



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Evaluation of Help to Grow: Management

End of year one evaluation report
March 2022

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Executive Summary

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has commissioned Ipsos, working in partnership with Institute for Employment Studies (IES), to undertake an independent evaluation of the Help to Grow: Management (HtGM) programme. This summary presents headline findings from an early process evaluation of the programme carried out between **October 2021 and March 2022**. It is based on analysis of available data and evidence on the first 200 cohorts of the programme, **3,328** SMEs who registered for the programme; 50 consultations with programme completers, HtGM mentors and Business Schools, and 171 responses to an online survey administered to participants after completing the programme¹.

Overview of Help to Grow: Management

Help to Grow: Management was announced in the March 2021 Spring Budget and delivery started in June 2021. It is a 12-week training programme delivered by a network of business schools across the UK. It comprises four parts of three modules each and wraparound support for SME leaders in the form of 1:1 business mentoring, peer-learning and access to an alumni network. The programme aims to upskill SME leaders across a range of leadership and management practices. Participants are supported to use this learning to develop and implement a plan to drive change within their business aimed at improving firm-level productivity.

Approach to the early process evaluation

The findings presented in this report are based on evidence collected through:

- **Analysis of programme monitoring data** – including data collected on programme participants and their firms through registration forms and diagnostic surveys.
- **Post-completion survey** – issued by Ipsos to the first **647 SME leaders** to have completed the HtGM programme and received 171 responses (a 26% response rate).
- **30 depth interviews** – with SME leaders who had completed HtGM.
- **10 depth interviews** – with mentors involved in delivery of HtGM.
- **10 depth interviews** – with Business Schools involved in the design and delivery of HtGM.

¹ These figures are based on the data reported in BEIS Monitoring Data (PB Tracker) 4th April 2022. At this point in time, BEIS and CABS were in the process of finalising management data definitions and therefore some figures reported may not be in line with the latest revised data.

Recruitment and retainment

Business school engagement

As of 4th April 2022, a total of **46 business schools**² had been recruited to deliver the HtGM programme and had formed a combined total of **200 cohorts**³ and 3,328 registered SME leaders had started or had been delivered. **Since the programme was launched, an additional 122 of the planned HtGM cohorts had been cancelled.** This reflects the lower than anticipated demand for the programme. Business schools reported difficulties in recruiting and filling their scheduled cohorts. In some cases, planned cohorts were combined to ensure there were enough participants.

Business schools were generally positive about their experience of delivering the HtGM programme to date. They felt it offered the potential to utilise their knowledge, skills and experience to benefit local SMEs. One had been closely involved in the development of the programme content and many were building on previous experience of delivering similar courses. It was generally considered to be a good fit with their wider offer. Some saw it as an opportunity to strengthen business engagement and further develop their expertise.

The main challenge to HtGM delivery reported by business schools was the recruitment of SME leaders to the programme.

Marketing and promotion

Help to Grow: Management has been promoted through a coordinated national marketing campaign delivered by BEIS. The campaign included The Chancellor's announcement in the Spring Budget 2021, which **generated high levels of initial interest in the programme.**⁴

Business schools were of the view that more national marketing of HtGM was required to raise awareness of the programme amongst eligible SMEs. The national branding of HtGM was considered by business schools to have been helpful for raising awareness of the programme and early recruitment. However, business schools suggested that national marketing of the programme could be **more consistent** (e.g., referenced more regularly in ministerial speeches or on government websites) and **less general**.

Participant recruitment

SME leaders were motivated to apply to HtGM by a combination of factors but placed most importance on what they would personally gain from the programme. Individually, applicants were interested in the programme as part of their ongoing personal development, seeking to either upgrade existing management skills, fill 'knowledge gaps' or to access formal management and leadership training for the first time; and to expand their peer support networks. SME leaders also applied to develop the necessary skills to improve their business

² Full list provided in Annex A

³ A cohort is comprised of 15-20 participants that carry out the course modules and peer group calls together

⁴ As of December 2021, over half of the general Expressions of Interest (EOIs) submitted to the website were done so in March 2021, the same month as the programme was announcement by the Chancellor in the Spring Budget.

operations; and build confidence and understanding in how to grow their business in the context of COVID-19.

SME leaders favoured HtGM over other training programmes because of its perceived quality, flexibility and affordability. The programme was perceived to be based on industry experience rather than being over-reliant on academic, theory-based content; and offered a variety of course start dates to choose.

Attendance

To date, the programme appears to be achieving relatively high and consistent levels of attendance and engagement amongst participants. The SME leaders who were interviewed said they participated in most sessions of each element of the programme and one business school reported a 95% attendance rate. Where there were examples of non-attendance, the main reasons were personal illness, time commitments (especially during holiday periods) and businesses needing to prioritise client requirements, which was most prevalent amongst those who were smaller or less financially stable.

Profile of HtGM completers

The evidence to date suggests that the programme has been successful in stimulating demand amongst a range of businesses and individuals, in terms of registration, enrolments and programme completers:

- **The majority (84%) of SME leaders who registered an interest in HtGM worked in private limited companies that operated across a broad range of sectors.** There was representation amongst registrants across all regions of the UK and the programme appears to be predominantly reaching those firms who are reasonably well established rather than start-ups.
- **HtGM is attracting businesses of varying sizes across the SME spectrum.** Businesses enrolled on the HtGM programme by early December 2021 employed an average of 26 staff and reported an average recent turnover of £2.9m.
- The evidence to date suggests that the programme has been **successful in stimulating demand amongst a diverse group of SME leaders and reaching typically under-supported businesses** (female and ethnic minority led): one in five (20%) of the SME leaders completing the programme worked in businesses with at least one senior leader from an ethnic minority background. Around eight in ten (79%) had at least one female senior leader within their business.

Quality of programme delivery

SME leaders are reporting generally high levels of satisfaction with HtGM programme delivery. The majority (92%) of those completing the survey were satisfied with how it was

delivered throughout.⁵ Moreover, most programme completers (91%) indicated that they would be likely to recommend the programme to other business leaders, with two thirds reporting that they would be very likely to do so.

Contact time

There were mixed views amongst business school interviewees on the optimum length of the programme. One thought it was too long, others commented that the length was about right, but that it was too intensive with too much content to cover in the timescales. One business school thought the programme should be delivered over a longer period. There is a trade-off in terms of length versus intensity, but there was no clear consensus amongst business schools that one or the other should change.

The SME leaders who participated in an interview were typically satisfied with **the time commitment** involved, reporting that the length (12 weeks of modules with mentoring continuing for up to 4 weeks) and intensity (50 hours) were sufficient to enable them to learn and make changes in their business.

Number of sessions

Programme participants thought that the overall **number of sessions** offered through HtGM was about right. However, around two fifths of those responding to the post-completion survey said they would have liked **more case study workshops** – indicating that these exceeded the initial low levels of interest. HtGM completers also reflected that they would have valued **slightly more** mentoring sessions and **slightly fewer** peer-group calls.

Frequency and length of sessions

SME leaders who had completed the programme also reflected positively on the **length of sessions**, with the majority agreeing that the duration was about right for all elements of the programme.

HtGM completers were also generally satisfied with the **frequency of sessions**, with most agreeing that the time between these was about right. However, those who did not think that the time between sessions was about right typically thought the sessions **were too close together**.

Delivery mode

The HtGM programme was launched in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The early cohorts of HtGM were expected to be administered predominantly online, with some face-to-face delivery at the discretion of individual business schools when possible. The results from the post-completion survey indicated that most business schools chose to deliver the four case study modules in person.⁶

⁵ SME leaders can have up to two weeks of HtGM left at the time of survey completion.

⁶ Case study modules were: M3: Internationalisation, M6: Building a brand, M9: High performance workplace and M12: Implementing GAPs.

Overall, most participants were satisfied with the level of face-to-face delivery, although two in ten were dissatisfied. Survey and interview data indicated that SME leaders valued a hybrid of online and in-person delivery but expressed a general preference for face-to-face delivery.⁷ Participants valued the flexibility and convenience of online sessions, especially when they did not live near the business school, but also appreciated the sense of teamwork and collaboration that the in-person sessions provided.

SME leaders expressed an overall preference for face-to-face delivery for the modular content but less of a preference on delivery mode for the mentoring and peer learning sessions. There was a preference for some face-to-face delivery of all modules.

Course content

Feedback from SME leaders and business schools indicated high levels of satisfaction with the overall design and content of the HtGM modules. The majority of SME leaders considered most of the modules to be relevant to their business, with strategy and innovation and vision, mission and values considered the most relevant. Module content and case studies were considered applicable and relevant to businesses and were said to stimulate thinking amongst SME leaders. **SME leaders who had completed HtGM were divided on the relevance of the internationalisation case study (Module 3),** with around half reporting that it was relevant to their business and around half reporting that it was irrelevant.

The main area for improvement to the course content recommended by business schools and SME leaders was the volume of module content to be delivered. There was broad consensus amongst business schools that there was too much content in the modules, making it difficult (or “impossible”) for tutors to cover them in full.

Mentoring

In the first year of HtGM delivery, mentors were paid per hour for a total of up to ten hours per participant (delivered from module 3 onwards).⁸ In future years, the intention is to transition to a pro-bono mentoring model. **The feedback on mentoring from mentors, business schools and programme participants presented below all relate to the Year 1 delivery model.**

Mentors were recruited by business schools through their own networks (alumni or existing business contacts **and were typically professional mentors, trainers and/or coaches.** Interviews with mentors indicated that they were often specialists in SMEs and had previous experience mentoring SME leaders. Mentors reported that the aims, objectives, and role of the mentor, and HtGM overall, were clear and felt well supported by the programme administrators and other staff at the Business School.

⁷ Evidence from depth interview programme: Most SME leaders reported that the programme offered a good balance between online modules and in-person activities (10) although some would have preferred slightly more face-to-face contact, but still with some online content (6).

⁸ Mentees can follow up with mentors for up to one month after the end of module 12. Any continuing relationship after this is not under the HtGM branding.

As of early April 2022, 1,457 mentoring relationships had been formed for HtGM.⁹

The mentoring element of the programme was very highly regarded by programme participants, scoring higher satisfaction levels than the programme overall. This was confirmed through interviews with programme completers, who valued the tailored, bespoke and personalised support that could be delivered through the mentoring element of the programme.

Around three quarters (77%) of programme completers said they felt they had been well matched to their mentor. Interviews with SME leaders indicated that they felt their mentor's experience was aligned to their individual and business needs. Mentors and mentees agreed that the business school had paid close attention to matching programme participants with mentors.

Over three quarters (78%) of programme participants had completed a Growth Action Plan (GAP) at the time of the post-completion survey¹⁰. Just over half (58%) of those who had been matched with a mentor used the mentoring support to help develop and implement their GAP (Figure 22).¹¹ Of those who had used the mentoring support to help develop their GAP, the majority (96%) said they had been well supported by their mentors in doing this.

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)¹²

The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is the online platform used to hold online workshops, peer group calls, and host learning materials. The VLE was not highlighted by SME leaders as crucial to the successful delivery of the programme, however a few noted that it was a valuable 'home' for the programme materials. The twelve online feedback surveys that participants are asked to complete after each module were not deemed to be particularly onerous, although some SME leaders were unclear on what they were for and how they linked to other data collection.

There was some criticism from business schools on the usability of the VLE. One said it was difficult to extract data from this (e.g., on attendance at cohort level), although they thought this had improved in the second version. Another felt that issues remained as data was not fully automated, relying on participants logging their participation, possibly leading to underreported attendance.

Programme effectiveness

All evidence on outcomes is based on self-reported data and should be treated as indicative, without any causal inference. Self-reported data is often subject to a degree of

⁹ 'Matched to mentor' in PB tracker for all live and delivered cohorts

¹⁰ As part of HtGM, all participants are required to complete a Growth Action Plan to drive productivity improvements within their business post-participation. Participants can use their mentors to support this.

¹¹ 163 out of 171 business leaders had been matched with a mentor (95%)

¹² The VLE was updated in October 2021 with improvements to the surveys and user navigation. The data reported in this section includes a small number of responses from before these changes were made.

optimism bias – a tendency to overestimate or be overly optimistic – and the findings presented in the following sections should be interpreted in this context.¹³

This narrative is consistent with the expected progression set out in the Theory of

Change: it is expected that benefits will accrue at the individual level in the first instance, before diffusing into wider business benefits. It is anticipated that more business level benefits will have been accrued at the time of the post-completion follow up survey, which will be administered by Ipsos six months after completion (launching May 2022).

Self-reported individual outcomes

Early evidence indicates that SME leaders had improved skills and confidence after completing the programme. Comparisons between capabilities at the time of registration and post completion show that more than half (59%) of HtGM completers experienced an improvement in their self-reported skills to lead their business over the next three years. In around one third of cases respectively (both 35%), programme completers also reported feeling better able to achieve their goals, even in the face of obstacles; and having the skills required to manage their employees over the next three years.

Diffusion of knowledge

Most (89%) SME leaders had shared what they had learned or gained from HtGM with others in their business within six weeks of completing the programme. This diffusion of learning is a key mechanism for generating impact at the business level. These findings therefore provide early indicative evidence in support of the Theory of Change, specifically that the benefits to individual leaders from participation in the programme are likely to translate into benefits to their business. Insights from in depth interviews with programme completers indicated that this diffusion of learning within their businesses tended to happen informally.

Self-reported business outcomes

Following completion of HtGM, SME leaders reported that their firms had a range of **business practice capabilities**. More than half (62%) said that their firm's understanding of **financial management** and the use of financial data to support strategic decision making was strong. Over half (55% and 54%, respectively) of business leaders were also confident in their firm's understanding of ways to improve operational efficiency and ability to effectively adopt digital solutions to help grow their business.

Following completion of the programme, SME leaders reported improvements to a range of firm level strategic capabilities and experience (Figure 29). The breadth of results reflects the range of topics covered in the HtGM curriculum and the different capabilities, interest and experience firms have at the beginning of the programme. There was no single business-level outcome commonly reported by programme completers, although half of SME leaders thought that their firm was better able to implement a business plan and strategy (50%) and a four in ten

¹³ See 'Optimism Bias' in HMT Green Book (2022)

agreed their firm had improved in its ability to communicate its vision, mission and value statements (43%)

Changes implemented within businesses

Around half (54%) of HtGM participants who responded to the post-completion survey had already made changes to the way they manage, organise, or operate their business.

These changes focussed on leadership and employee engagement, company vision, operational efficiency and customer targeting (Figure 29). The nature of the changes implemented to date are closely related to the individual leader, facilitated by the informal diffusion of knowledge. To date, there is limited evidence of organisational changes relating to formal business structures and operations (e.g., customer targeting, data analytics).

Reflections on effectiveness of delivery

What were the biggest drivers behind individual and business outcomes?

- The HtGM curriculum was comprehensive and included topics that were generally relevant to participants' business needs.
- The mentoring relationships were an important mechanism to consolidate HtGM participants' learning and helped to 'fill the gaps' in their understanding.
- Mentors were flexible and ensured that support was tailored to the SME leaders' needs.
- Peer group calls gave participants the confidence to embed learning.

Where could delivery be improved to support individual and business level outcomes?

- **More time between sessions** (e.g., between module and peer learning calls) to ensure that participants have enough time to digest the modular content and identify areas where they would value more support through the mentoring or peer-learning sessions.
- **Streamline the content covered in the curriculum or extend the number of module sessions.** Business schools and programme participants agreed that there was too much content to be sufficiently covered in twelve sessions.
- **More flexibility to accommodate business demands on SME leaders.** This would help minimise last minute absences and address any resulting knowledge gaps.
- Linked to this, SME leaders expressed an interest in some flexibility in the design of the programme. There was a preference for **mentoring sessions to be offered earlier** in the course delivery to help consolidate knowledge in tandem with the course content, rather than using the earlier sessions to rapidly cover lessons to date.
- Secondly, participants would have valued the option to have **changed the composition of peer group calls during the programme** to ensure that they could develop networks and share learning across their cohort more freely.

Introduction

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has commissioned Ipsos, working in partnership with Institute for Employment Studies (IES), to undertake an independent evaluation of the Help to Grow: Management (HtGM) programme. The programme is targeted at SME leaders and incorporates an intensive training programme aimed at improving leadership and management skills and addressing firm-level productivity challenges. This report presents early findings from the process evaluation, based on evidence collected from October 2021 to March 2022.

Overview of Help to Grow: Management

The Government announced the **Help to Grow programme** in the March 2021 Spring Budget. It comprises two sub-programmes – one designed to support SME business leaders to improve their management and leadership practices (the focus of this study) and a second focused on digital adoption. They are both designed to drive improvements in SME profitability and productivity. **Help to Grow: Management** is a 12-week training programme delivered by a network of business schools across the UK. It comprises four parts of three modules each and wraparound support for SME leaders in the form of 1:1 business mentoring, peer-learning and access to an alumni network. The programme aims to upskill SME leaders across a range of leadership and management practices. Participants are supported to use this learning to develop and implement a plan to drive change within their business aimed at improving firm-level productivity.

The HtGM programme was launched in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and is a key mechanism by which the government expects to support economic recovery. In addition to its influence on programme rationale and design (see Theory of Change in Annex D), it is important to acknowledge the unprecedented challenges the pandemic posed, and will continue to pose, for programme delivery and SME decision making. The findings set out in this report on the early implementation of the HtGM programme should be interpreted within this context.

Evaluation aims and objectives

The aim of the evaluation is to assess the **effectiveness** of the approaches taken to the design, development and delivery of Help to Grow: Management and its **impact** on SME leaders, their businesses and the wider economy. Key objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Understand how to improve **delivery** (process evaluation)
- Measure the **early impacts** of the programme (e.g. adoption of new practices)
- Generate evidence to inform **future** programme design and funding (strategic question)
- Embed effective data collection practices to enable **longer-term** impact evaluation
- Evaluate the programme's impacts on **productivity and recovery** using administrative data.

- Understand the **impacts of COVID-19** on delivery and businesses over time (strategic question).

These aims and objectives are incorporated within five high-level evaluation questions to be addressed through the evaluation (Table 1). This report is structured around questions 1-3, presenting evidence collected to date in relation to each.

Table 1: Help to Grow: Management high-level evaluation questions

#	High Level Evaluation Questions
1	How effective is the programme in recruiting businesses and ensuring they complete the programme?
2	To what extent is the programme successfully delivering high quality business support?
3	To what extent is the programme effective at teaching new skills and encouraging business leaders to adopt new practices?
4	What early changes are businesses making as a result of participating in the programme?
5	What other factors influence how and what changes businesses are making after they complete the programme?

Source: Help to Grow: Management ITT documents

Methodology

Overall evaluation approach

The evaluation will assess delivery of the HtGM programme and early outcomes and impacts for individual leaders, their businesses and the wider economy. It will incorporate quantitative and qualitative primary data collection through surveys, interviews and case studies with programme participants, business schools and wider stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of the programme. It will also incorporate analysis of programme monitoring data and linking to national administrative datasets to enable assessment of the longer-term impact of the programme on SME performance, including GVA and productivity.

