

Safety Tech Academy Discovery Report 2022



Consequential & Considered Capital

Safety Tech Academy

Discovery Report

January 2022

Introduction to project

The UK government wants to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online.

A new sector is emerging which focuses on protecting users and communities in online spaces and is looking to support the creation of a safer and better internet for everyone.

To support this nascent sector, the Knowledge Transfer Network (KTN) has created the Safety Tech Innovation Network. It aims to grow a global community of Safety Tech professionals by providing opportunities for networking, collaboration, and a genuine dialogue for overcoming challenges unique to the sector and influencing policy making.

Through this network, Consequential and Considered Capital have been asked to run a pilot Safety Tech Academy with a targeted cohort of earlier stage businesses to test ways to support them in creating good products, building sustainable businesses, and growing the sector and its impact.

Introduction to discovery phase

As this is a pilot project, we took the time to invest in a short discovery phase to allow for a targeted and meaningful learning experience where KTN and DCMS are able to learn as much from the Safety Tech Academy as its participants. In this discovery phase, we focused on exploring the right audience for the pilot academy, what their unmet needs might be, and what types of learning experiences may best support them as they grow their businesses and contribute to a trustworthy safety tech sector.

Within this discovery phase, there were a number of questions we looked to answer:

- Who needs this tailored learning experience the most within the sector? How can we most usefully segment the sector and focus support?
- What are the biggest pain points leaders are facing in running their businesses? What are their biggest fears about what they may need to know or do in the future? What kinds of decisions are they facing? What may be holding them back?
- Where would growth and maturity of the safety tech sector support the growth and maturity of individual businesses? What do they need to know about or engage with at a sector level?
- How might a focus on impact, responsibility, and customers create a sector that supports a better and safer online experience for everyone?

This discovery phase lasted a month, from November to December 2021, and involved both desk research and quantitative research in the form of unstructured interviews. Consequential and Considered Capital reviewed the materials other partners have



contributed to the growth of the safety tech sector and its needs - in particular the [Skills and Capabilities report](#) by Foundry4, the [UK Safety Tech Sector 2021 Analysis](#) by Perspective Economics, articles published on the Safety Tech Innovation Network's website, materials provided by DCMS and KTN on their future plans and the state of the sector, as well as the websites of many companies in the sector.

Within the qualitative action research, we spoke to people who volunteered to speak with us as part of this project. For our interviews, we targeted both sector supporters - those who already represent many conversations with businesses in the sector, and safety tech business leaders themselves. The sector supporters we spoke to included Foundry4, Perspective Economics, PUBLIC, and OSTIA. For businesses, we targeted companies who had achieved between £100,000- £1,000,000 in revenue in 2020 according to research by Perspective Economics. We spoke to the CEOs of five safety tech companies in our target research group, as well as Richard Pursey, the CEO of the successful SafeToNet and a highly active member of OSTIA. Our interviews revolved around a core set of questions, but were unstructured and explorative, where we listened deeply to our interviewees and their experiences and needs. After our interviews, we conducted a thematic analysis to inform our proposed content and formats for the Academy, which are outlined below.



Summary of Discovery Findings

The [Skills and Capabilities for Safety Tech in the UK report](#) found that “safety tech does face some challenges in achieving its objectives - namely, attracting suitably-skilled technical candidates; creating a diverse workforce to better ensure products address the needs of all users; prioritising data privacy and security; and centring the people it serves within product development.”

The original report was published May 2021, and in our discovery phase seven months later we find that steps are in fact being taken to tackle many of these challenges and that many of the companies we've spoken to have recently experienced successes such as new investment or securing new contracts for big clients.

It is worth mentioning that our small number of interviews allow for indications rather than insights, but we were still able to identify some common themes that point to challenges an Academy could help to address:

TALENT

What we found in our desk research and from the sector supporters we spoke with is that most early stage businesses are focused on or worried about getting the technical talent they need to build their products. As the Skills & Capabilities Report mentions, it will be important that alongside technical talent, businesses have a diverse workforce that reflects the stakeholders in their technologies. This means for many businesses, their workforce will also need to be based in the other markets they plan to operate in, not only the UK. This is posing a problem as many funding opportunities like the ones offered by Innovate UK are restricted to UK offices and workforces.

