

## **POLICY BRIEF: KEY ECONOMIC SECTORS - DIGITAL/TECHNOLOGY AND NET ZERO**

### Executive Summary

The Scottish Government has set out ambitious plans for Scotland's economy in the Digital/Technology sector and the Net Zero sector. While resources have been made available to businesses to aid this economic strategy, there is a disconnect between the strategic ambitions and the access to a proportionate share of resources by women-led businesses.

As revealed in the Survey of Women in Enterprise<sup>1</sup>, 75% of those who reported needing digital and technology support, said they had not been able to access it and nearly 60% of women-led businesses are somewhat disengaged from achieving positive climate action. Government investment in two key economic sectors is failing to reach many women-led businesses with serious implications for a just transition to net zero and a diverse, technology-enabled business economy.

Key factors repeatedly highlighted by respondents across both sectors include a misalignment in goals, a lack of awareness or understanding, an inability to access support and a lack of confidence linked to skills gaps<sup>2</sup>. Action is required to remediate the current position if our economic ambitions for the Digital/Technology and Net Zero sectors are to be realised, and women-led businesses are to be afforded a proportionate share of available funding and support resources.

This policy brief emphasises the need for renewed dialogue between Government and women-led businesses in relation to these critical economic sectors. Five policy recommendations are proposed to improve engagement and access to resources – and in so doing, boost business growth and the contribution to carbon capture by women-led businesses.

- Train advisers in the provision of gender-aware support especially in majority-male areas of the Digital/Technology and Net Zero sectors
- Implement a campaign engaging women entrepreneurs on the importance of Net Zero and provide expert, gender-aware support to optimise engagement
- Implement a campaign engaging women entrepreneurs on the tools and support available to improve digital and technology skills, in particular the skills to set digital and technology business strategies. Provide expert, gender-aware support to optimise engagement.
- Use communication channels which reach a wide range of women entrepreneurs to boost reach and engagement on Digital/Technology and Net Zero opportunities.
- Measure and regularly report on the proportion of all Digital/Technology and Net Zero funds and resources received by women-led businesses.

<sup>1</sup>Survey of Women in Enterprise 2023, Women's Enterprise Scotland (2024)

<sup>2</sup>Survey of Women in Enterprise 2023, Women's Enterprise Scotland (2024)

## Introduction

Women-led businesses in Scotland are key to driving economic growth and contributing to the country's sustainability goals. However, challenges remain in enabling their potential, particularly in the areas of Technology and Digital transformation and transitioning to Net Zero. Despite the Scottish Government's investment in those sectors, women entrepreneurs face barriers related to access, awareness, and skills. Addressing these challenges through targeted policy actions can unlock billions in economic value and accelerate Scotland's goals to a sustainable, Digital/Technology enabled economy.

The Scottish Government has already recognized the importance of the digital sector, committing £100 million to digital support programs for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), such as the DigitalBoost initiative<sup>3</sup>. However, survey data reveals significant barriers that prevent women entrepreneurs from fully capitalizing on these opportunities. Obstacles reported by respondents included a skills gap and lack of confidence, limited access to support, lack of awareness of funding, and time constraints and caring responsibilities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic which prevented women entrepreneurs in being able to take advantage of digital grants and support available<sup>4</sup>.

*"There was no support available, and I had a lot of caring responsibilities."*

With regards to Net Zero, the Scottish Government's goal of a just and green transition is backed by £5 billion in funding such as Scottish Enterprise's SMART Scotland grant and Zero Waste Scotland's Circular Economy Investment Fund<sup>5</sup>. However, women-led businesses reported facing similar barriers in this area as they did in accessing support and funding opportunities for Digital and Technology. The survey highlighted sub-optimal attitudes towards net zero and a gap in understanding. A significant proportion of women entrepreneurs were either disengaged or uncertain about their role in climate action, reported limited access to practical support and a lack of awareness and accessibility to existing financial support, leading to low application rates<sup>6</sup>.

This policy brief aims to highlight the benefit of addressing these barriers to Scotland's Digital/Technology and Net Zero goals and presents five policy recommendations from Women's Enterprise Scotland (WES) designed to drive positive and transformative change for women-led businesses in Scotland.