Approach to the early process evaluation

The purpose of this report is to present the early findings collected through the evaluation in response to the three key process evaluation questions (Q1-3 in Table 1). It is important to note that the findings presented in this report are **not based on representative samples**. Moreover, it is likely that the sample of respondents to the participant primary data collection is subject to a

degree of self-selection bias, meaning those who have engaged are more likely to be those that were more engaged with the programme and / or viewed it favourably. As such, the findings are intended to provide emerging insights into the effectiveness of the processes associated with the delivery HtGM rather than definitive findings and should be interpreted as such.

This report also summarises the emerging evidence collected to date on outcomes and the relative contribution of each element of the programme to these outcomes. All evidence on outcomes set out in this report is based on self-reported data and should be treated as indicative, without any causal inference.

The findings in this early process evaluation report are based on evidence collected through:

- **Analysis of programme monitoring data** – including data collected on programme participants and their firms through registration forms and diagnostic surveys. This stage also incorporated a review of available data on participating business schools from BEIS monitoring data, including numbers of enrolments and delivery to date.
- **Post-completion survey** – Ipsos issued an online survey to the first **647 SME leaders** to have completed the HtGM programme. The survey was designed to gather feedback on their experiences of participating in the programme and emerging outcomes for themselves and their businesses. It was launched on 4 November 2021 to participants who had completed the final module of the programme within the previous two to six weeks and is administered on a rolling monthly basis to SME leaders completing the programme. There were 171 responses to the survey by March 2022, representing a response rate of 26% (see Annex A for more details).
- **30 depth interviews with SME leaders who had completed HtGM** – Ipsos and IES conducted a programme of telephone interviews with HtGM participants who responded to the post-completion survey and provided consent to be recontacted. The interviews built on the data collected through the survey to explore in more detail participants' experiences of the programme and perceived current and potential future benefits to them and their business from this.
- **10 depth interviews with mentors** – Ipsos conducted telephone interviews with mentors who had supported SME leaders on the early cohorts of the HtGM programme. These discussions explored the mentor recruitment and onboarding process, how the mentoring support was being used in practice, what was working well and any aspects of the mentoring offer that could be further developed or improved.
- **10 depth interviews with Business schools** – Ipsos and IES conducted a programme of interviews with a series of business schools involved in designing and implementing the programme. The discussions gathered evidence on their experience of delivering the programme to date, identifying key areas of success and elements of the programme they thought could be improved.

Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** presents the early evidence to date on the effectiveness of HtGM in recruiting businesses and ensuring they completed the programme (Evaluation Question 1)
- **Chapter 3** summarises feedback on the quality of HtGM delivery to date (Evaluation Question 2)
- **Chapter 4** provides evidence on the effectiveness of the programme at teaching new skills and encouraging business leaders to adopt new practices (Evaluation Question 3)
- **Chapter 5** provides summary conclusions, reflecting what has worked well, and less well, in the delivery of HtGM to date.

The main body of the report is supported by the following annexes:

- **Annex A** – Response rates of the post-completion survey
- **Annex B** – List of Business Schools involved in Y1 of programme delivery
- **Annex C** – Theory of Change and logic model.

2. Recruitment and retainment

Summary of key findings in relation to Evaluation Question 1: How effective is the programme in recruiting businesses and ensuring they complete the programme?

- In the first year of delivery (June 2021 to end of March 2022), HtGM recruited **46 business schools**¹⁴ who had formed **200 cohorts** of programme participants. Of these, around a third were scheduled, a third were in delivery and the remaining third had completed by April 2022.
- The 200 cohorts represented a combined total of **3,328 programme registrations**¹⁵.
- Recruitment of SME leaders to HtGM was the main challenge to programme delivery identified by participating business schools, with many reporting difficulties in recruiting and filling scheduled cohorts. Since the programme was launched, **122 planned HtGM cohorts had been cancelled**.¹⁶
- HtGM has been promoted through a coordinated national marketing campaign delivered by BEIS, which has been supplemented with ad hoc local promotion by business schools.
- The programme is attracting SMEs of a range of different **sizes** and from different **sectors**. Early evidence suggests HtGM been successful in stimulating demand amongst a **diverse group of SME leaders** and reaching some under-supported businesses (female and ethnic minority led).
- Participants who had completed the programme reflected positively on their experience of the application and onboarding process, although there was some potential for improvement identified in relation to clarity on where to go with queries and the time taken to respond to the initial application.
- Business leaders who participated in HtGM found the programme offer to be **relevant** and **relatable** to their business. SME leaders' expectations of HtGM were generally focussed on the benefits to them as leaders within their business.
- Once enrolled onto the programme, **attendance and completion rates were relatively high** suggesting high levels of commitment amongst those who signed up.

Introduction

This chapter presents evidence collected to date on the effectiveness of HtGM in recruiting SME leaders and ensuring they complete the programme. It begins with an overview of engagement of business schools to deliver the programme, followed by discussion of the

¹⁴ As of March 2022, five of these business schools had not published cohort dates but were registered to the programme

¹⁵ This figure is based on registrations to specific business schools as reported in BEIS Monitoring Data (PB tracker 4th April 2022). Registration figures include ineligible participants as eligibility checks take place after registration.

¹⁶ The 122 cancelled cohorts are not included in the 200 reported in the first bullet point, which includes those scheduled, in delivery or completed.

approach taken to marketing and promotion and participant recruitment. A profile of those SME leaders completing the programme is provided. The analysis draws on evidence from interviews with programme completers, mentors and business schools, data collected through the post-completion survey and programme monitoring data provided by BEIS.

It is important to acknowledge that this evidence relates to the first year of programme delivery, which was severely impacted by COVID-19 – this should be taken into account in the interpretation of the findings.

2.1 Business school engagement

As of 4th April 2022, a total of **46 business schools**¹⁷ had been recruited to deliver the HtGM programme. Figure 1 shows the distribution of HtGM cohorts across the UK: showing the number of cohorts in each region and the percentage of all SME leaders registered to the programme in each region.¹⁸

Participating business schools had formed a combined total of **200 cohorts** of programme participants by early April 2022, of which around a third were scheduled, a third were in delivery and the remaining third had completed (Table 2). A total of **2,612 SME leaders** had enrolled onto an HtGM cohort, representing a conversion rate of 78% of the **3,328** who had registered an interest in the programme¹⁹. Approximately 3% of SME leaders that registered for HtGM were ineligible.

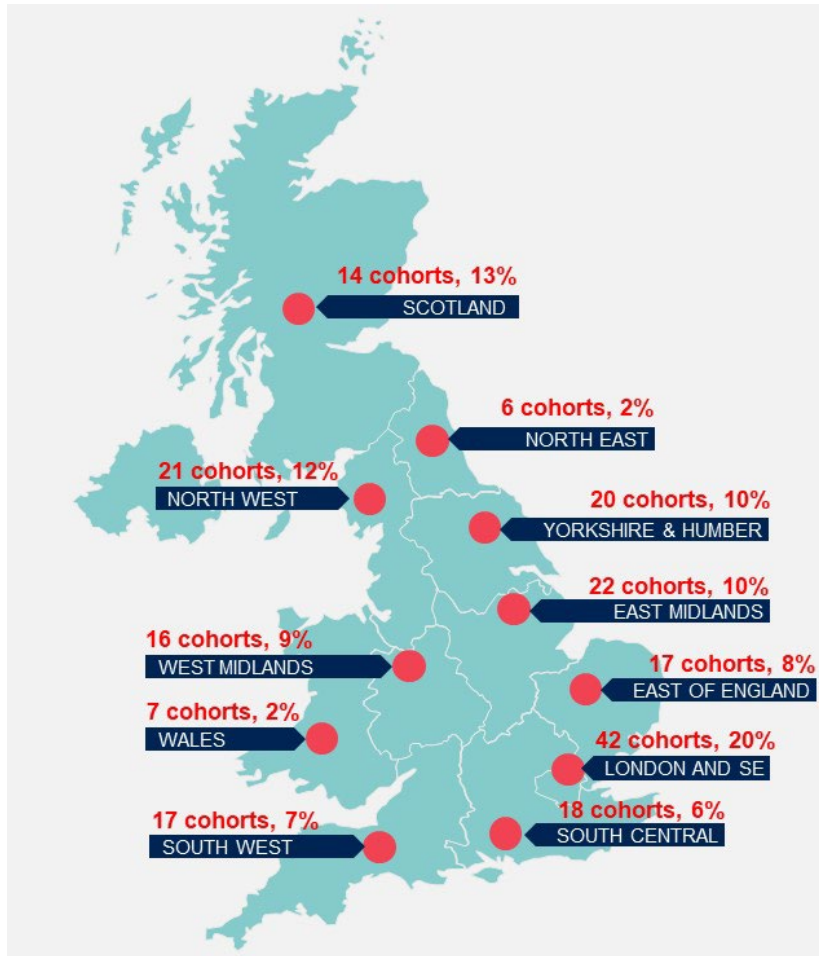
Since the programme was launched, 122 of the planned HtGM cohorts had been cancelled. This reflects a lower than anticipated demand for the programme. Business schools reported difficulties in recruiting and filling their scheduled cohorts. In some cases, planned cohorts were combined to ensure there were enough participants. Business schools' views on the factors behind the lower than anticipated demand for HtGM are discussed later in this chapter (section 2.2).

¹⁷ Full list provided in Annex A

¹⁸ This analysis is based on data extracted on 4th April 2022, which did not include three of the most recently registered business schools. The data and analysis presented in this report is therefore based on 38 of the 41 registered business schools.

¹⁹ This figure is based on 'live registrations' reported in BEIS Monitoring Data (PB Tracker 4th April 2022).

Figure 1: No of cohorts and % of SME leader registrations to HtGM by region



Source: Ipsos (2022), BEIS monitoring data (PB tracker) (4th April 2022); Percentages represent % of total SME leader registrations

Table 2: Status of Help to Grow: Management cohorts

Status	No. of cohorts
Completed	69
In delivery	65
Scheduled ²⁰	66
Total	200
<i>Cancelled</i>	122

Source: BEIS monitoring data (PB tracker) (4th April 2022)

²⁰ This figure includes cohorts scheduled in Year 1 and Year 2 in the BEIS Monitoring Date (PB Tracker) 4th April 2022.

Business schools were generally positive about their experience of delivering the HtGM programme to date. They felt it offered the potential to utilise their knowledge, skills and experience to benefit local SMEs. One had been closely involved in the development of the programme content and many were building on previous experience of delivering similar courses. It was generally considered to be a good fit with their wider offer. Some saw it as an opportunity to strengthen business engagement and further develop their expertise. One business school (which had exceeded its recruitment targets) had been delivering similar programmes for many years and had experience of small business ownership within the programme delivery team. They felt that this perspective and experience of delivering similar programmes was critical to their success.

The main challenge to HtGM delivery reported by business schools was the recruitment of SME leaders to the programme.

2.2 Marketing and promotion

Help to Grow: Management has been promoted through a coordinated national marketing campaign delivered by BEIS. The campaign included The Chancellor's announcement in the Spring Budget 2021, social media activity and radio promotion. This has been complemented by more targeted local marketing administered by some business schools who have been able to allocate their own resources to promoting the programme and local press coverage (e.g., [North Wales Chronicle](#), [Leicestershire Live](#), [Marketing Stockport](#) and [MyLondon](#)).

The Chancellor's announcement of the programme in the Spring Budget 2021 appeared to generate high levels of initial interest in the programme.²¹ Around a third of the programme completers who participated in an interview first heard about the programme from the Chancellor's Spring Budget speech, the promotional video associated with the Budget or associated coverage on social media and national television news.²² Programme completers also reported becoming aware of the programme via tailored email promotions from BEIS, Local Councils or Business Schools. A small number had heard about the programme from a direct recommendation or referral from a senior director within their company.

However, business schools reported that the gap between the Chancellor's announcement and programme launch led to some attrition amongst those who had initially expressed an interest. To counter this, one business school launched a pre-engagement programme for SMEs who had registered an interest, asking about their motivations for signing up and introducing them to programme mentors. This was found to have helped maintain interest and reduce levels of dropout before programme delivery started.

Business schools were of the view that more national marketing of HtGM was required to raise awareness of the programme amongst eligible SMEs. Business schools considered

²¹ As of December 2021, over half of the general Expressions of Interest (EOIs) submitted to the website were done so in March 2021, the same month as the programme was announcement by the Chancellor in the Spring Budget.

²² 11 of 30 business leaders.

the national branding of HtGM to have been helpful for raising awareness of the programme and early recruitment. They suggested that national marketing of the programme could be **more consistent** (e.g., referenced more regularly in ministerial speeches or on government websites) and **less general**. It was suggested that marketing would resonate better if it was **more segmented and tailored** to SMEs at different business stages, sectors or areas:

- One business school thought that greater consideration could be given to what point in the **business lifecycle** the programme would be a useful investment for SMEs (e.g., to inform succession planning, or when a business has reached a critical mass).
- Another suggested that the **focus on ‘growth’** in the messaging around the programme could discourage some businesses who would benefit but who were not necessarily looking to grow. For those businesses, it wasn’t immediately clear what they would get out of the programme.
- Related to this, another business school referenced challenges delivering a **clear message** about the potential benefits of the programme due to different types of SMEs having different motivations.

However, some business schools noted that national marketing has been apparent more recently and, along with the increased testimonials and word of mouth, this would increase awareness of the programme and help improve recruitment in the future.

Programme participants indicated that marketing and promotion are most effective at reaching SME leaders when they are relatable. They suggested that programme alumni should be at the heart of the marketing campaigns, either in the form of personal testimonials, or Q&A sessions with prospective applicants. SME leaders also recommended other possible marketing channels, including: advertising through large accountancy firms and HR consultant networks; promotions at conferences; include details of the programme in HMRC, LEP and local government correspondence.

SME leaders’ expectations of HtGM

Business leaders who participated in HtGM found the programme offer to be relevant and relatable to their business and the issues they were facing at the time of application. The majority (77%) of SME leaders who responded to the post-completion survey thought that the objectives of the programme were ‘extremely’ or ‘somewhat’ clear at the time of applying.²³ This was reflected in their expectations of the programme, which demonstrated an understanding of HtGM’s intended outcomes, including around developing their leadership skills and management practices to drive improvements within their business.

At the time of application, SME leaders’ expectations of HtGM were focussed on the potential benefits to them as leaders within their business. Participants most commonly expected to become better equipped to lead and manage their business through **increased confidence** and **improved skills** (Figure 2). Second to this, participants applied to the programme to improve their **knowledge** (e.g., how to drive productivity and growth) and

²³ These data are in response to the following question: “When you applied, how clear were you on the aims and objectives of the programme?” Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171)

technical know-how (e.g., business model approaches). Comparatively, relatively few programme participants (less than half) expected HtGM to improve their understanding of **employee engagement** or **financial management**.

Figure 2: What were your expectations of the HtGM programme? What were you hoping to get out of it?



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: multiple choice

2.3 Participant recruitment

Motivations

SME leaders were motivated to apply to HtGM by a combination of factors but placed most importance on what they would personally gain from the programme. Individually, applicants were interested in the programme as part of their ongoing personal development, seeking to either upgrade existing management skills, fill ‘knowledge gaps’ or to access formal management and leadership training for the first time; and to expand their peer support networks. SME leaders also applied to develop the necessary skills to improve their business operations; and build confidence and understanding of how to grow their business in the context of COVID-19.

SME leaders who participated in depth interviews highlighted that the programme appealed to them because it:

- would provide valuable **networking opportunities**, help them to identify **parallels** with the issues and challenges faced by other business / industries and facilitate **knowledge sharing** with other business leaders.
- had government-backing, suggesting that it was 'reputable' and had a 'rubber stamp' of **quality**.
- was like a 'mini-MBA', offering **practical business support** with the expertise and prestige of a university-standard course.
- was perceived to be a **cost-effective solution** to addressing business challenges.
- would **upgrade their skills** and provide a 'refresher' of good business practice.²⁴

All SME leaders interviewed favoured HtGM over other training programmes because of its perceived quality, flexibility and affordability.²⁵ The programme was perceived to be based on industry experience rather than being over-reliant on academic, theory-based content: programme participants favoured practical learning over a more formal, exam-based structured. SME leaders were also motivated to sign up for the programme because the application process was **straightforward** and **flexible** - they could choose a cohort that suited their other commitments. In the few circumstances where applicants had considered applying for other management and leadership training or support, this tended to be more formal MBA or Masters programmes delivered by universities or other higher education institutes.

The opening module on strategy and innovation was of most interest to SME leaders at the time of applying (Figure 3). After this, SME leaders were most interested in the modules on vision, mission and values and developing a marketing strategy.²⁶ The case study modules were of least interest to participants at the outset, depth interview evidence suggested that this may be because SME leaders expected the case studies to be too bespoke and therefore not directly relevant or applicable to their business.

²⁴ Motivations are reported in order of most to least frequently mentioned by SME leaders who participated in an interview.

²⁵ Note: depth interviews were completed with SME leaders that had completed HtGM

²⁶ Note: Survey respondents were asked to choose the **three modules** that were of most interest to them at the time of applying. These results should not be interpreted as overall interest levels in each module.

Figure 3: Which three modules were you most interested in when you signed up to the programme?



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171) Note: Case study modules are highlighted in red; Question type: multiple choice (up to three)

Enrolment and onboarding

The process of converting registrations into enrolments was broadly similar across business schools. SME leaders can register an interest in the HtGM programme through the Small Business Charter website. They can either register a general expression of interest (EOI) or register for a specific cohort at a named business school (registrations). Those registering for a specific cohort are contacted directly by the relevant business school to be enrolled onto the programme. As of early April 2022, a total of **2,612 SME leaders** had enrolled onto a HtGM cohort, representing a conversion rate of 78% of the **3,328** who had registered an interest in a specific cohort (see Section 2.1) (Table 3).²⁷

Table 3: Number and percentage of registrants enrolling on HtGM

Number / % of SME leaders	
Registrations	3,328
Enrolled	2,612

²⁷ The data presented here are based on registrations to specific cohorts, captured in the BEIS monitoring data (PB tracker). This analysis does not include the broader registrations to the programme. Y1 enrolments are counted based on date in which schools had marked the participant as enrolled, not by cohort start date.