What we heard from the businesses was that as they are taking on more projects and clients they need to deliver quickly. In order to deliver, they need to quickly ramp up the size of their teams and their capacity and capabilities, but the time it takes to source and interview talent is extremely difficult to balance - especially when it takes people away from delivery in order to hire. In particular, there are many ethical considerations that these businesses need to weigh when creating their products; balancing privacy, security, and freedom of speech with safety and protection and prevention of online harms, as well as understanding human behaviour online. The talent these companies hire need to understand these issues and how they intersect and turn into product requirements in order to effectively create products that center the benefit of their users and meet the legal and regulatory requirements of the markets they serve. The time it takes to do this onboarding can be crippling, and as the talent pool of already passionate people who understand these issues and the sector becomes smaller, the amount of time and material and resources required to get people up to speed on these issues and the product grows. This is a significant challenge for growth.

We also found that companies seem to be far more focused on technical talent and on developing their products than on commercial talent. The founders are often shouldering the burden of all commercial aspects of the business and focusing resources on engineering and product development. This may serve them well as they deliver for the first time and test their models and prove their value, but could present challenges around pipeline, cash flow, and capacity management in the future.

Another area which may be overlooked at the moment is a focus on how to build effective teams. As founders begin to hire and deliver, they will need to dedicate time to thinking about the structure of their teams and how they interact with each other. Especially in safety tech, which requires multidisciplinary teams who can understand all areas of the customer's problem space and work together quickly to prove their value and create products that really do protect people and communities. Joining a growing company and sector can be a huge draw for talent who are fielding competing offers. On a sector level, a consideration of career paths and what progression may look like within the sector as it grows and matures could be a meaningful way to attract prospective and younger talent.

PRODUCTS THAT ADDRESS USER NEEDS

We heard from both supporters of the sector and business owners alike that access to sensitive data was essential for the growth of this sector and the creation of meaningful products that do more good than harm. Businesses raised the importance of understanding human behaviour and also the needs of brands in a B2B context alongside the data. We believe this challenge is best solved by projects already underway with PUBLIC and others and should not be focused on within this Safety Tech Academy pilot.

We also heard a great deal about the importance of IP within the sector and how an understanding or taxonomy of online harms is often the core competitive advantage for many founders and their companies, and so any in-depth focus on product or online harms topics within the Academy would not be considered useful or desirable by businesses. There is scope, however, for an exploration of the ethical challenges facing product development across the whole sector being discussed throughout the Academy and being addressed within the Safety Tech Innovation Network.

CUSTOMERS

It's clear that many of the founders in this sector are driven by a personal passion and connection to the subject matter. They believe deeply in the mission of the sector and in the good they want their businesses to have, and many come from careers in the areas which they have now focused their businesses on. What this means is that their first few customers are largely coming from their networks or their contacts, and they are working with people who have a similar level of understanding about the issues their business is trying to solve. This situation allows businesses to focus on the work and means they don't need to invest as much in marketing, sales or business development. We heard a fair amount of reticence to spend money anywhere else but the product - not on marketing, commercial areas, or their operations. However, as those customers and contacts are tapped and the space matures, it will become necessary to be able to educate both sales experts and potential customers on the sector, its mission, and the problems it looks to solve.

MARKET STRATEGIES

We heard from many of the earlier stage businesses that for them, growth rarely looks like an IPO. Given the size of the market and the number of customers and potential solutions, most earlier staged businesses are looking to validate their products and services, prove value, and get enough attention and relationships to then be acquired. Though some businesses have products they believe could create a sustainable market niche and are looking to consolidate that corner of the market, many sector supporters point towards some inevitable consolidation in the market. In this context, helping founders to navigate emerging markets and create a market strategy would be of value for the growth of a sector that has proven products.

For a sector which deals with highly sensitive and powerful information, as the market becomes more crowded there are many fears that a few irresponsible companies could ruin it for everyone. In this context, being trustworthy and knowing how to prove that is an important way to stand out.

