proposals.
61. BetaDen recommend putting together a small working group comprising Executive team, HQ team and Accountable Body representation to review and assess incoming information on likely future public funding sources. This group will also factor in the early-stage assessment of potential commercial income streams. This will inform a 3-year financial plan, which the Working Group will report back to the WLEP Board once there is greater certainty over the future funding and governance landscape. An update will be provided in Autumn 2025.

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