% Conversion²⁸	78%
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Source: BEIS Monitoring data PB tracker (4th April 2022)

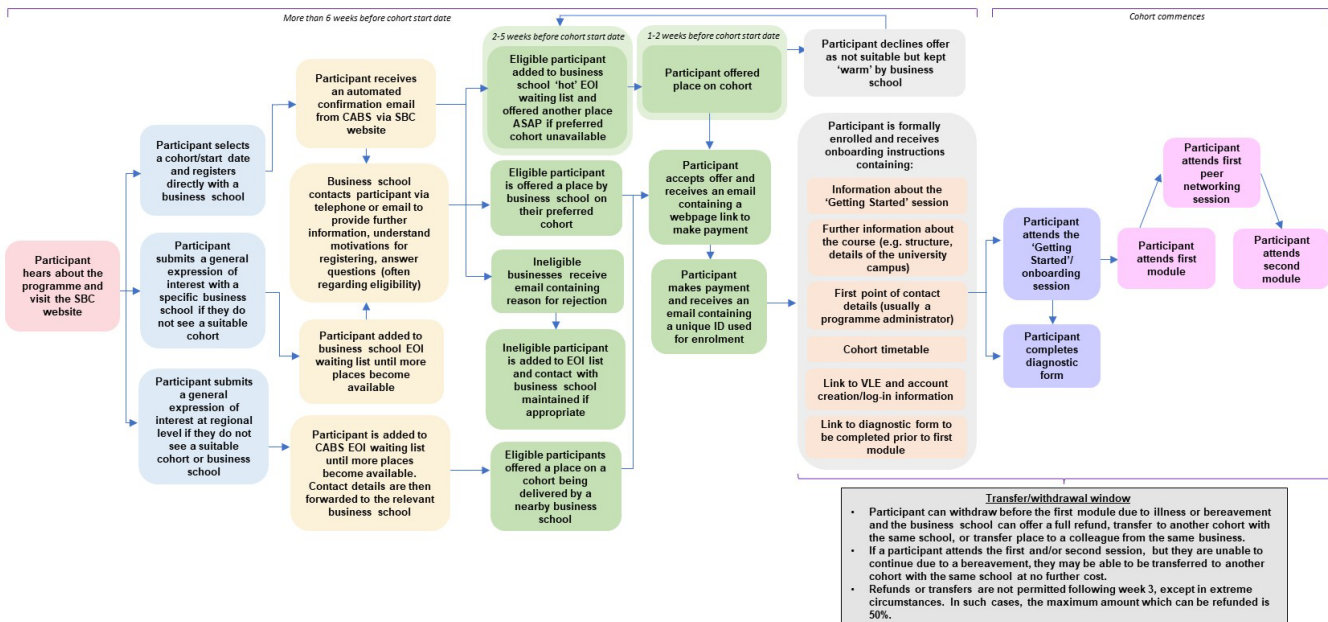
In some cases, businesses enrolled (and made payment) immediately following the initial registration, but this was not common. In most cases, business schools followed up with registrants via email and telephone to provide more information, understand individuals' motivations for registering, collect information for eligibility checks and answer any questions they might have before formally enrolling them on to a cohort. Some business schools had dedicated teams working on this, including completing eligibility checks²⁹ and liaising with SME leaders throughout the process from initial enquiry through to enrolment.

Typically, once a place is confirmed with the business school, participants are sent a link to make payment and are formally enrolled onto the programme. Following this, a confirmation email is sent to the SME leader containing their individual ID for enrolment and subsequent communications provided links to the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and other preparatory information.

The feedback on the enrolment process was generally positive amongst programme completers who participated in an interview. However, there were a few instances where, following initial contact from the business school, registrants were unsure whether they had been accepted to the programme and went on to enrol on a cohort with a different business school.³⁰

An overview of the typical process is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Typical participant onboarding process for HtGM



Source: Ipsos HtGM Evaluation scoping report

²⁸ This calculation is based on cross section data in April 2022. At the time of writing, Ipsos did not have access to individualised longitudinal data.

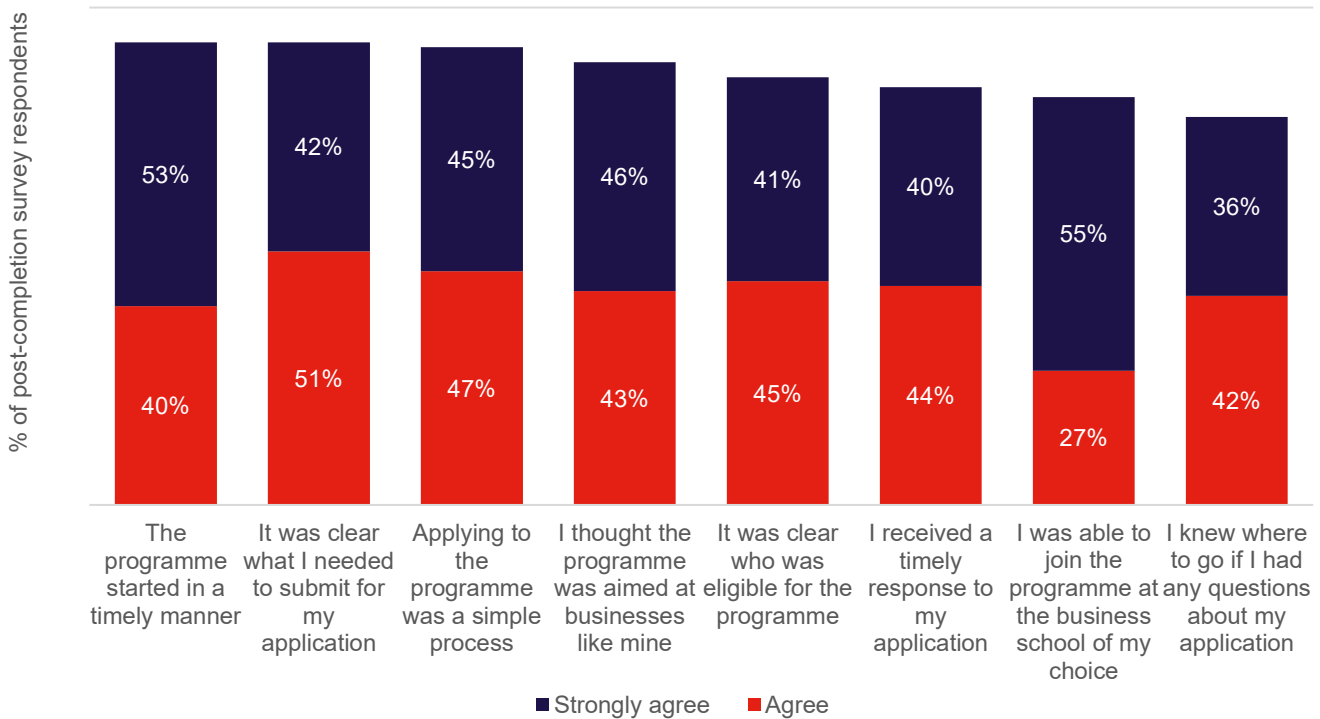
²⁹ Initial eligibility checks are included in the registration form. Business Schools then perform secondary checks.

³⁰ Three out of the 30 SME leaders interviewed said they had done this.

Participants who had completed the programme reflected positively on their experience of the application and onboarding process (Figure 5). Key findings in relation to this were that:

- Almost all (93%) of those who responded to the post-completion survey thought the **programme had started in a timely manner** – feedback from the follow up interviews with SME leaders who had completed the programme suggested that the time between registering and starting the programme varied considerably between business schools.
- Programme completers who responded to the survey were **clear** what was needed to submit their application and most considered the overall application process to be **simple**. This was confirmed through interviews with programme completers, who thought that the communication had been clear and effective, and they felt they received all the information they needed.

Figure 5: Thinking about your experience of applying to HtGM, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice per statement

Whilst the overall application process was a positive experience for programme participants, Figure 5 and depth interview evidence highlighted a few potential areas for reflection to inform ongoing delivery:

- **Support channels for applicants could be made clearer** to ensure applicants know where to go with queries. When participants contacted business schools for more information, SME leaders found business school staff to be helpful and that their queries were addressed in a timely and satisfactory manner.
- **Whilst overall satisfaction with the application was high (84%), less than half of programme completers strongly agreed that they had received a timely response to their application.** This was confirmed in follow up interviews with programme

completers, who reported wait times of between one week and two months to receive a response to their initial application.

2.4 Attendance

To date, the programme appears to be achieving relatively high and consistent levels of attendance and engagement amongst participants. As of 4th April, three quarters of programme participants who had completed HtGM had attended at least 75% of the modules.³¹ The SME leaders who were interviewed said they participated in most sessions of each element of the programme and one business school reported a 95% attendance rate.

Where there were examples of non-attendance, the main reasons were personal illness, time commitments (especially during holiday periods) and businesses needing to prioritise client requirements, especially smaller or less financially stable ones. In these cases, SME leaders interviewed were able to catch up on missed content in their own time by watching recordings of the session stored on the VLE. These recordings were sometimes used by attendees to consolidate their understanding ahead of peer-to-peer learning and mentoring sessions.

2.5 Profile of demand

As of early April 2022, 69 cohorts had completed the HtGM programme comprising 1,214 SME leaders.³² The results of the post-completion survey, administered to programme participants between two and six weeks after the final module, provides insight into the profile of SME leaders completing the programme – discussed in the following section. This section draws upon evidence collected at the registration, enrolment and completion stage.

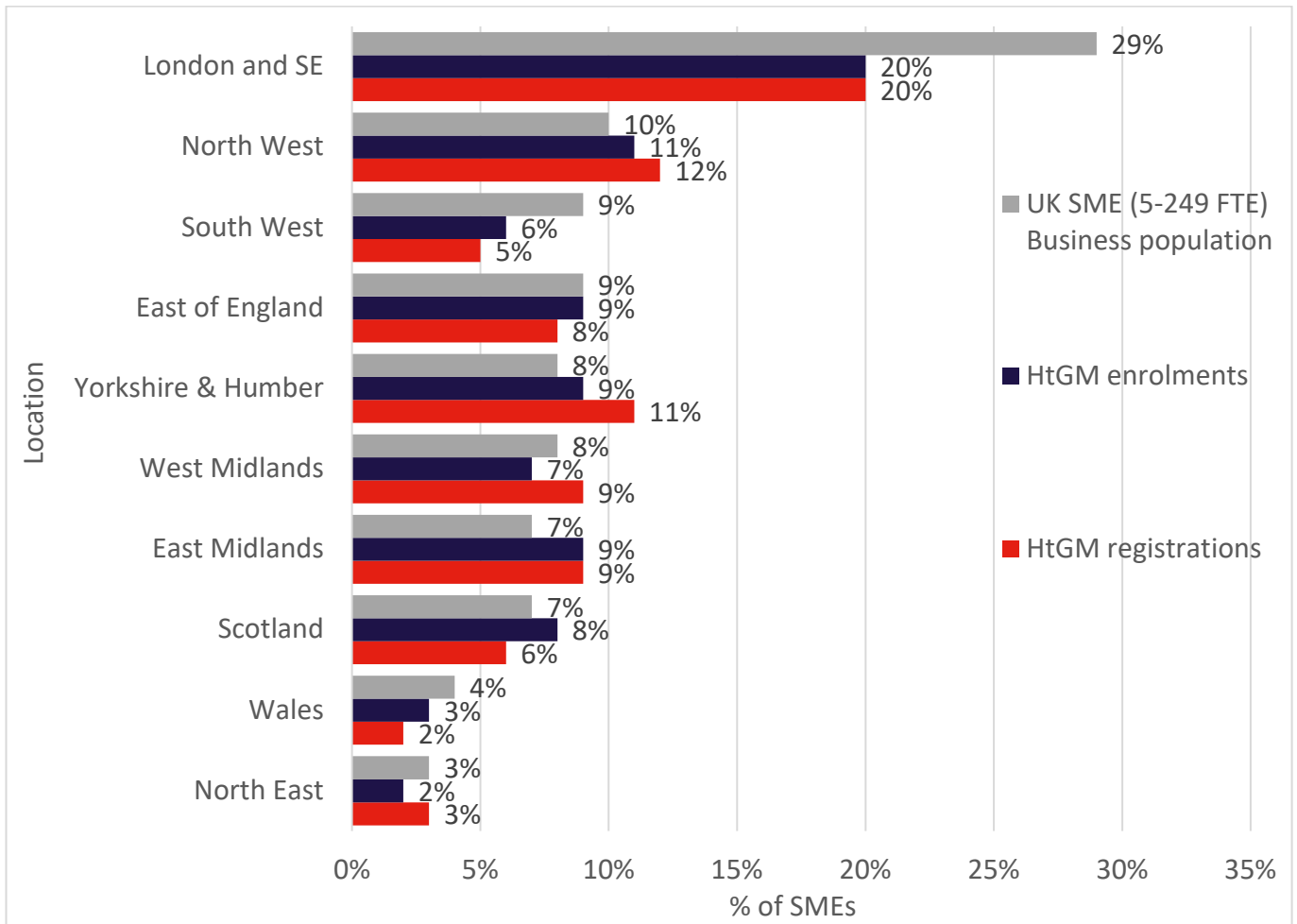
Business characteristics

The majority (84%) of SME leaders who registered for HtGM worked in private limited companies. There was representation amongst firms registering and enrolling on HtGM across all regions of the UK (Figure 6), however around one fifth of firms were based in London or the South East (20% for both registrants and enrolments). These figures broadly align to the wider UK SME population, for which London and the South East account for the largest shares on third (29%). Demand for HtGM was lowest in the North East and Wales.

³¹ BEIS Monitoring Data (PB Tracker 4th April 2022) – 907 of the 1214 SME leaders in the 69 completed cohorts (based on number attending module 1) had completed at least 75% of the module content ('completed the programme')

³² Number of participants is based on module 1 attendance reported in the BEIS monitoring data (PB Tracker 4th April 2022)

Figure 6: Regional distribution of businesses submitting registrations and enrolling on HtGM compared to the UK SME population³³



Source: BEIS monitoring data, registrations (n=3,732), enrolments (n=2,828). Question type: single choice, Note: 'OxCamArc' data constitutes East of England for BEIS data; ONS SME Business Characteristics (2021)

The programme appears to be predominantly reaching those firms that are reasonably well established rather than start-ups. This is in line with the eligibility criteria, which requires businesses to have been operating for at least one year to qualify for the programme. Most SMEs (51%) enrolling on HtGM had been **in operation for ten years or less** (Figure 7).³⁴

HtGM is attracting businesses of varying sizes across the SME spectrum (Figure 8). Businesses enrolled on the HtGM programme by early April 2022 employed an average of **26 staff**. However, there was variation across businesses, with those with **up to ten employees** accounting for almost half the total (41%).

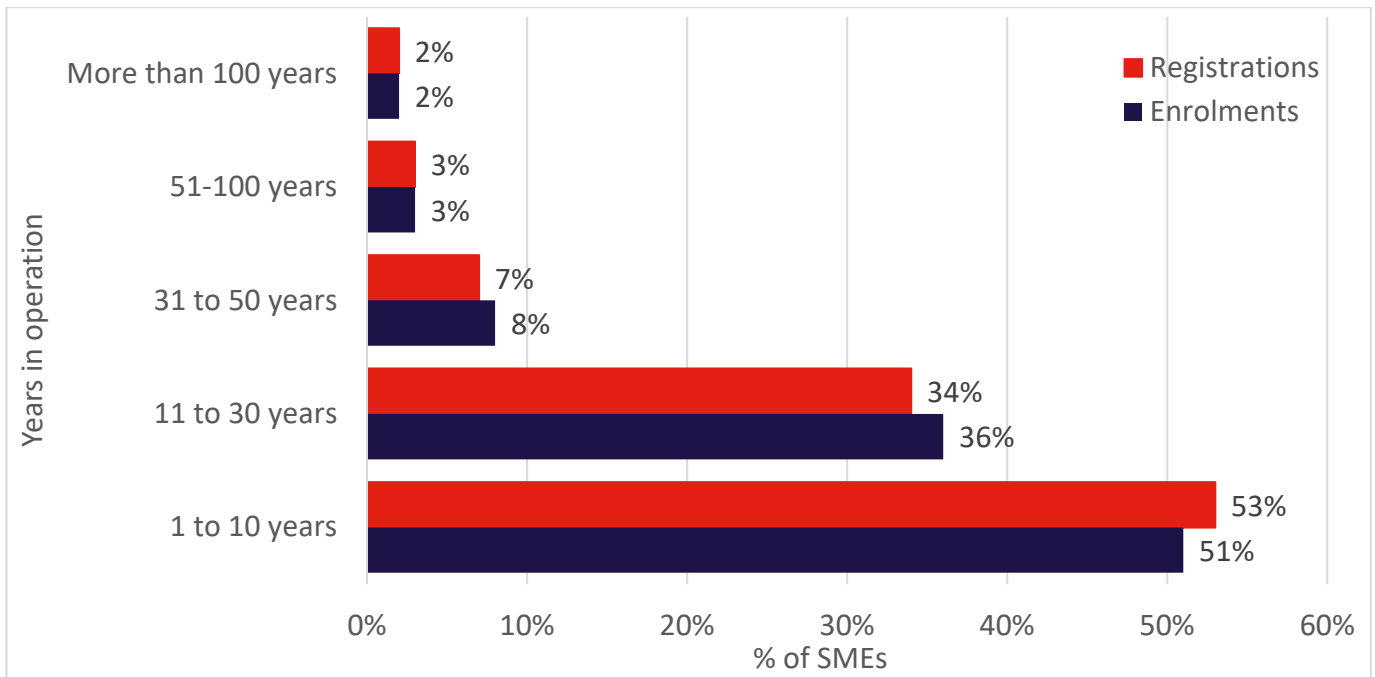
Businesses registered for HtGM reported an **average recent turnover of £2.9m**. The majority (78%) of registered businesses forecast **an increase in turnover**, suggesting that many were either on a growth trajectory and / or had growth ambitions. The average projected increase in

³³ SME population data are restricted to only include SMEs with 5-249 employees to align to HtGM eligibility

³⁴ Note: businesses that have been operating for less than one year are not eligible for the programme.