COLLABORATION

There is a strong desire for collaboration in the sector as businesses were very interested in growing their networks. Founders were open to the idea of collaboration and community, but wanted a clear value exchange on how that was going to help them grow their business. They would be especially keen to participate in an Academy that offered opportunities for finding partners for grant applications and potential partners for customers - especially internationally. They were equally interested in finding out if others in the sector were potential customers, or if they could form relationships that would result in recommendations or referrals of customers or funding opportunities.

Goals & Objectives for Pilot

Based on our research and the indications we have about common challenges, we propose that the pilot Academy focus on building the market for safety tech with foundational resources that will support growth. We will look to develop this pilot academy in ways that

allow us to translate indications into insights in a collaborative, co-created way with the participants.

Goals for the pilot Safety Tech Academy:

- Finding ways to segment the sector usefully for support and learning experiences
- Finding the unmet needs of the sector and learning the best ways to help address them
- Creating a repeatable and scalable offer for companies with a roadmap to creating good products, building sustainable businesses, and growing the sector and its impact
- Discovering more about what capabilities companies need or already have to create products that tackle hard safety challenges and comply with regulation

Objectives of the pilot Safety Tech Academy:

- BUSINESS RELEVANCY: to provide small companies with the resources they need in the moment to build and mature their business and create a roadmap for their future
- POSITIVE SECTOR IMPACT: to provide targeted and tailored support that influences the conditions for a sector to create trustworthy technology
- CREATE A COLLABORATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE: to provide access to a cohort-based learning opportunity with meaningful content business leaders can't find elsewhere
- BUILD A VALUE PROPOSITION: to determine the benefit of providing an academy while building a sector

Sector Segmentation & Target Audience for Academy Pilot

One of the most important considerations for the academy will be identifying ways to segment its participants so that the content can be as targeted and relevant as possible. It's possible different cohorts of the academy will be targeted at different segments of the sector and therefore have a different focus based on those needs and the growth of the sector in the coming years.

There are a number of useful ways to segment the sector for a targeted learning experience:

- Annual income generation
- Number of customers
- Number of years in the sector
- Number of employees
- Amount of investment
- Product readiness; in development or delivery

At the moment, the sector has 100 companies that would be identified as supplying safety tech. We recommend for this pilot Safety Tech Academy to have a cohort of 8-10 companies, 10% of the sector. We believe it will be most useful to focus on earlier stage businesses who have generated between £50-£400k in income in 2020.

We believe this segmentation would indicate companies who have a market-ready or near-market-ready product and who are about to go through a period of scaling, and would most benefit from taking some time to set strong foundations for this growth.

Screening Questions for the Pilot

To participate in the pilot, you will need to:

- have a market-ready, or near-market-ready, Safety Tech product;
- be preparing for a period of scaling (for example, have a growth strategy in place);
- commit to attending the Academy for 15 hours of tuition and learning during February and March;
- have between 4 and 15 employees.;
- have a trading presence in the UK.

As this is a trial programme, we will also be seeking to:

- build an overall trial cohort of companies which represent different categories of Safety Tech;
- recognise the need to build sector diversity through supporting under-represented groups in tech

Proposed Content & Format

This pilot Safety Tech Academy will focus on helping a cohort of 10 safety tech companies who are about to scale. We propose the theme of this pilot be market building. Throughout the pilot, participants will co-design materials that will help them build a market for the sector as their shared thread, which can also be leveraged to benefit their businesses. Together, the materials will provide the start of a roadmap towards being a mission-led business which contributes to the growth of a trustworthy sector.

Format for each module:


- A 1.5hr Online Session hosted on zoom - each module in the programme will introduce concepts that are essential to an early stage business and be accompanied by a co-design session that will support founders in creating materials and resources that will support their future and help build a market for safety tech.
- Access to Teachable Platform - an all-in-one online course platform hosting curated pre-recorded videos by subject matter experts, the decks used during live sessions, and links to extra reading materials for participants to access on their own time. Participants will have access to Teachable throughout the pilot and for 1 month afterwards.
- Online Office Hours - 1hr access to facilitators for any participant to drop by and ask questions, receive coaching, or follow-up on the materials created in sessions



Programme Learning Principles:

