

Experiences of small businesses in flood-stricken town help shape new internet tool

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Credit: University of the West of England

The experiences of small businesses in a town struck by severe flooding twice in the past 10 years have been used to create an internet tool designed to strengthen flood resilience among similarly sized firms nationwide.

Owners of small organisations in Tewkesbury, which was devastated by flooding in both 2007 and 2012, shared their stories of coping with high water to inform the development of the new e-learning tool.

The easy-to-use tool has been developed by researchers from the

University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) and Kingston University with funding from the UK Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

Academics were inspired to create the tool after observing that many learning resources for small organisations were focused on short-term contingency planning and the downward transfer of information from government agencies. Their tool is aimed at helping firms adapt in ways which make them more resilient to flooding, supporting them in times of changing flooding risk.

It uses a narrative approach to share resilience stories, and focuses on business-to-business communication about longer-term adaptation to flooding risks. The tool features digital stories, filmed exchanges between business people and scientists, and a forum for businesses to share learning.

Lindsey McEwen, Professor in Environmental Management at UWE Bristol, said: "This tool trials a very different approach to building the resilience of small businesses to flood risk. Here businesses share their knowledge and experiential learning of how to 'live with floods' with other small businesses."

The tool, developed as part of the [Sesame](#) flooding project, was co-produced with the owners of 10 small businesses in Tewkesbury and 15 regional and national stakeholders which help businesses develop their resilience to risk. Organisations involved included the Federation of Small Businesses, Business in the Community, Tewkesbury Borough Council, Sustainability West Midlands and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council.

Sam Holliday, Development Manager for the Gloucestershire and the West of England branch of the Federation of Small Businesses, said:

"Flooding is a serious concern for many small businesses and we welcome this initiative which is designed to help SMEs prepare for an incident and deal with it when it happens.

"I think this easy-to-use tool could prove to be a vital 'one-stop shop' resource for [small businesses](#) and we would urge all SMEs to look at it now to see how to lessen the impact of any flooding occurrence and save it as a bookmark in case the worse should happen."

Kingston University's Dr Tim Harries said the project was a great example of partnership working, with researchers working alongside the people they are researching and treating them as partners.

He said: "This was a fabulous and really effective way of working. Our partners from Tewkesbury's business community and elsewhere told us when we had a good idea and also left us in no doubt when we had come up with something that wouldn't work. The end result is much better for it. The [tool](#) is practical and down-to-earth; because of the help of our partners, it hits the target and provides exactly the kind of resource people need."

Provided by University of the West of England

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