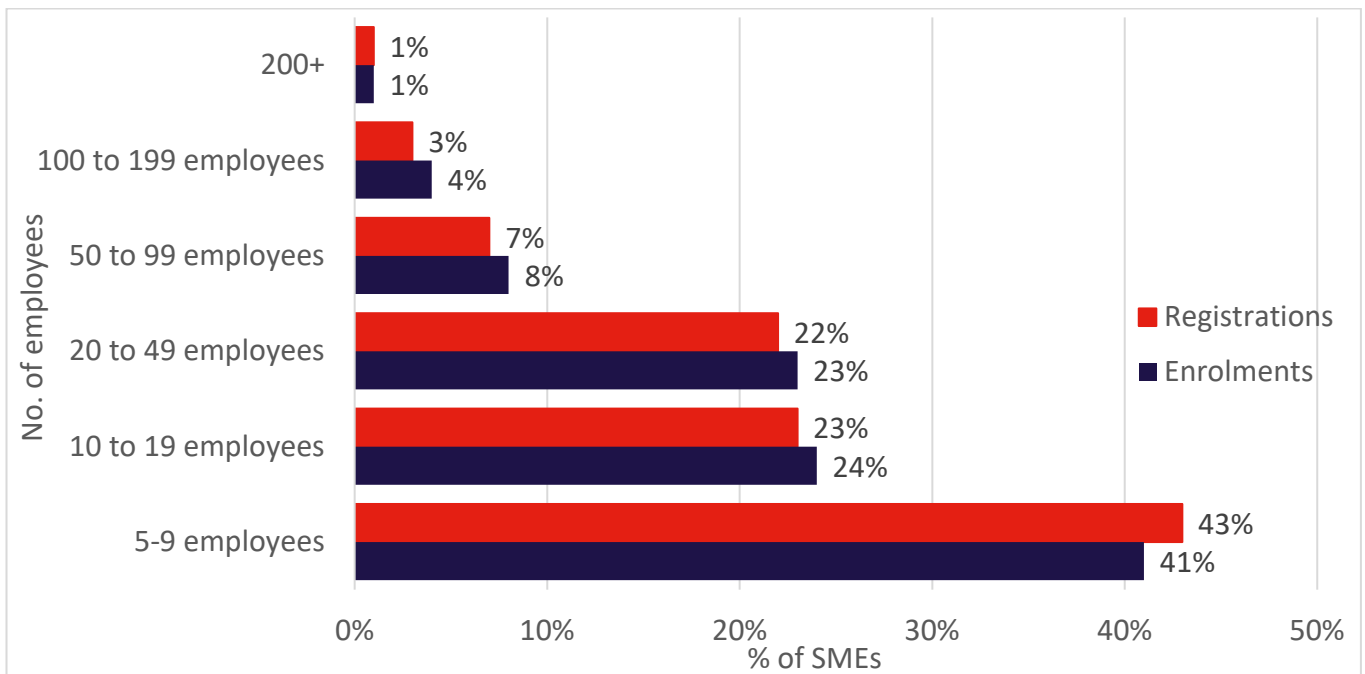
turnover was **£750,000**.³⁵ However, there were wide variations and a few anomalies in the registration data, with figures ranging from £1 to £279m.³⁶

Figure 7: Years in operation (Age) of businesses that registered for HtGM (% of firms)



Source: BEIS monitoring data, registrations (n=3,266), enrolments (n=2,596). Question type: single choice

Figure 8: Number of employees in businesses that registered for HtGM



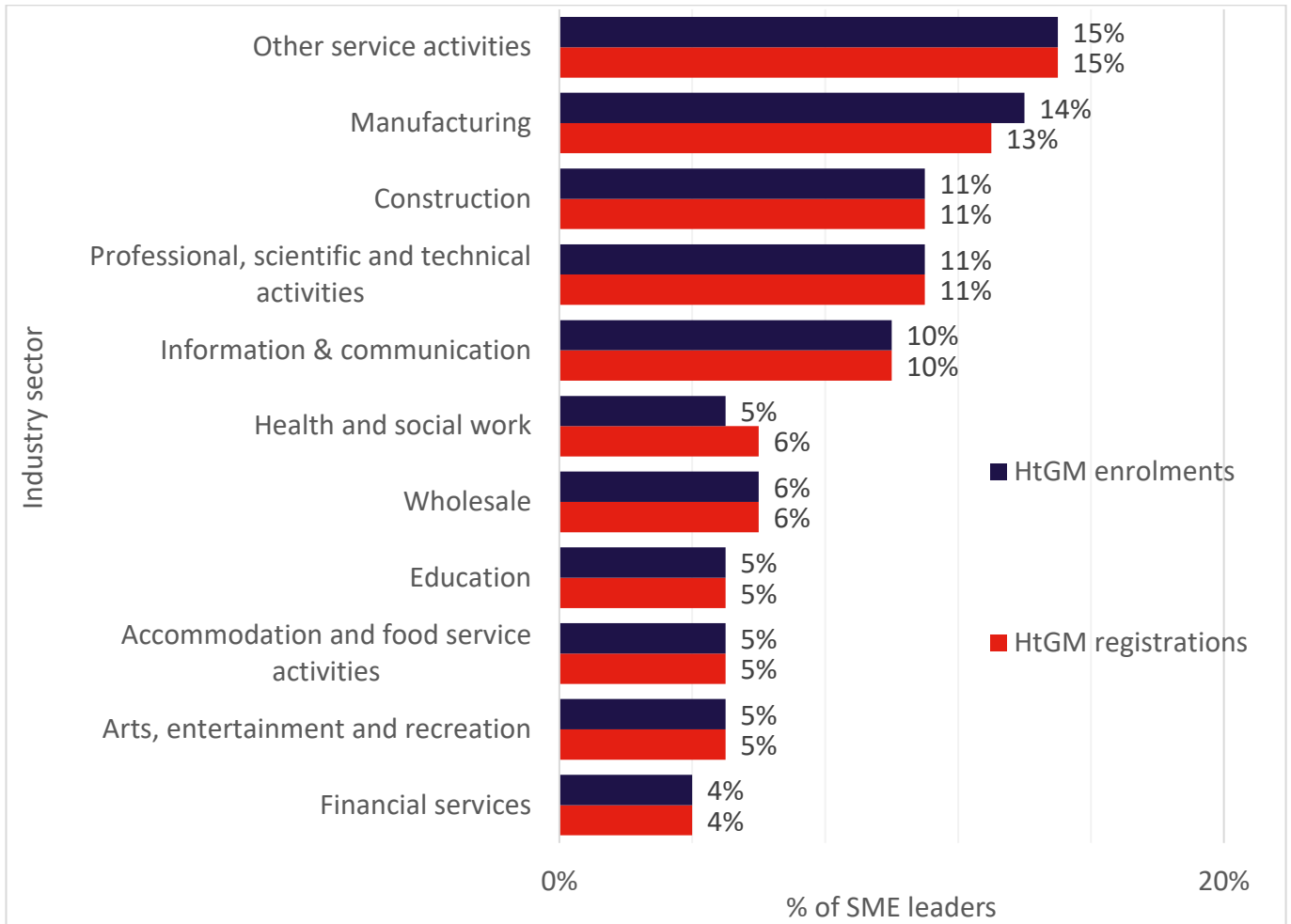
Source: CABS Registration data extraction from website backend (all data prior to 5th April 2022) n=3,289 registrations before 5th April 2022 based on the module 1 start date data ; Question type: single choice

³⁵ Calculation based on removal of five outliers with growth forecasts between £150m and £1.2bn

³⁶ As with industry sector, we will gather a more accurate picture of company turnover in later stages of the evaluation through matching details of participating business to administrative datasets.

There was demand for HtGM amongst SMEs operating across a broad range of industry sectors. Figure 9 shows that there was very little difference between the location of SMEs registering an interest in the programme and those that went on to enrol. Nearly fifth (15%) are in the service sector, which includes retail and hospitality. A further quarter (25% of enrolments, 24% of registrations) are in manufacturing or construction – these categories are combined in the registration form. The remainder operate across a range of different industries. A more granular analysis of industry sector will be possible in later stages of the evaluation through linking details of participating business to national administrative datasets.

Figure 9: Sector of businesses registered for HtGM³⁷



Source: BEIS monitoring data, registrations (n=3,732), enrolments (n=2,828).

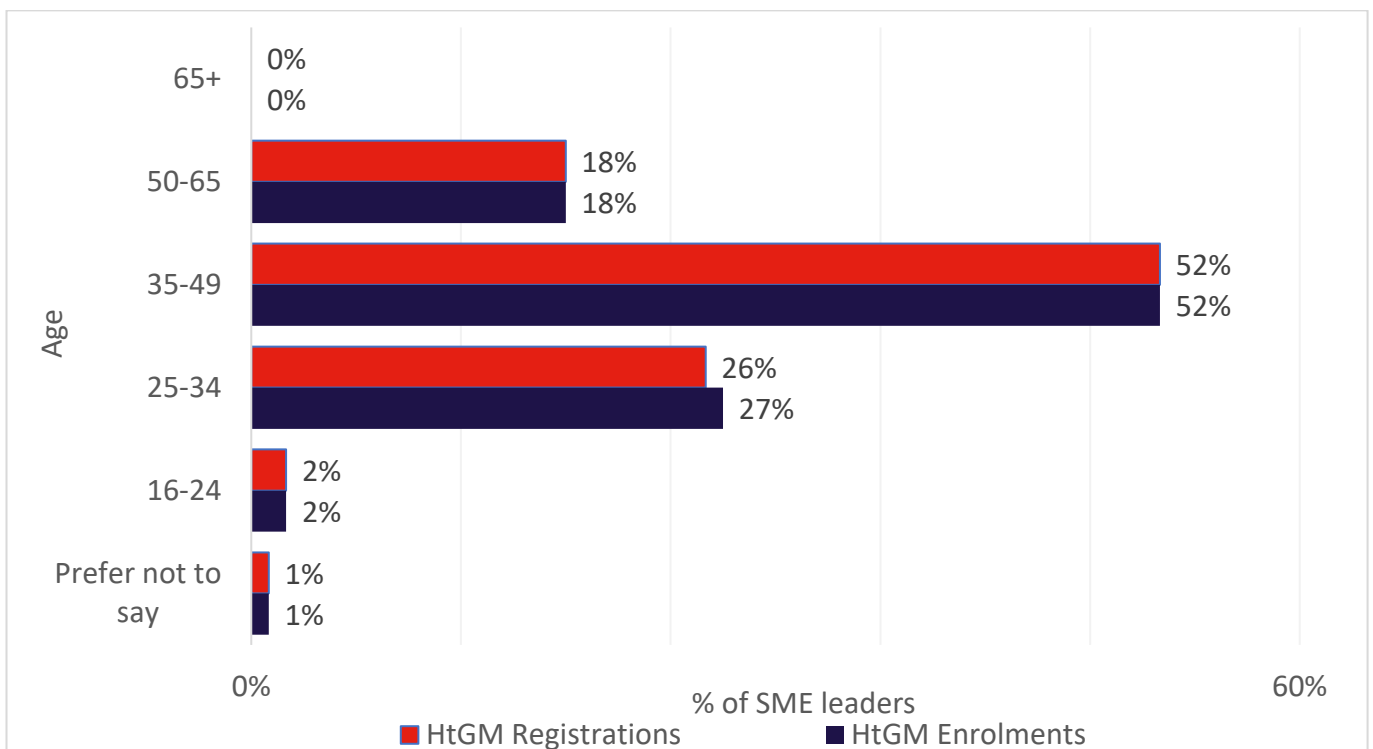
Demographics of wider business leaders

The evidence to date suggests that the programme has been **successful in stimulating demand amongst a diverse group of SME leaders** in terms of registrants and enrolments to the programme:

³⁷ Services industry combines ‘accommodation and food service activities’ and other service activities’ as set out in the registration form

- **Age:** the majority of SME leaders registering or enrolling to the programme were younger 50 and were most commonly aged 35-49 (Figure 10). An additional one fifth of registrants and enrollers were aged 50-65.
- **Gender:** one third of registrants and enrolments (both 31%) to the programme were female (Figure 11). Comparatively, female-owned and led businesses account for 24% of private sector employment in the wider UK business population.³⁸
- **Ethnicity:** Around one fifth (17%) of SME leaders registering and more than one in ten of those enrolling on the programme were from an ethnic minority background. Across the wider business population, 6% of SMEs are led by people from an ethnic minority background suggesting that there is good representation of this group of businesses on the programme (Figure 12).³⁹

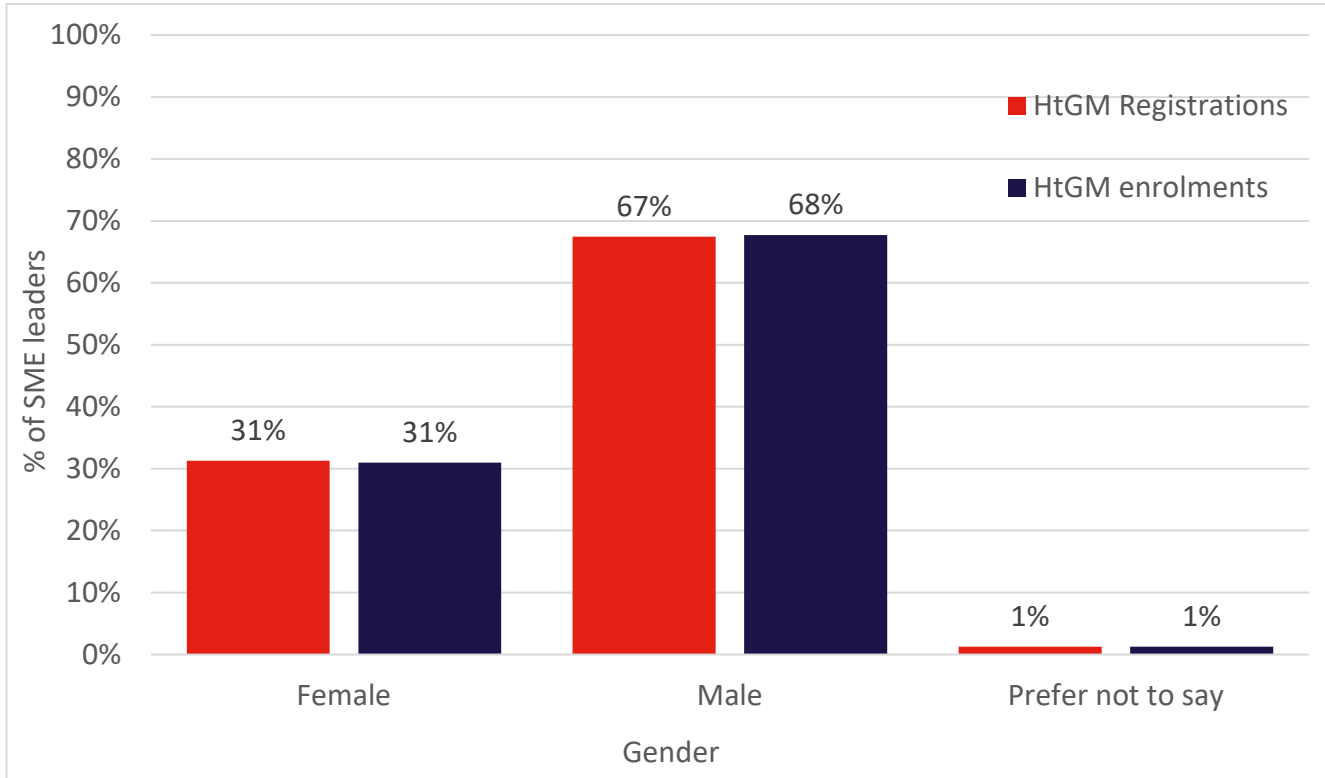
Figure 10: Age of SME leaders registering and enrolling on HtGM



Source: BEIS monitoring data, registrations (n=3,732), enrolments (n=2,828).

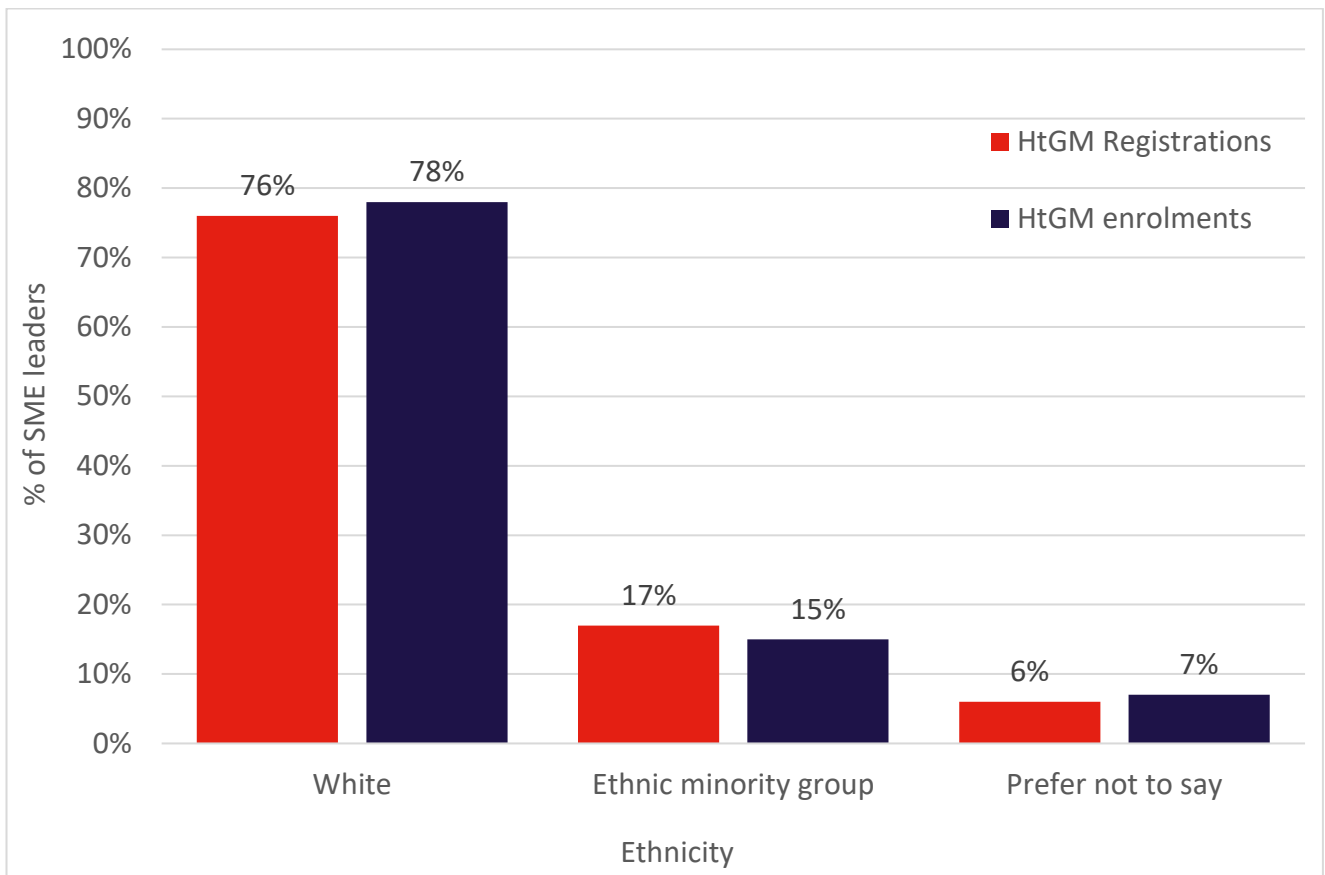
³⁸ Women owned and women led businesses provide a total of 24% private sector employment – Federation for Small Businesses - <https://www.fsb.org.uk/resource-report/supporting-women-s-enterprise-in-the-uk.html>

Figure 11: Gender of SME leaders registering and enrolling on HtGM



Source: BEIS monitoring data, registrations (n=2,945), enrolments (n=2,386); Note: reported percentages are subject to rounding

Figure 12 Ethnicity of SME leaders registering and enrolling on HtGM



Source: BEIS monitoring data, registrations (n=2,945), enrolments (n=2,386); Note: reported percentages are subject to rounding

The post-completion survey gives some indication into the diversity of firms **completing** the programme. In most cases (79%) SME leaders worked in firms with at least one female senior leader; around one third (29%) reported having a senior leader from an ethnic minority background in their firm. ⁴⁰

The majority (94%) of those completing the programme had been in their current role for at least two years and half (50%) had been in their role for more than five years. This suggests that the programme is appealing to relatively new senior leaders as well as those who are more experienced and looking to refresh or update their skills. Programme completers held a range of positions within their company including founder/owner, Managing Director, Head of Operations, Finance Director and Business Development Manager.

⁴⁰ Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice

3. Quality of programme delivery

Summary of key findings in relation to Evaluation Question 2: To what extent is the programme successfully delivering high quality business support?