- We design and deliver content that is useful to participants, balancing comprehension with depth and new ideas with proven strategies
- We encourage the participants to apply what they are learning as they learn it by creating immersive experiences and experiments
- We turn complex concepts into accessible ideas that encourage participants to have engaging discussions and find what works best for their own businesses
- Participants are aware of their own responsibility in contributing meaningfully to the course and its aims
- We embrace the KTN values of open, creative, collaborative, and determined

Proposed Programme Outline:

- **Kick-Off:** A 30 minute session for participants to introduce themselves and to establish the aims and cadence of the course, to determine how we want to work together, and to focus the course on the mission of the sector (guest speaker). To be included as part of Module 1.
 - **Module 1 - Attracting Board Members, Advisors, and Building a Network:** Overview of the importance and roles board members and advisors can play, and how to know what you want and need to find the right people. Co-design ways to recognise what advisors need from you, and ways to create practices within your organisation for taking advice.
 - **Module 2 - Growing High Performing Teams:** Overview on different team structures, the importance of culture and practices, and how to hire people who can translate ethical issues into product requirements. Co-design the ingredients for a sector intro to an onboarding deck for employees new to the sector.
 - **Module 3 - Building a Relevant Brand:** Overview of the importance of being trustworthy, story arcs, and common issues facing emerging sectors. Co-design a story arc for the sector to help create more relevancy and the beginning of a shared narrative.
 - **Module 4 - Attracting Investment:** Overview of funding strategies and market analysis. Co-design materials that could be used to educate investors and funders in the sector and its potential.
 - **Module 5 - Going International:** Overview of steps you should follow when preparing to move internationally. Co-design session to identify common target markets and create the beginning of sector level materials for the Department of International Trade to use in building international partnerships for UK Safety Tech companies.
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- **Module 6 - Designing your Roadmap:** A closing session to help the cohort develop a broad plan for the future and determine next steps for the co-designed materials.
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Evaluation

KTN will be responsible for managing the impact evaluation of the course, but we propose that it is built into the Academy in a variety of ways as it happens, rather than happening only at the end. Proposed evaluation metrics based on the objectives of the course are:

BUSINESS RELEVANCY: *to provide small companies with the resources they need in the moment to build and mature their business and create a roadmap for their future*

Impact measurements:

- Continuous attendance for each module
- Feedback from anyone in the sector on the Academy offer
- Engagement within the co-design sessions
- Feedback from the cohort on the usefulness of each module and how it will impact their business afterward

POSITIVE SECTOR IMPACT: *to provide targeted and tailored support that influences the conditions for a sector to create trustworthy technology*

Impact measurement: feedback from the cohort, KTN & DCMS, and the sector on the materials created in the Academy

CREATE A COLLABORATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE: *to provide access to a cohort-based learning opportunity with meaningful content business leaders can't find elsewhere*

Impact measurement: engagement within the co-design sessions

BUILD A VALUE PROPOSITION: *to determine the benefit of providing an academy while building a sector*

Impact measurement: number of applications for the course, feedback from the cohort



Timeline of the Pilot

Task	February 14-18	February 21-25	Feb 28 - March 4	March 7-11	March 14-18	March 21-25	March 28-31
Kickoff & Course 1	Kickoff & Module 1						
Office hours							
Retro & revise							
Course 2		Module 2					
Office hours							
Course 3			Module 3				
Office hours							
Course 4				Course 4			
Office hours							
Course 5					Course 5		
Office hours							
Course 6						Course 6	
Office hours							
Impact Review / Retro							

Marketing Recommendations

In the course of our conversations with business leaders, we realised quickly that many of them thought we were from DCMS, and that they don't fully appreciate the differences between DCMS, KTN, and OSTIA. Many of them thought we may have the power to provide them with future funding opportunities like the recent safety tech challenge. This meant they were initially far less open in discussing their challenges with us.

With this in mind, we recommend for this pilot and for any future Safety Tech Academy, the marketing make it clear the Academy is a safe place to tackle business challenges, and that nothing discussed in the Academy would ever impact future investment or involvement in opportunities from DCMS or others.

We look forward to co-creating a Safety Tech Academy that provides real value to safety tech companies and helps to build a market for the sector.

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