<sup>3</sup> Programme for Government 2021 – 2022, Scottish Government

<sup>4</sup> Survey of Women in Enterprise 2023, Women's Enterprise Scotland (2024)

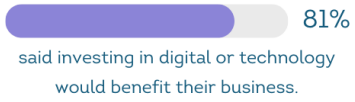
<sup>5</sup> Programme for Government 2023 – 2024, Scottish Government

<sup>6</sup> Survey of Women in Enterprise 2023, Women's Enterprise Scotland (2024)

## Key Findings

The WES 'Survey of Women in Enterprise 2023 Report', found:

### Digital and Technology Funding



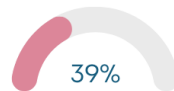
### Access to Digital and Technology Support

Of those who reported needing support to set a digital or technology strategy



said they had not been able to access this support.

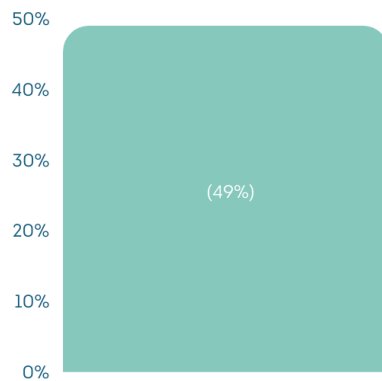
### Net Zero



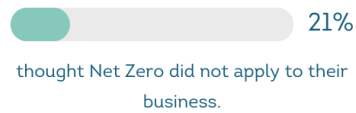
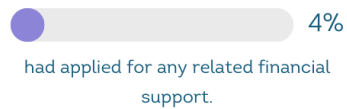
of women entrepreneurs lacked confidence in their company's ability to achieve Net Zero.

### Digital and Technology skills

The percentage of respondents that reported they did not have the skills needed to develop a digital or technology strategy for their business or effectively use digital tools:



### Net Zero Financial Support



## Conclusion and Recommendations

Women-led businesses are essential to achieving the Digital/Technology and Net Zero goals of Scotland's economy yet face substantial barriers in accessing the support they need. The statistics from the Survey of Women in Enterprise<sup>7</sup> underscore the need to bring awareness to and change attitudes towards Digital/Technology and Net Zero. Addressing these needs could be transformational for our economic strategy - more women will be able to benefit from funding and support on offer to them and have the confidence and skills to access these resources. WES proposes five policy recommendations to address the barriers causing the disconnect between women-led businesses and the ambitions of the Scottish Government for these key economic sectors. By implementing targeted policies that improve access to Digital/Technology and Net Zero funding, enhanced training, and offering dedicated support, Scotland can ensure its women entrepreneurs play their rightful role in driving both economic and environmental progress.

### Enhance Awareness of and Accessibility to Grants and Support Schemes

For women-led businesses to benefit from the grants and support schemes made available by government, they need to be aware of and able to access these resources. Increasing outreach efforts will ensure more women are informed of the Digital/Technology and Net Zero grant and support opportunities.

WES recommends:

- Using communication channels which reach a wide range of women entrepreneurs and develop gender-aware communications which engage women.
- Measuring and regularly reporting on the proportion of all Digital/Technology and Net Zero funds and resources received by women-led businesses.

### Provide Education/Incentivise Participation in Skills Development

Skills are central to achieving our ambitions for a forward-thinking and thriving economy. By increasing the capability of women-led businesses to realise opportunities in the Digital/Technology and Net Zero sectors we can accelerate the achievement of our economic goals.

WES recommends:

- Implementing a campaign engaging women entrepreneurs on the tools and support available to improve Digital/Technology skills, in particular the skills to set digital and technology business strategies. Provide dedicated gender-aware support to optimise engagement and action.
- Delivering a campaign engaging women entrepreneurs on the importance of Net Zero and providing dedicated gender-aware support to optimise engagement and action.

### Provide Dedicated Support

The application of dedicated, needs-based support is an established strategy in economic development. As women continue to start-up businesses in broadly similar percentages to men<sup>8</sup> providing dedicated support which caters to the distinct needs of women-led businesses will assist with engagement and sustained activity in the Digital/Technology and Net Zero sectors going forward.

WES recommends:

- Training advisers in the provision of gender-aware support, especially in majority-male areas of the Digital/Technology and Net Zero sectors.

For further information visit [Women's Enterprise Scotland - Research](#)

<sup>7</sup>Survey of Women in Enterprise 2023, Women's Enterprise Scotland (2024)

<sup>8</sup>Annual Reports, Business Gateway