- HtGM completers are reporting **high levels of satisfaction** with programme delivery, with 92% saying they were fairly or very satisfied with how the programme was delivered from start to end.
- The majority of programme completers (91%) indicated that they would be **likely to recommend the programme to other business leaders**, with two thirds reporting that they would be very likely to do so.
- Feedback from SME leaders and business schools suggest high levels of satisfaction with HtGM **programme design and curriculum**. Those completing the programme report they were happy with the number and duration of sessions, although some would have valued more time between sessions to embed learning.
- Most participants were **satisfied with the level of face-to-face delivery**, although one in five were dissatisfied and some expressed a preference for more in-person delivery, particularly for the modules. The mode of delivery of the peer group and mentoring sessions was not perceived to impact on quality.
- **The mentoring element of HtGM is very highly regarded by programme participants** and is emerging as a key mechanism for embedding the learning gained through the programme. Feedback from both SME leaders and mentors themselves suggest that the processes for matching mentors to mentees is working well.
- The mentoring relationships were used to build on topics covered by the programme curriculum and to provide **more tailored, bespoke support** on ad hoc business issues.

Introduction

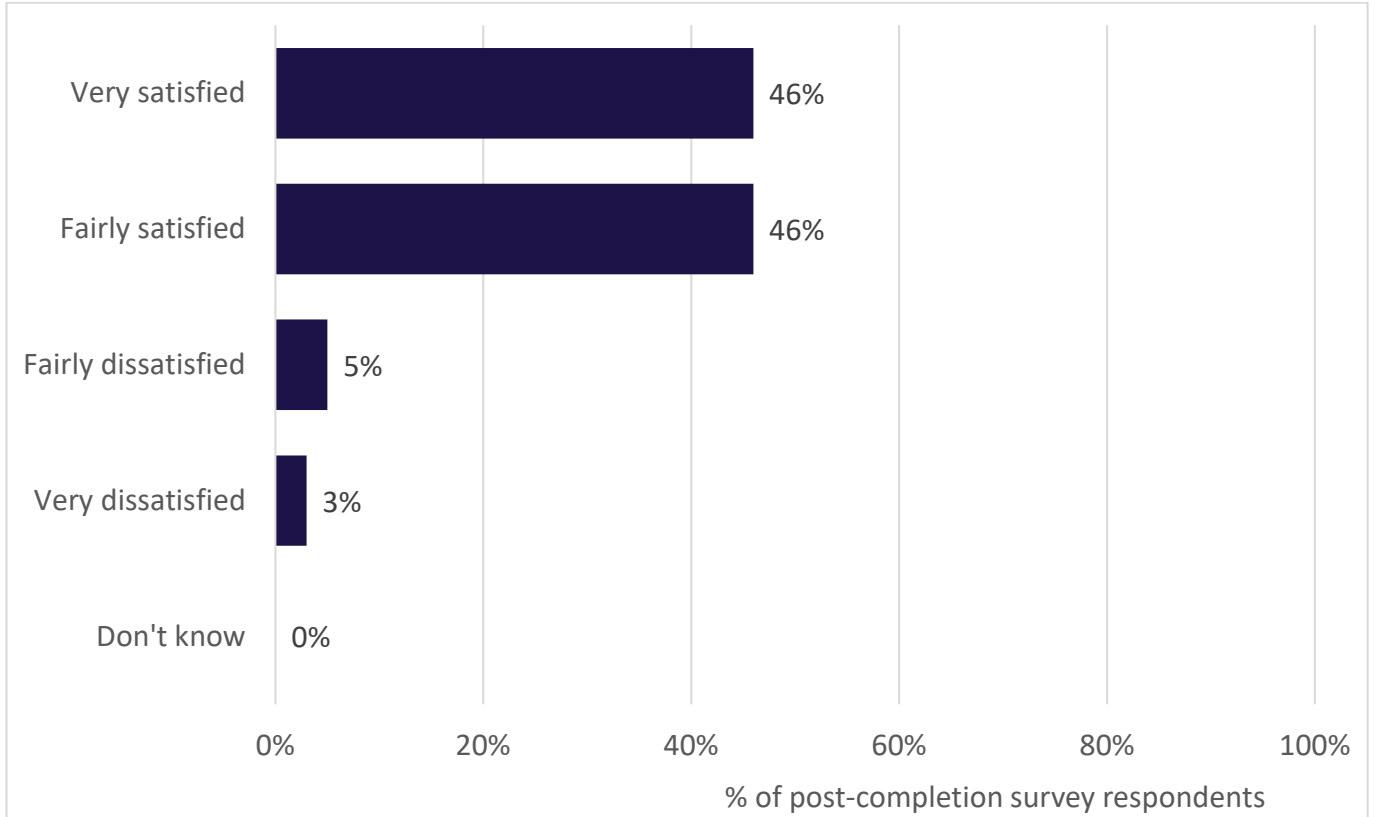
This chapter presents evidence collected to date on the quality of the business support delivered to SME leaders through HtGM. It provides insights into participants' satisfaction across key areas of programme delivery and reflections on the relevance of the curriculum and appropriateness of the delivery model. The findings are informed by depth interviews with business schools, mentors and SME leaders and the post-completion survey of programme participants. All findings relate to the first six months of programme delivery and should be interpreted within this context.

3.1 Overall satisfaction

SME leaders are reporting generally high levels of satisfaction with HtGM programme delivery. The majority (92%) of those completing the programme were satisfied with how it was

delivered from the first module through to the end of their mentoring relationship (Figure 13). Of these, almost half (46%) were 'fairly' satisfied, suggesting some scope for improvement in the overall proportion who are 'very' satisfied.

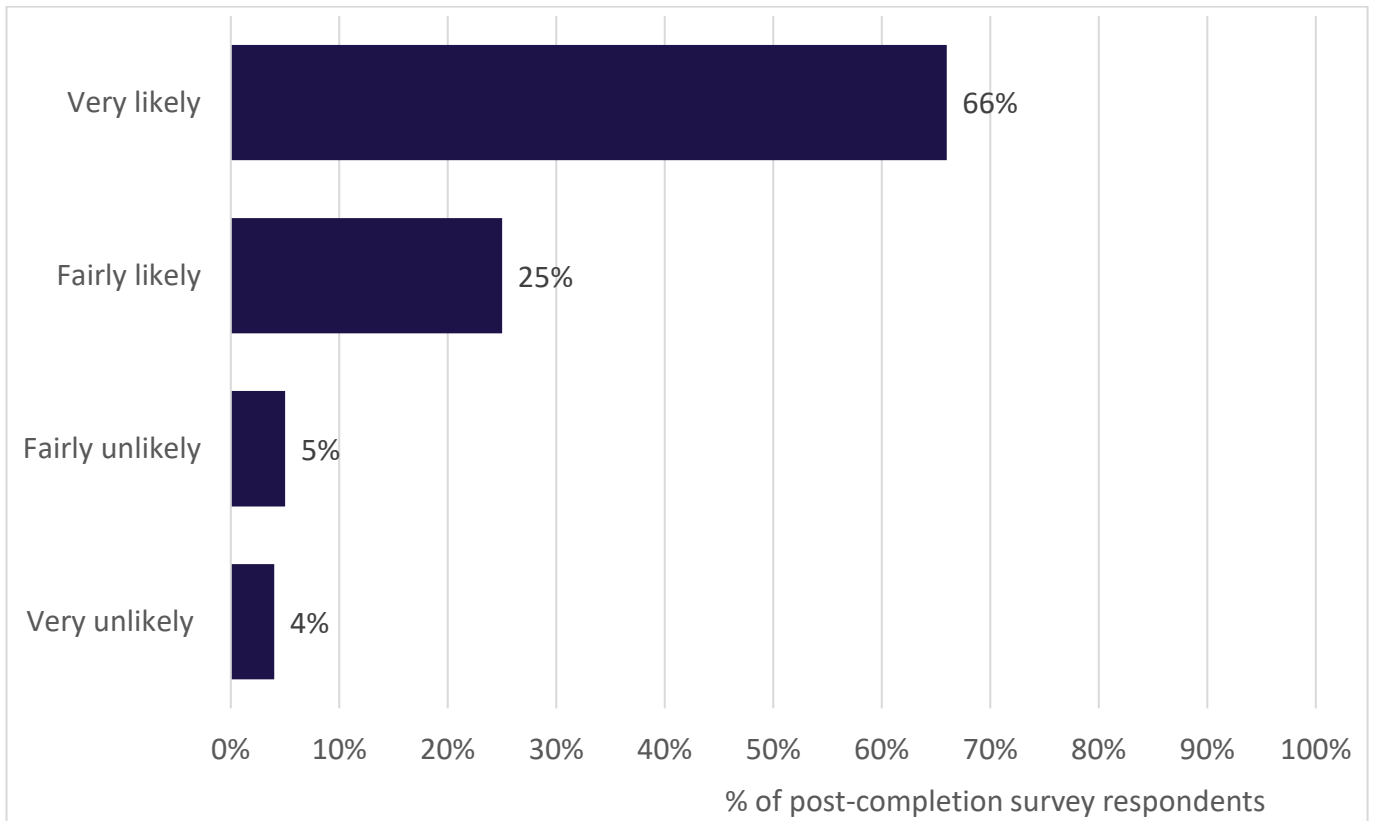
Figure 13: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with how the HtGM programme was delivered from start to end?



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice

In almost all cases (91%), SME leaders completing the programme reported that they would be likely to recommend HtGM to another business leader (Figure 14). This reflects the high levels of overall satisfaction reported in Figure 13 and suggests that future demand for the programme may increase as programme alumni begin to share their experiences within their networks.

Figure 14: How likely would you be to recommend HtGM to another business leader?



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice

3.2 Contact time

There were mixed views amongst business school interviewees on the optimum length of the programme. One thought it was too long, others commented that the length was about right, but that it was too intensive with too much content to cover in the timescales. One business school thought the programme should be delivered over a longer period. There is a trade-off in terms of length versus intensity, but there was no clear consensus amongst business schools that one or the other should change.

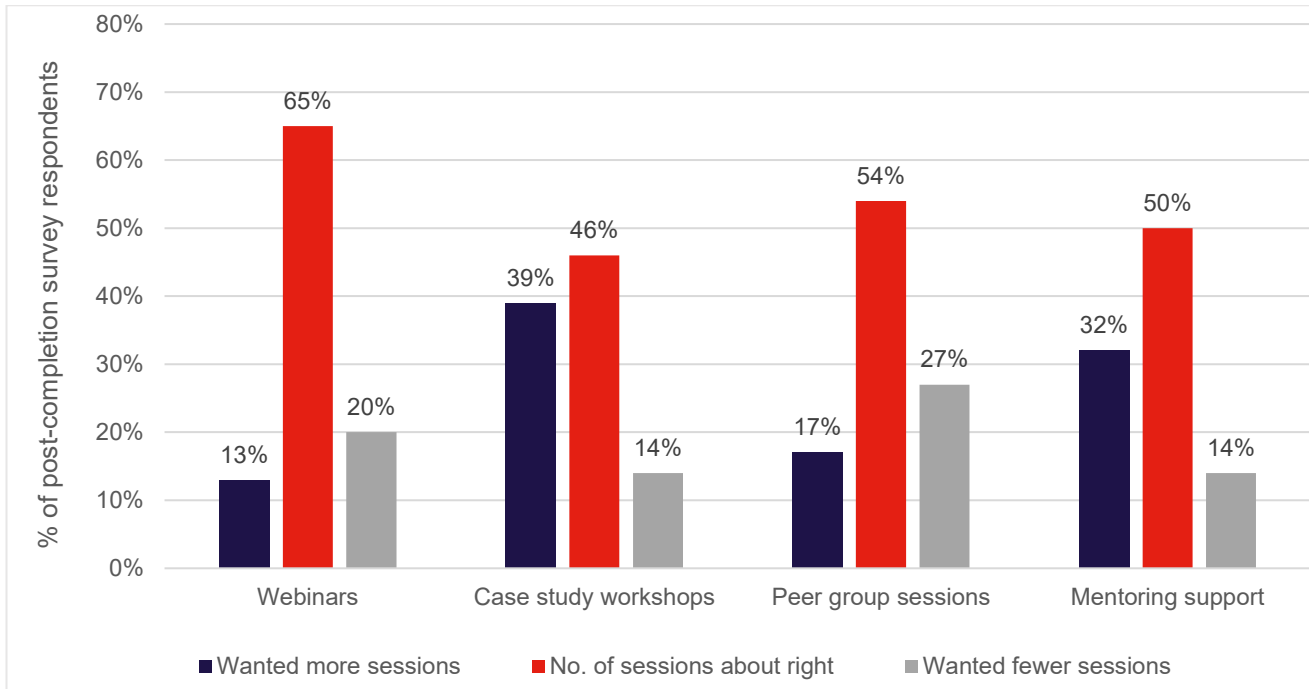
The SME leaders who participated in an interview were typically satisfied with **the time commitment** involved, reporting that the length (12 weeks of modules with mentoring continuing for up to 4 weeks) and intensity (50 hours) were sufficient to enable them to learn and make changes in their business.

Number of sessions

Programme participants thought that the overall **number of sessions** offered through HtGM was about right (Figure 15). However, around two fifths of those responding to the post-completion survey said they would have liked **more case study workshops** – indicating that these exceeded the initial low levels of interest (discussed in Chapter 2, Figure 3). HtGM

completers also reflected that they would have valued **slightly more** mentoring sessions and **slightly fewer** peer-group calls.

Figure 15: What are your thoughts on the number of sessions involved HtGM?



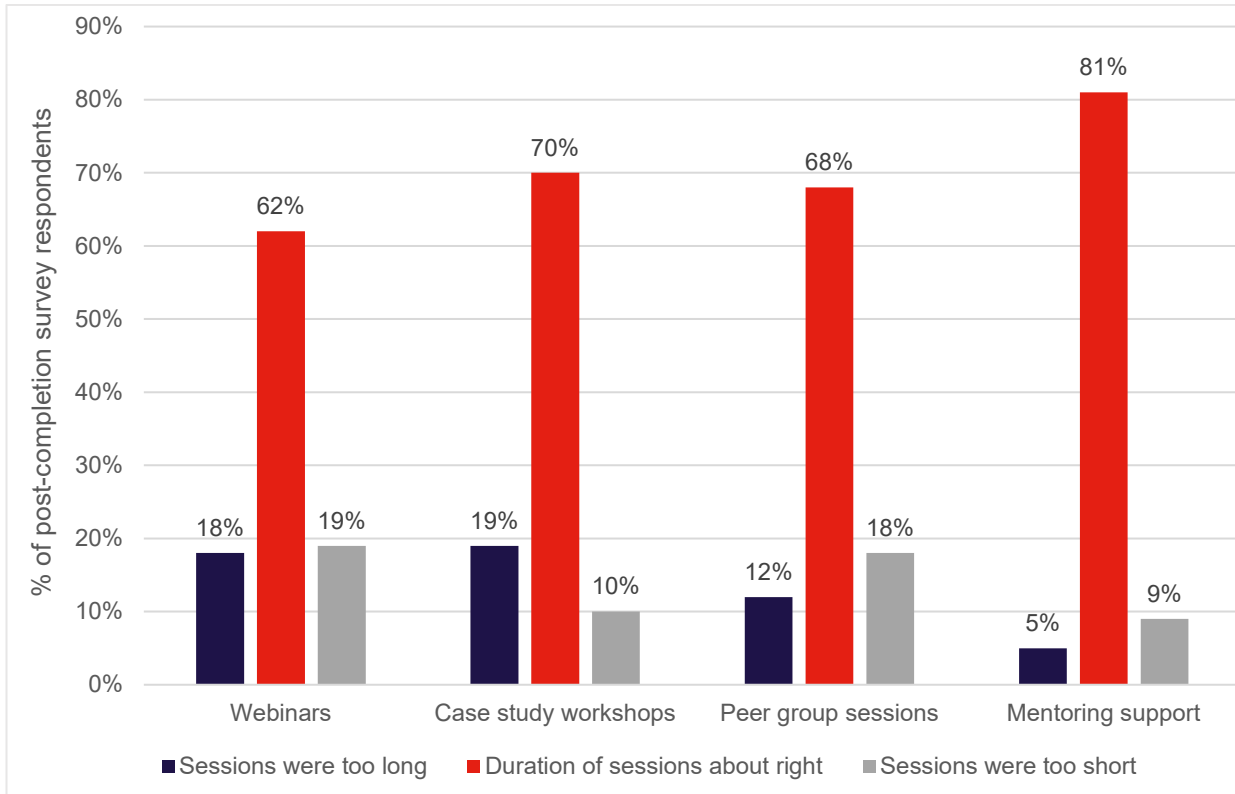
Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice per statement

Frequency and length of sessions

SME leaders who had completed the programme also reflected positively on **length of sessions**, with the majority agreeing that the duration was about right for all elements of the programme (Figure 16). There was no clear consensus amongst those who did not think the duration of sessions were about right – they were fairly evenly spread between those who thought they were too short and those who thought they were too long.

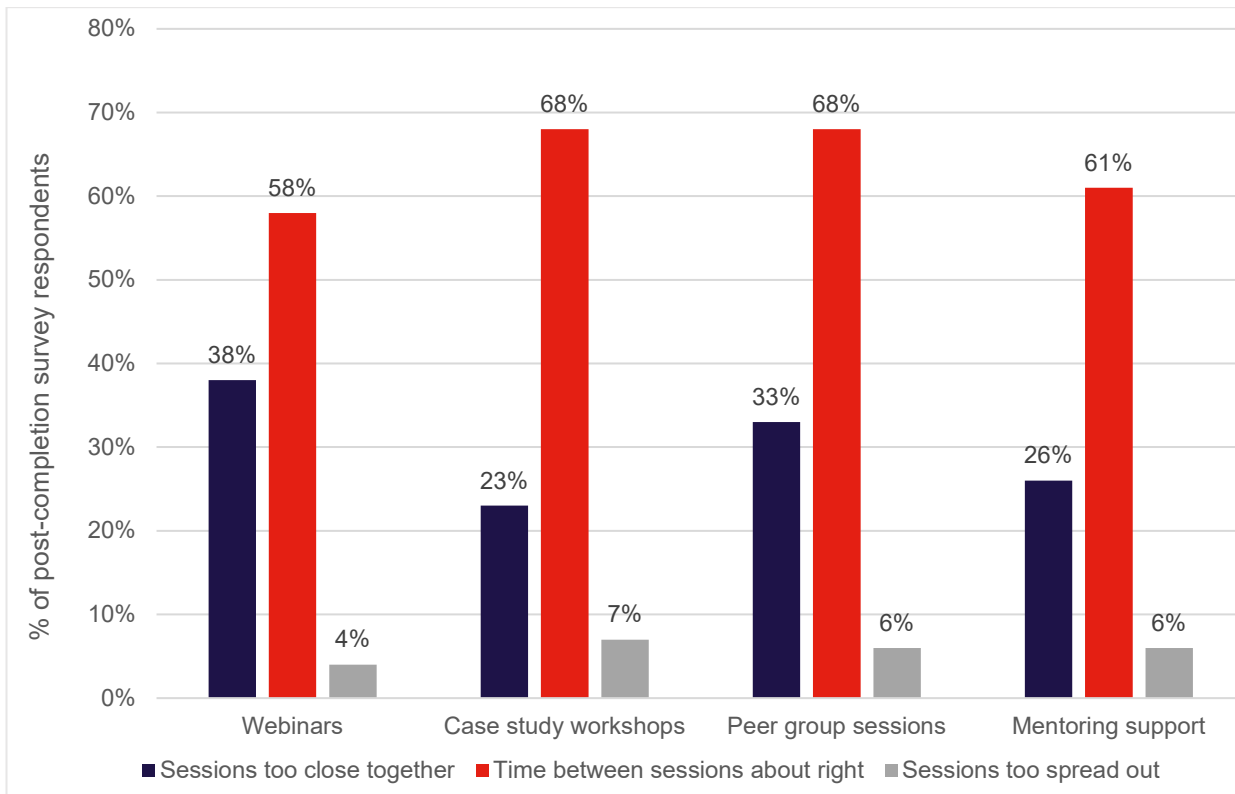
HtGM completers were also generally satisfied with the **frequency of sessions**, with most agreeing that the time between these was about right (Figure 17). However, those who did not think that the time between sessions was about right typically thought the sessions **were too close together**. Around a third would have liked more time between webinars and peer group calls, whilst around a quarter would have liked more time between case study workshops and mentoring sessions. This aligns with feedback from those who participated in an interview, who said they would have liked delivery to have been spread over a longer period and that having more time to reflect on module content would have helped them to make better use of the peer learning and mentoring sessions.

Figure 16: What are your thoughts on the duration of sessions involved in HtGM?



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice per statement

Figure 17: What are your thoughts on the frequency of sessions involved in HtGM?



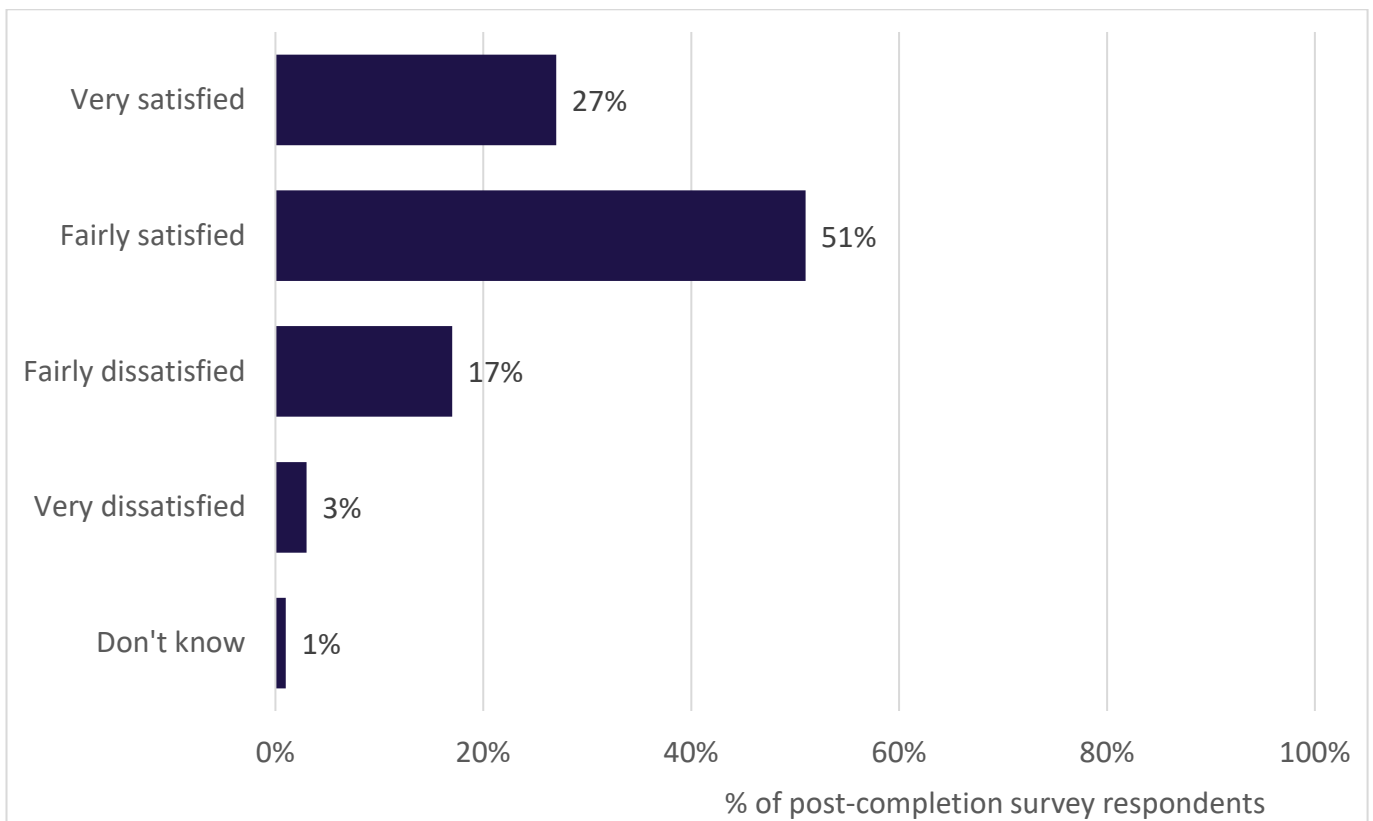
Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice per statement

3.3 Delivery mode

The HtGM programme was launched in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the early cohorts of HtGM were expected to be administered predominantly online, with some scope for face-to-face delivery at the discretion of individual business schools. The results from the post-completion survey indicated that most (84%) business schools chose to deliver the four case study modules in person.⁴¹ There was some limited evidence of other elements of the programme being delivered in person (non-case study modules were delivered in person in fewer than 10% of cases).

Overall, most participants were satisfied with the level of face-to-face delivery, although two in ten were dissatisfied (Figure 18). Survey and interview data indicated that SME leaders valued a hybrid of online and in-person delivery but expressed a general preference for face-to-face delivery.⁴² Participants valued the flexibility and convenience of online sessions, especially when they did not live near the business school, but also appreciated the sense of teamwork and collaboration that the in-person sessions provided.

Figure 18: Overall, how satisfied were you with the amount of face-to-face delivery in the HtGM programme?



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice

⁴¹ Case study modules were: M3: Internationalisation, M6: Building a brand, M9: High performance workplace and M12: Implementing GAPS.

⁴² Evidence from depth interview programme: Most SME leaders reported that the programme offered a good balance between online modules and in-person activities (10) although some would have preferred slightly more face-to-face contact, but still with some online content (6).

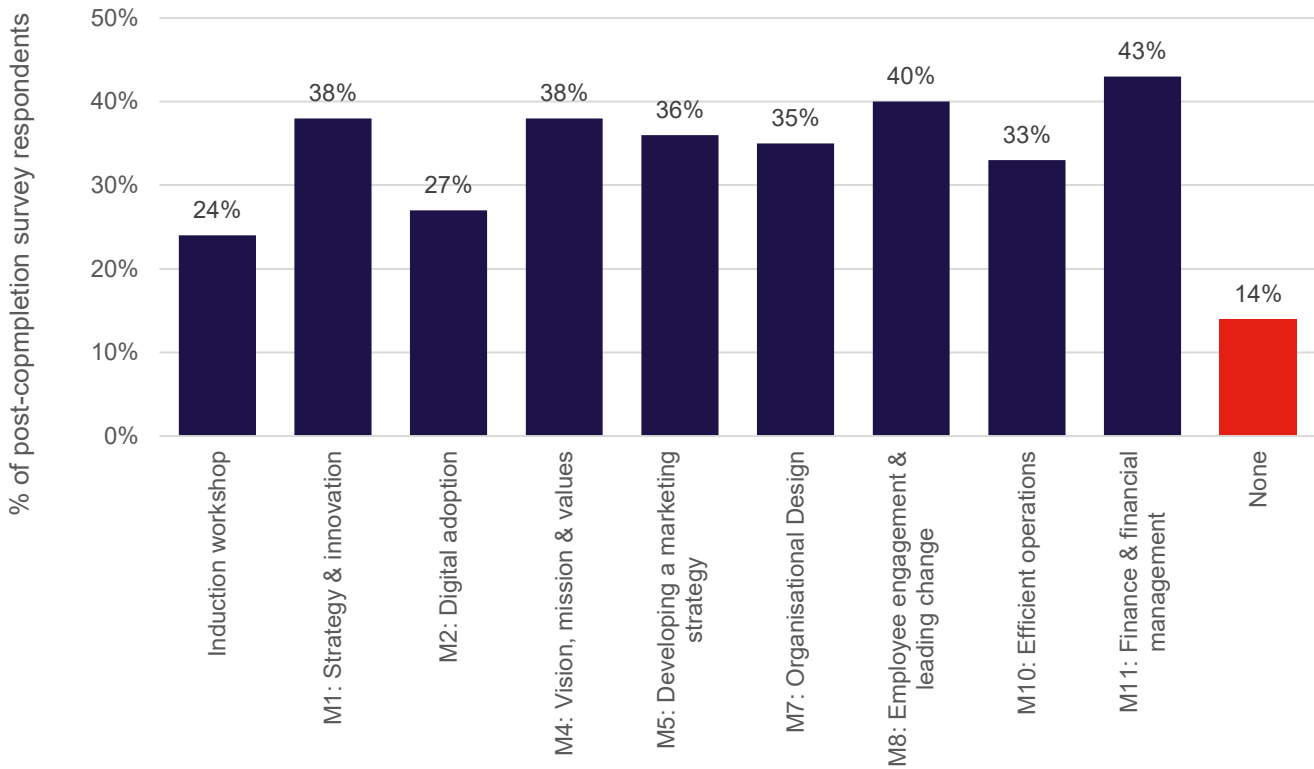
SME leaders expressed an overall preference for face-to-face delivery for the modular content: the majority of survey respondents thought that the general and case study modules were best delivered in person (68% and 74% respectively).⁴³ Given that most participants *did* receive in-person delivery for the case study modules, this can be interpreted as an early endorsement for delivering case study modules face-to-face over online.

Programme completers had less of a preference on delivery mode for the mentoring and peer learning sessions. Around half (45%) of those who responded to the survey said that the format of their mentoring sessions did not influence their overall satisfaction with programme delivery and two fifths (42%) did not have a preference on the mode of delivery of the peer learning groups.

There was a preference for some face-to-face delivery of all modules: only a small proportion (14%) of programme completers thought that none of the modules could have been improved by some face-to-face delivery (Figure 19). SME leaders had the strongest preference for some face-to-face delivery of the finance module (43% saying this module would benefit from some face-to-face delivery). Evidence from the depth interviews suggested that some participants would have valued more of the curriculum to be focused on finance and financial management. This could suggest that the topic of finance would be better suited to in-person delivery as it would enable more discussions and participants might be more willing to ask questions. Around one in four SME leaders would have preferred the induction workshop and digital adoption modules to have been delivered in person – the lowest of all the modules.

⁴³ These data are in response to the following question: “Do you think the sessions in the Help to Grow: Management programme would be better if they were delivered face-to-face or online?” Source: Ipsos (March 2022)

Figure 19: Which of the modules do you think would have been improved by some face-to-face delivery? (Excl. case study modules)



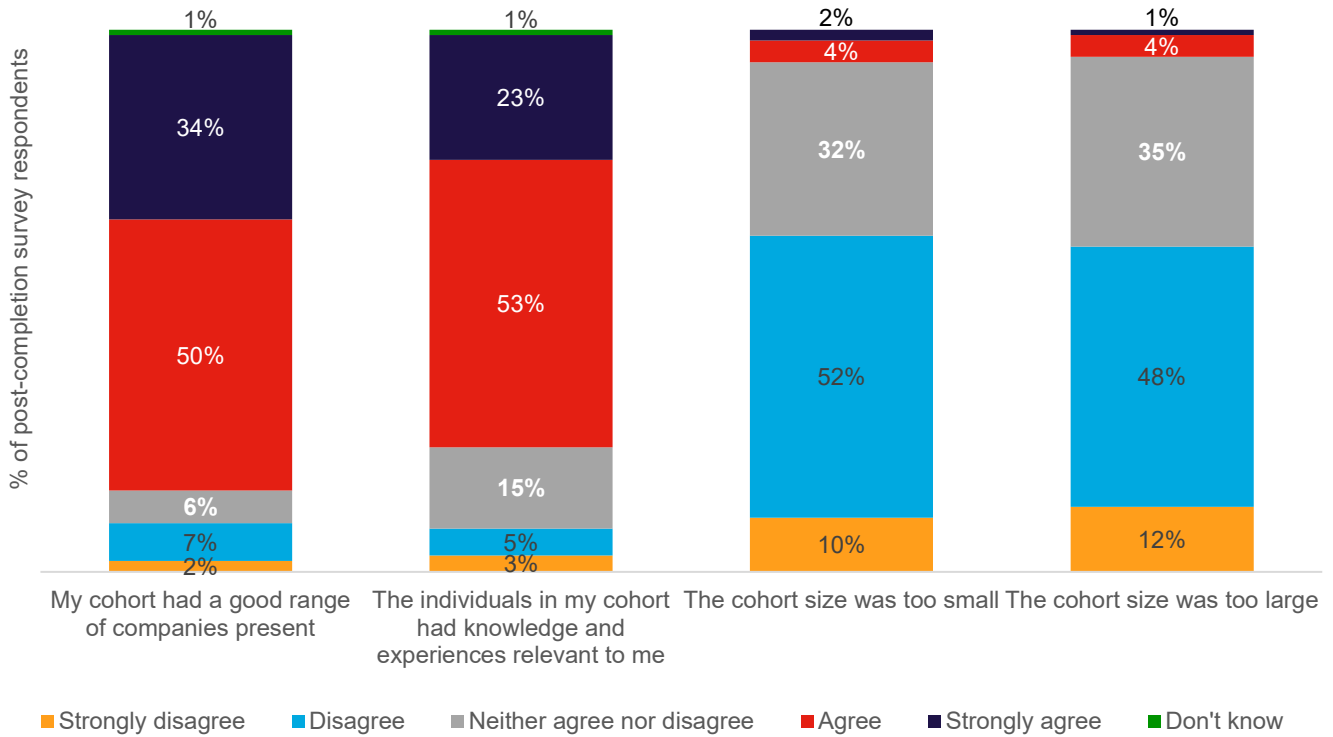
Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: multiple choice

Cohort composition

Business schools generally reported that demand had been too low to curate cohorts, but that diverse cohorts were preferable (e.g. gender balanced, with businesses of different sizes and from different sectors) to maximise knowledge sharing and discussion. HtGM cohorts were expected to comprise 25 SME leaders but in practice **cohort size varied considerably**, from 9 to 26. Only half of cohorts consisted of 20 participants or more. Feedback from business schools suggested that they thought the target size of 25 was broadly right, but that the programme could still be delivered to a high standard with smaller groups where demand was low.

Despite most business schools being unable to curate cohort composition based on factors such as sector or size, **survey feedback from SME leaders on the make-up of their cohorts was very positive**. The majority thought that their cohort included a good range of companies and their cohort peers had knowledge and experiences that were relevant to them (Figure 20). There was no clear consensus on optimum cohort size amongst survey respondents: with very similar proportions of participants reporting that their cohort size was too large and too small.

Figure 20: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your HtGM cohort?



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice per statement

3.4 Course content

Feedback from SME leaders and business schools indicated high levels of satisfaction with the overall design and content of the HtGM modules. The majority of SME leaders considered most of the modules to be relevant to their business, with strategy and innovation and vision, mission and values considered the most relevant (Figure 21). This was reflected in the interview feedback, where SME leaders highlighted the breadth of content as being particularly valuable and said they found some useful information for their business within each module. Module content and case studies were considered applicable and relevant to businesses and were said to stimulate thinking amongst SME leaders.

Quotes from depth interviews with HtGM programme completers

HtGM programme completer

“[It] touched on enough not to confuse people, and gave everybody enough to give them an introduction”

HtGM programme completer

“Absolutely fantastic, really well researched”

HtGM programme completer

“Gives you a toolbox of things you can fix bits of your business with”

HtGM programme completer

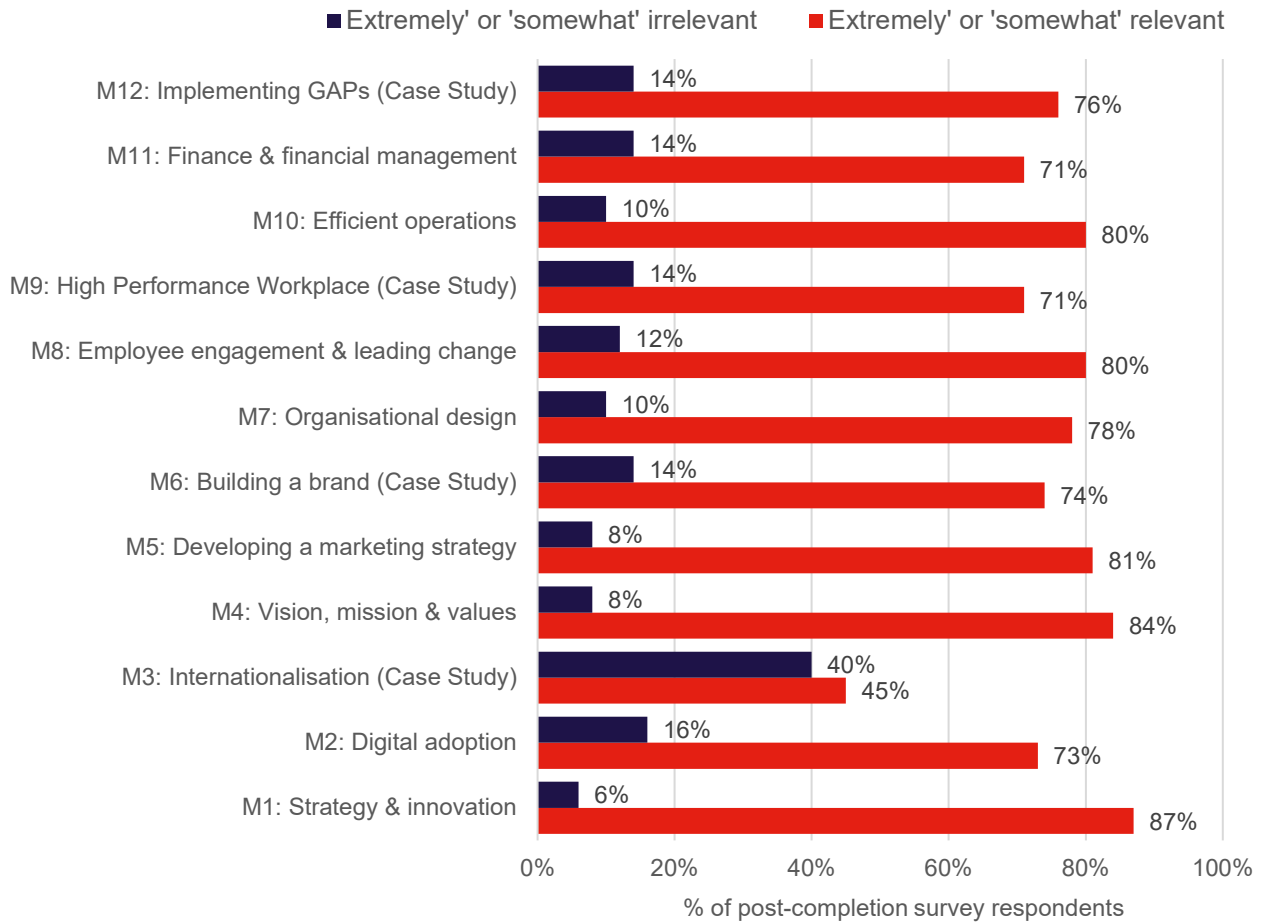
“Overall positive feedback on content, 9/10... clear and easy to use and available online”

Source: Ipsos and IES depth interviews with SME leaders completing HtGM (March 2022)

SME leaders who had completed HtGM were divided on the relevance of the internationalisation case study (module 3), with around half reporting that it was relevant to their business and around half reporting that it was irrelevant (Figure 21). Follow up depth interviews with SME leaders corroborated this: it was considered to be one of the less useful modules. This was either because their business did not currently have plans to trade overseas or because their business model was not appropriate for internationalisation (e.g., a local barbershop).

The main area for improvement to the course content recommended by business schools and SME leaders was the volume of module content to be delivered. There was broad consensus amongst business schools that there was too much content in the modules, making it difficult (or “impossible”) for tutors to cover them in full. Similarly, programme completers said that modules sometimes felt too high level and rushed due to the amount of content to be covered within the available time. Whilst it was acknowledged that there was some flexibility in delivery of the course content, it was noted by business schools that this could lead to inconsistency in delivery if some schools chose to cover some elements in more detail than others.

Figure 21: How relevant were each of the HtGM modules to your business?



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice per module

3.5 Mentoring

In the first year of HtGM delivery, mentors were paid per hour for a total of up to ten hours per participant (delivered from module 3 onwards).⁴⁴ In future years, the mentoring offer will be delivered on a voluntary basis.⁴⁵ The feedback on mentoring from mentors, business schools and programme participants presented in the following sections all relate to the Year 1 delivery model.

Mentor recruitment

Mentors were recruited by business schools through their own networks (alumni or existing business contacts). Most mentors had previously worked through the Business School and were contacted by them directly to ask if they would participate in mentoring. Existing and/or previous experience at the Business School included teaching/adviser roles (e.g., lecturer, ‘Entrepreneur in Residence’), and involvement in the delivery of similar business

⁴⁴ Mentees can follow up with mentors for up to one month after the end of module 12. Any continuing relationship after this is not under the HtGM branding.

⁴⁵ The effect of this change in delivery of the mentoring model will be explored in the second year of the evaluation (2022/23)

programmes e.g. The Small Business Leadership Programme. Some were required to take part in a formal procurement process and interview, others were not.

Key motivations for registering included the perceived nature and quality of the programme, as well as business school staff involved in the delivery. Conversations with the programme administrator were important in making this decision / appraisal. One mentor said, *"knowing that there's other people who I rate the quality of and we can have discussions and learn from each other, that's always really valuable"*.

The following factors were identified, by existing mentors, as potential barriers to recruitment of future mentors:

- **Lack of awareness** – due to delayed and insufficient national publicity. One mentor proposed that talented people who would be a good fit for the mentor person specification might not always label themselves as 'mentors'. As a result, they may be unaware of the programme and unlikely to find or click on the specification.
- **Time commitment** of ten sessions, especially in a short timeframe. One mentor reported that they could only commit to one mentee as a result.
- **Geography** – one mentor suggested it was important to be at a local business school to cut down on travel and because they like to make a local impact. Another mentioned that remote delivery was an advantage and was the reason they chose to be a mentor rather than facilitator or lecturer when offered.

Types of mentors

Mentors involved in the first year of HtGM delivery were typically professional mentors, trainers and/or coaches. Interviews with mentors indicated that they were often specialists in SMEs and had previous experience mentoring SME leaders. Most were mentoring full time and had private clients alongside their mentoring on the Help to Grow: Management programme. Some had experience with mentoring on similar programmes. A few were mentoring through multiple business schools. Their employment backgrounds included local government and the public sector, procurement, manufacturing, fashion, human resources and technology, with experience in large and small organisations.

Pay for mentors

Around half of the mentors interviewed commented that they would not have mentored under HtGM without payment. The programme was considered too demanding to be offered pro-bono and consultees highlighted the importance of payments attracting high quality, experienced mentors. Other mentors were unsure if they would participate in the programme without payment, suggested they might be able to do pro bono but only with one or two mentee(s).

It might be expected that the mentors interviewed at this stage would favour the paid-for model given that this is what they were delivering. Those interviewed were also professional mentors recruited through the business schools for whom mentoring may be their main source of income, so they may have higher expectations of payment.

Mentor training

Mentors reported that the aims, objectives, and role of the mentor, and HtGM overall, were clear. The role was described by mentors as being straightforward and similar to previous mentoring experiences. As a result, mentors largely reported that formal training was not necessary. However, they were satisfied with the preparation materials that were accessible before starting. Some also commended the business schools for being clear about the structure and time expectations from the start.

Overall, **mentors felt well supported** by the programme administrators and other staff at the business school. This support was typically offered through the Help to Grow: Management online group induction session/programme and a conversation with the programme administrator. The induction sessions included training videos on key mentoring skills and an overview of the mentor role and Growth Action Plans, to help mentors understand the programme requirements. A couple of mentors mentioned finding the training videos useful and easier to learn from than reading the handbook.

The mentoring relationship

*As of early April 2022, 1,457 mentoring relationships had been formed for HtGM.*⁴⁶

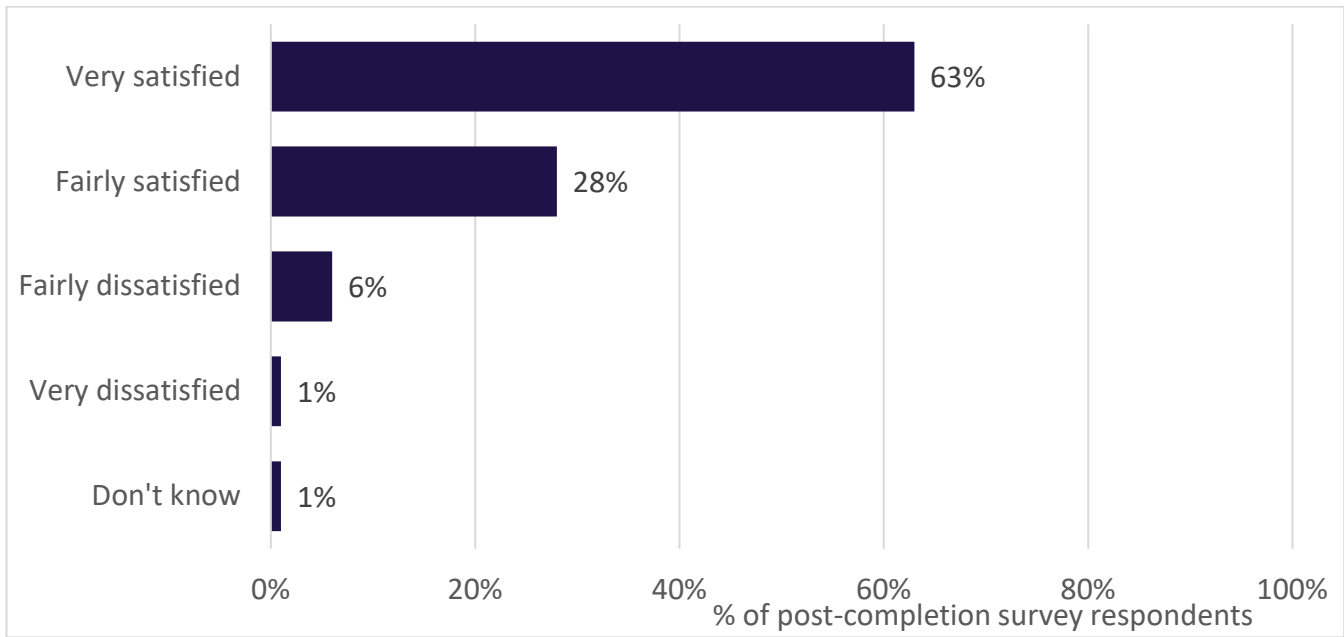
The mentoring element of the programme was very highly regarded by programme participants, scoring higher satisfaction levels than the programme overall. Figure 22 shows that almost all respondents to the survey were satisfied with the mentoring support received through the programme (91%) and almost two thirds (63%) were very satisfied with this. This was confirmed through interviews with programme completers, who valued the tailored, bespoke and personalised support that could be delivered through the mentoring element of the programme.

Around three quarters (77%) of programme completers said they felt they had been well matched to their mentor. Interviews with SME leaders indicated that they felt their mentor's experience was aligned to their individual and business needs. Mentors and mentees agreed that the business school had paid close attention to matching programme participants with mentors. **Around two thirds (69%) of SME leaders responding to the post-completion survey had completed all ten planned sessions with their mentors**, in most cases the remaining had completed at least five sessions.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ 'Matched to mentor' in PB tracker for all live and delivered cohorts

⁴⁷ It is worth noting that the survey was administered to participants between two and six weeks after completing module 12, and so not all will have completed their mentoring at the time of their response: 5% were not matched with a mentor at all and 23% of relationships were not complete.

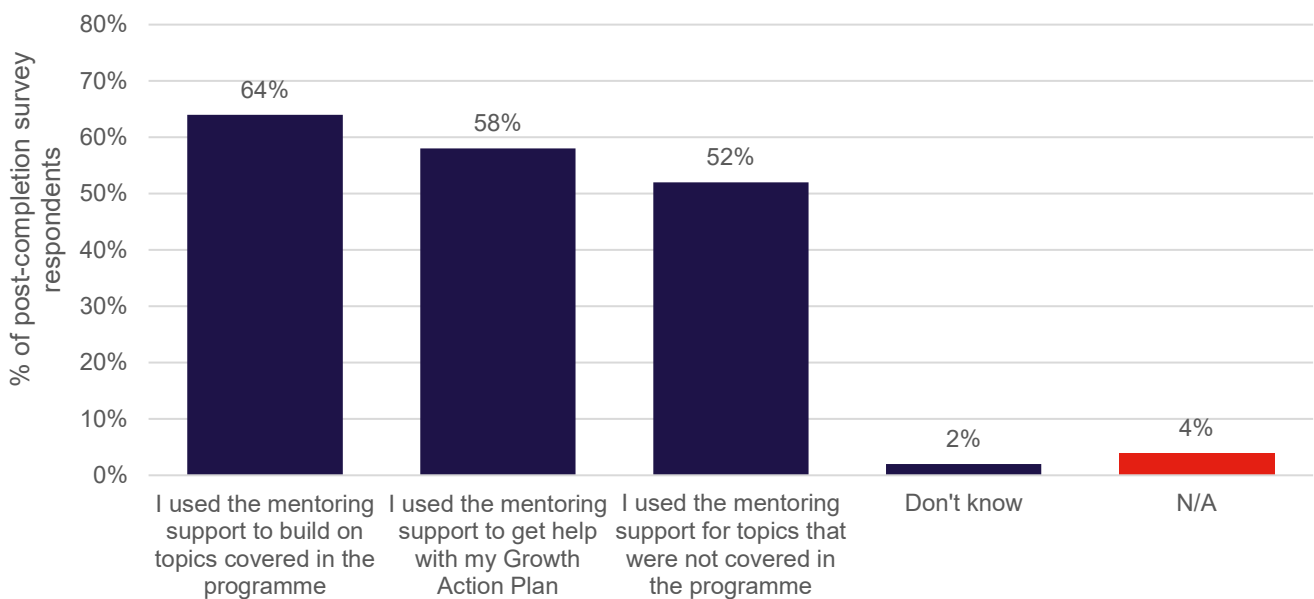
Figure 22: Overall, how satisfied are you with the one-to-one mentoring support you received through the HtGM programme?



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice

Programme participants used their mentoring relationships to both build on the **topics covered in the HtGM programme curriculum** and to seek advice, guidance and support on **ad hoc issues** they or their businesses were facing (Figure 23). This was reflected in the depth feedback from SME leaders and mentors, who reported that the sessions were often used (and most valued) by participants when they were tailored to their individual business needs (e.g. one business leader used the mentoring relationship to build a 'business survival plan' in response to the COVID-19 Omicron variant and associated lockdowns). Mentors also reported that the sessions were commonly used for ad hoc support.

Figure 23: Which of the following describes how you used the one-to-one mentoring support?



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: multiple choice

Over three quarters (78%) of programme participants had completed a Growth Action Plan (GAP) at the time of the post-completion survey⁴⁸. Just over half (58%) of those who had been matched with a mentor used the mentoring support to help develop and implement their GAP (Figure 23).⁴⁹ Of those who had used the mentoring support to help develop their GAP, the majority (96%) said they had been well supported by their mentors in doing this. This finding is an early endorsement of the programme design: it suggests that the mentoring relationships are effective in facilitating the development and implementation of GAPs, and that mentors should be encouraged to use the relationships for this purpose.

A selection of quotes from the depth interviews with programme completers is presented below. These examples corroborate the finding that SME leaders typically use the mentoring support to both tailor the HtGM curriculum to them but also for ad hoc support with their wider business.

Quotes from depth interviews with HtGM programme completers on the mentoring support received

<p>HtGM programme completer</p> <p><i>“From working with the mentor I know the [GAP] we ended up with was much, much better than the plan that we would have had if it had just been...the peer to peer learning and the modules. It would have been a much worse plan if it hadn't have been for the mentor”</i></p>	<p>HtGM programme completer</p> <p><i>“we were able to go into those things that were really the most relevant to me within the whole curriculum, digest it and come to conclusions myself. It just made sure that everything fitted into place, to the extent that I used the GAP as a focal point of some of the board of directors' meetings.”</i></p>
<p>HtGM programme completer</p> <p><i>“What was really useful for me...in a fairly new role of being part of the board of directors, going through structural changes in the company that I was very much initiating, and not feeling as confident maybe with those things, having the possibility to discuss those things with my mentor. “</i></p>	<p>HtGM programme completer</p> <p><i>“We had a series of five or six sessions on Zoom, structured around my growth plan. So, taking a different element each time to actually talk through the growth plan. I had some great ideas and we talked through the ideas for growth in terms of new premises and machinery. ”</i></p>
<p>HtGM programme completer</p> <p><i>“We went through [the GAP] together to find out which issues most urgently needed dealing with. It wasn't like, 'Well, we'll do the easier ones first.' It was more of a, 'that seems to be your next step, and this seems to be the step after that.' And employee engagement was the [area] I really needed to focus on”</i></p>	<p>HtGM programme completer</p> <p><i>“We did an overall health check of the business. We put together a plan for the next few months after the expansion and then once we were hit with Omicron variant we put a survival plan together. I was very anxious but with the plan we actually did really well. I am very thankful for his ideas and support on this. “</i></p>
<p>HtGM programme completer</p> <p><i>“There was a mixture of direct advice and then also just applying theory to the business from the course. How we actually adapt it to our business or is it even relevant, and, if it's not, at what stage is it relevant? And then just any personal advice around what was going on at the time of the business. “</i></p>	<p>HtGM programme completer</p> <p><i>“Mentoring helps you to stay focused on what you [want] to achieve. [I received] support with funding and identifying the right tools to help me, especially with my ERP* set up. Then also offered me other cost saving measures that I could put in place. So it really helped. I ended up signing up for an extra 10 hours. “</i></p>

Source: Ipsos and IES depth interviews with SME leaders completing HtGM (March 2022); * Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)

⁴⁸ As part of HtGM, all participants are required to complete a Growth Action Plan to drive productivity improvements within their business post-participation. Participants can use their mentors to support this.

⁴⁹ 163 out of 171 business leaders had been matched with a mentor (95%)

3.6 Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)⁵⁰

The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) was not highlighted by SME leaders as crucial to the successful delivery of the programme, however a few noted that it was a valuable 'home' for the programme materials. The twelve online feedback surveys that participants are asked to complete after each module were not deemed to be particularly onerous, although some SME leaders were unclear on what they were for and how they linked to other data collection.

There was some criticism from business schools on the usability of the VLE. One said it was difficult to extract data from this (e.g. on attendance at cohort level), although they thought this had improved in the second version. Another felt that issues remained as data was not fully automated, relying on participants logging their participation, possibly leading to underreported attendance.

One business school suggested that it would be preferable if they could administer the diagnostic themselves as part of registration to the programme. This would ensure that it was completed in advance of participation (as some were reported to be completing it after the programme had started). It would also enable delivery staff to develop an understanding of the profile of their cohort, and their development needs, which would be helpful. It was noted that mentors were unable to access the diagnostic assessment completed by the participants, which could be helpful in informing their work.

⁵⁰ The VLE was updated in October 2021 with improvements to the surveys and user navigation. The data reported in this section includes a small number of responses from before these changes were made.

4. Programme effectiveness

Summary of key findings in relation to Evaluation Question 3: To what extent is the programme effective at teaching new skills and encouraging business leaders to adopt new practices?

- Self-reported feedback from those completing the programme suggest that it has contributed to **improvements in their individual skills and confidence after completing the programme.**
- There is emerging evidence of successful **diffusion of learning within participating businesses**: 89% of SME leaders have shared what they had learned or gained from HtGM with others in their business. This is a key mechanism through which programme participants can secure organisational buy-in to new practices.
- **Following completion of the programme, SME leaders reported improvements to a range of firm level strategic capabilities and experience** (Figure 29). Though there was no particular business-level outcome commonly reported by programme completers, half of SME leaders thought that their firm was better able to implement a business plan and strategy (50%) and a four in ten agreed their firm had improved in its ability to communicate its vision, mission and value statements (43%)
- Around half (54%) of HtGM participants had already gone on to make changes to the way they **manage, organise or operate their business**. The types of changes implemented to date were closely related to the individual leader, with a focus on leadership, employee engagement, vision, purpose and brand.
- As might be expected immediately following completion of the programme, there was less evidence of organisational changes relating to **formal business structures and operations** (such as those relating to carbon footprint, data analytics, innovation and markets).
- The evidence to date suggests that the biggest drivers behind the self-reported individual and business outcomes were the **mentoring support, the breadth of topics covered in the HtGM curriculum and peer group calls.**
- The evidence also highlighted some possible areas for improvement to programme design and delivery to improve its effectiveness in generating outcomes. These included: more time between sessions; streamlined module content or more module sessions; and more flexibility to accommodate wider business demands on SME leaders.

Introduction

This chapter presents the evidence to date on individual and business level outcomes reported by SME leaders who have completed the HtGM programme. It provides emerging insights into the types of outcomes being reported and the relative contribution of the different elements of the programme to the realisation of these. It draws on evidence from SME leaders completing

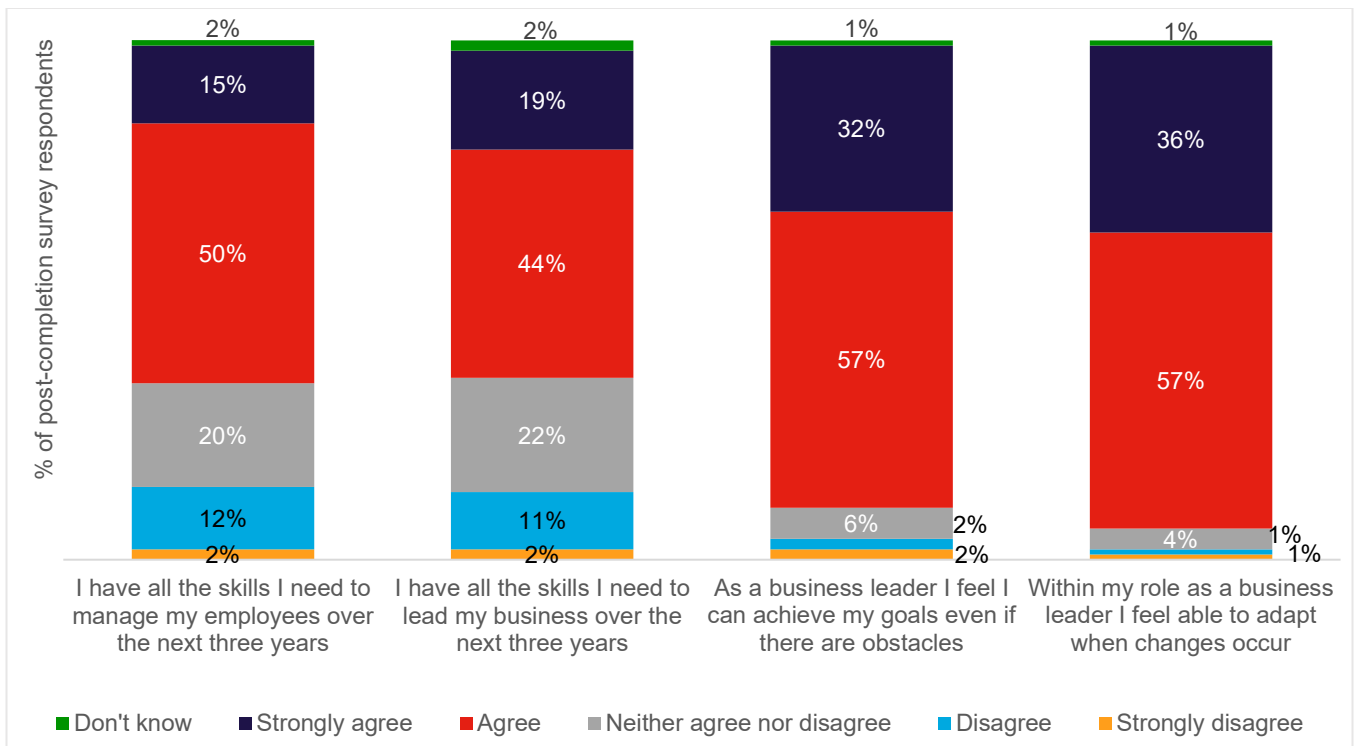
the programme (through the post-completion survey and depth interviews) and interview evidence from mentors and business schools.

All evidence on outcomes is based on self-reported data and should be treated as indicative, without any causal inference. Self-reported data is often subject to a degree of optimism bias – a tendency to overestimate or be overly optimistic – and the findings presented in the following sections should be interpreted in this context.⁵¹

4.1 Self-reported individual outcomes

SME leaders report relatively high levels of confidence in their leadership capabilities and ability to deliver change within their businesses within six weeks of completing HtGM (Figure 24). Most participants agreed that they were confident in their ability as a leader to adapt when changes occur (93%) and achieve their goals even in the face of obstacles (89%). The proportions agreeing that they were confident that they had all the skills they needed to lead their business and manage their employees over the next three years were lower (63% and 65% respectively). This suggests that there is a perceived **skills gaps** amongst SME leaders following completion of the programme.

Figure 24: Thinking about how you feel today, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Up to six weeks post completion)



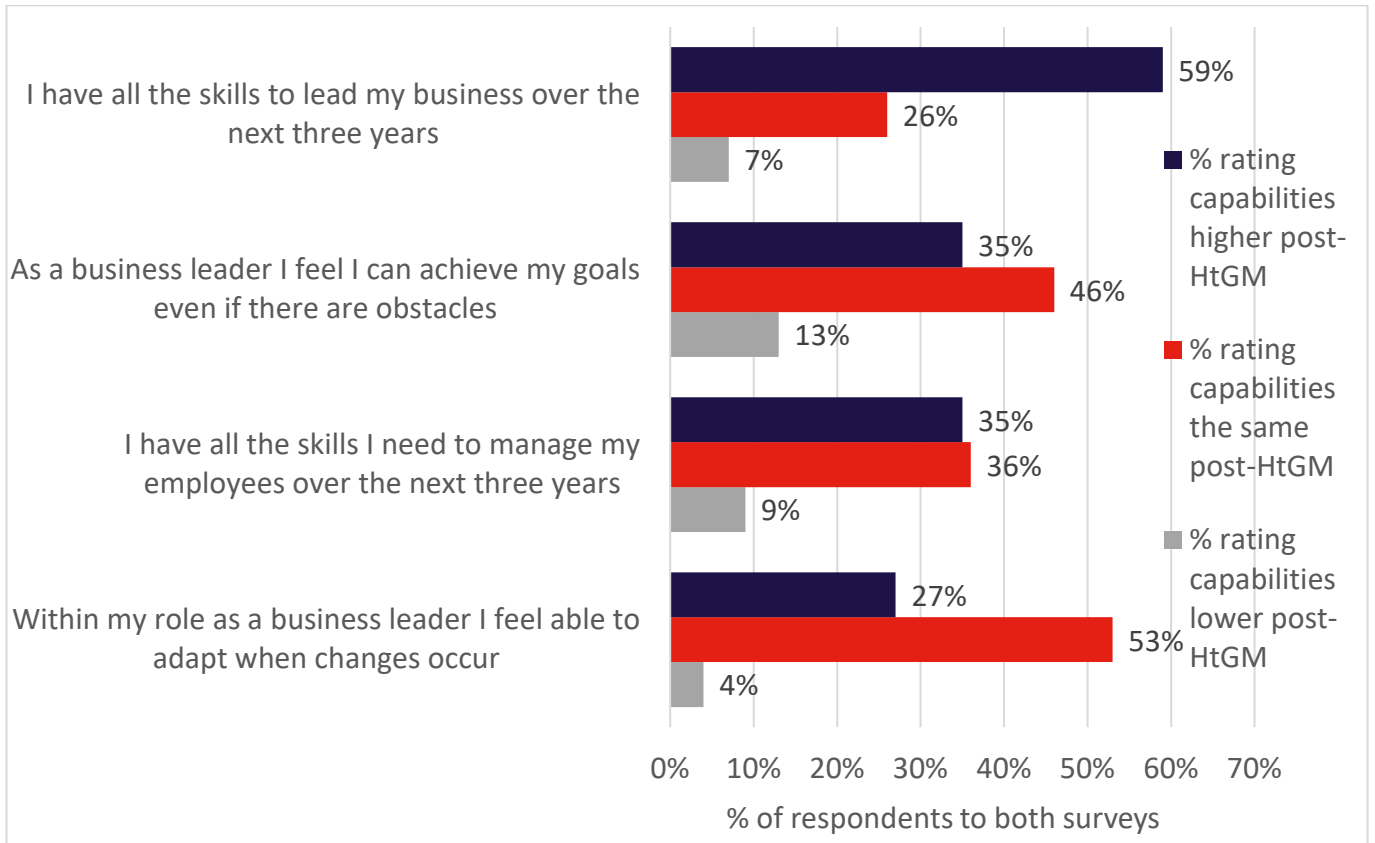
Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice per statement

Early evidence indicates that programme completers experience positive changes in their individual skills and confidence after completing the programme (Figure 25). Comparisons between capabilities at the time of registration and post completion show that

⁵¹ See 'Optimism Bias' in HMT Green Book (2022)

HtGM completers experienced the biggest change in their self-reported skills to lead their business over the next three years (59%). In around one third of cases respectively (both 35%), programme completers also reported feeling better able to achieve their goals, even in the face of obstacles; and having the skills required to manage their employees over the next three years. Comparatively few (27%) programme completers were more confident to adapt to changes after completing the programme. However, this was the area that SME leaders reported feeling most confident in before starting the programme (74% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement), meaning there was less scope for improvement.

Figure 25: Changes in skills, capabilities and confidence (pre- and post- HtGM) ⁵²



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey and HtGM Diagnostic Tool (n=161 – those that completed both the diagnostic tool and the post completion survey); Note: reported change is based on the difference between self-reported data collected at two points in time

These findings are consistent with the expected progression set out in the Theory of Change for the programme: it is anticipated that benefits will accrue at the individual level in the first instance, before diffusing into wider business benefits. It is anticipated that more business level benefits will have been accrued at the time of the post-completion follow up survey, which will be administered by Ipsos six months after completion (launching May 2022).

HtGM participants report a range of individual outcomes within six weeks of completing the programme, with increased confidence and awareness of factors that drive business productivity the most common (Figure 26). At this stage, the benefits most frequently reported by completers relate to **enhancing them as individual leaders** (e.g. improved confidence, awareness and leadership and management skills).. The skills and knowledge associated with **enhancing business performance** (e.g., technical know-how that might lead to changes in

⁵² Question: Thinking about how you feel today, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

business structures to improve efficiency, data practices, financial systems) are less embedded at this stage. Moreover, relatively few (33%) programme completers report greater awareness of financial management through the programme.

Figure 26: Individual level outcomes (expectations vs. self-reported outcomes)



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: multiple choice

Evidence collected through interviews with programme completers provide insights into the nature of individual outcomes achieved to date. SME leaders completing HtGM:

- Were **more confident to lead and manage their business**: the programme provided them with new skills (e.g., cashflow management and digital marketing) and also reinforced some of their existing knowledge.
- Had **improved their management and leadership skills** (e.g., strategic thinking, strategic decision making, active listening) and developed a **greater understanding of best practice leadership and management approaches** (e.g., to sustainability, innovation and investment).

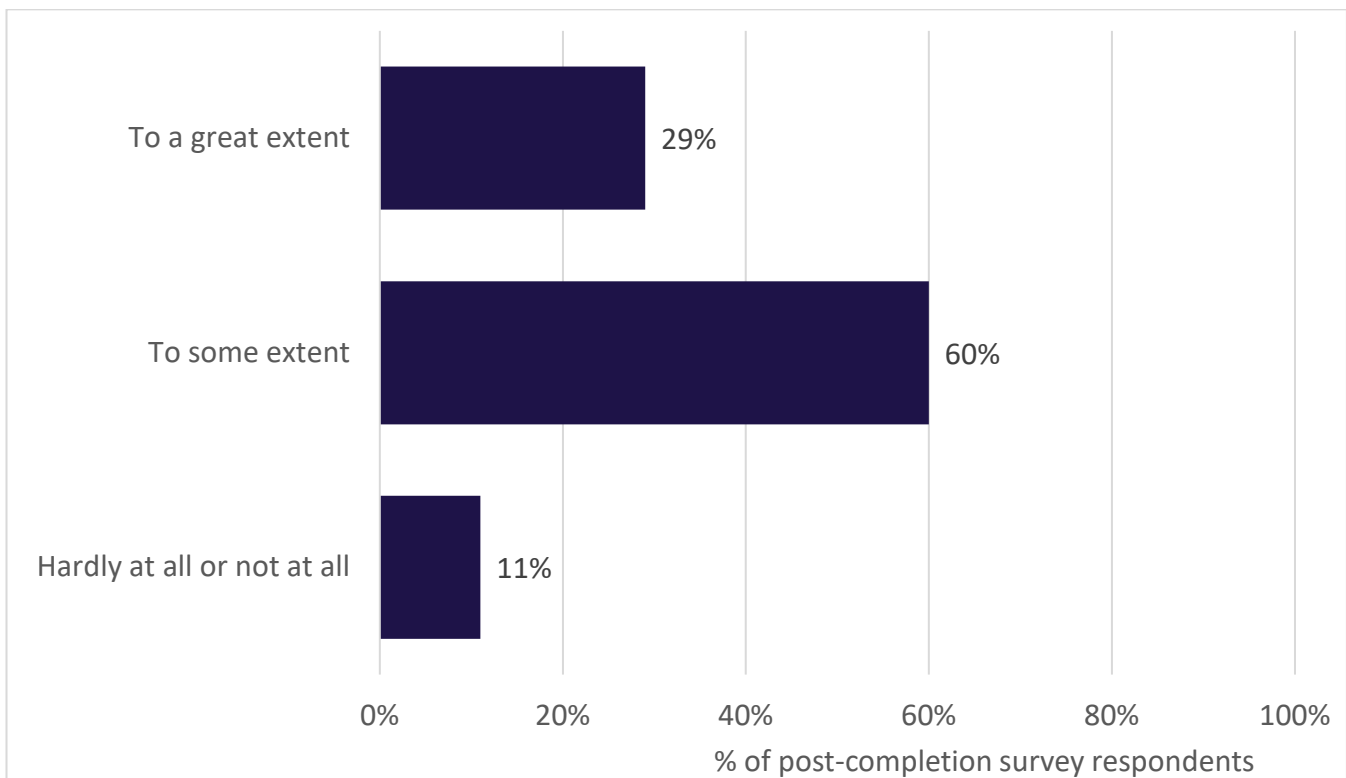
- Better **understood the factors that drive productivity**, specifically that employee engagement is positively correlated with productivity and digitisation is an effective tool to support and monitor productivity.⁵³

The mentoring support was considered to be a key contributing factor to individual outcomes by SME leaders. Those interviewed highlighted that the one-to-one sessions with mentors had enabled them to seek advice, share opinions and further develop their management and leadership skills. The **peer learning groups were also referenced as a mechanism to achieving individual outcomes:** SME leaders learned from other organisations facing similar challenges and reported feeling less alone when making significant business decisions.

4.2 Diffusion of knowledge

Most (89%) SME leaders had shared what they had learned or gained from HtGM within six weeks of completing the programme (Figure 27). This diffusion of learning from individual leaders completing the programme is a key mechanism for generating impact at the business level. These findings therefore provide early indicative evidence in support of the Theory of Change, specifically that the benefits to individual leaders from participation in the programme are likely to translate into benefits to their business.

Figure 27: To what extent have you shared what you have learned or gained from participation in the programme with others within your businesses?



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice

⁵³ These findings are presented in order of the frequency with which they were mentioned by SME leaders in the depth interview programme.

Insights from depth interviews with programme completers indicated that the diffusion of learning within participant businesses tended to happen in an informal way:

- HtGM completers said they were sharing knowledge through **changes to their behaviour - 'leading by example'**: setting new behavioural norms within their business that fostered a more open, collaborative and inclusive working environment (e.g. asking for regular feedback, actively listening to team members, trusting colleagues' decisions)
- Others **adopted new practices** within their business, such as modifying meeting styles and frequency, opening new communication channels between senior leaders and hosting regular all-staff knowledge sharing events.
- A small number had shared knowledge through **formal training and presentations** to colleagues.
- In the few instances where learning from the programme had not been shared widely within the business, SME leaders referenced barriers that were both **internal** (e.g. lack of organisational buy-in to the Growth Action Plan) and **external** (e.g. factors in the wider economy, COVID-19) to the business.

4.3 Self-reported business outcomes

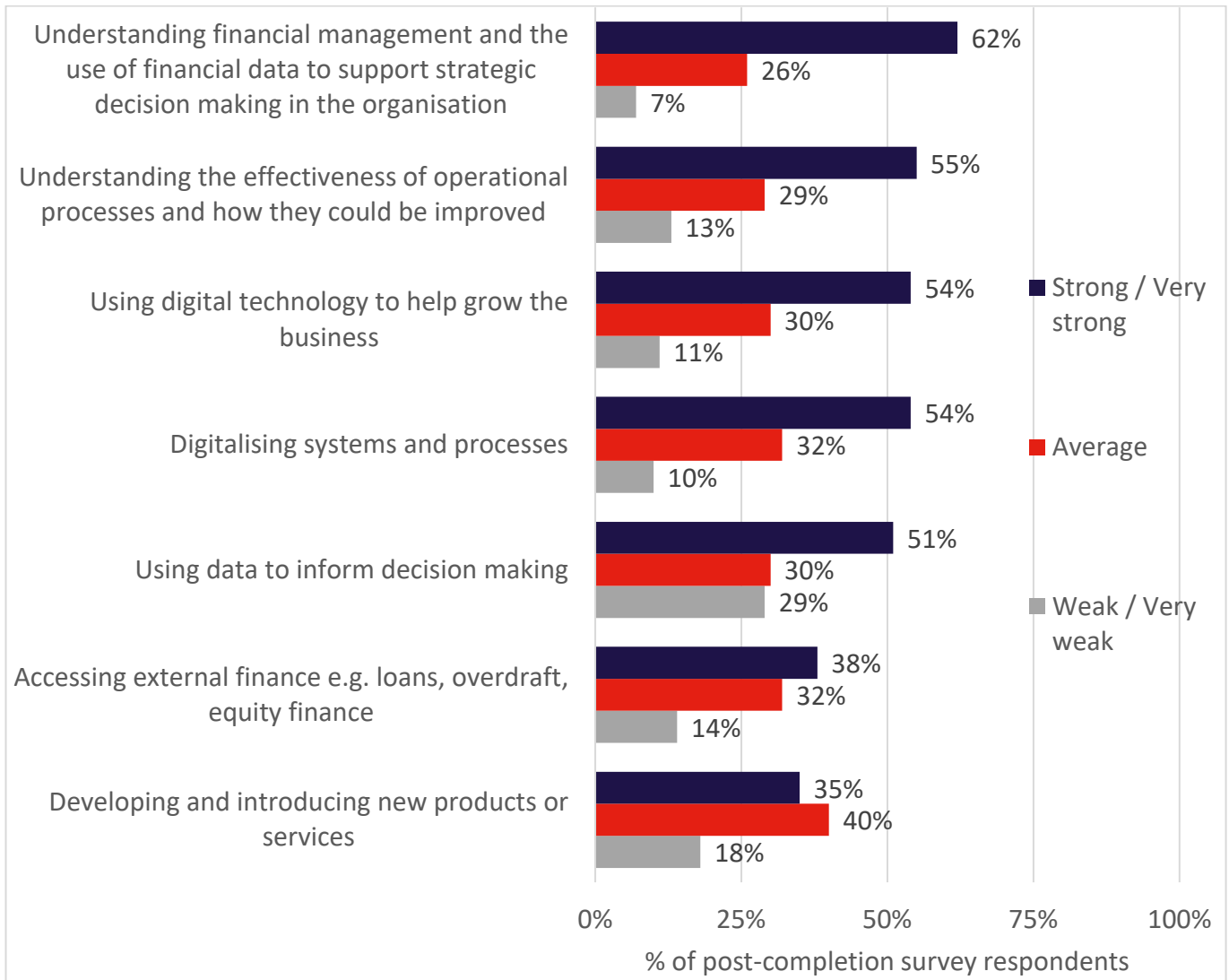
Firm capabilities

This section presents perceptions of HtGM completers on the capabilities of their business following completion of the programme.

Six weeks after completing HtGM, programme participants also reported that their firms had a range of **business practice capabilities** (Figure 28). SME leaders reported that their firm's understanding of **financial management** and the use of financial data to support strategic decision making was strong (62%). This could explain why relatively few SME leaders expected to have a greater awareness of financial management as a result of completing HtGM (see Figure 2) and reported relatively low levels of interest in the finance module at the outset (see Figure 3) Over half (55% and 54%, respectively) of business leaders were also confident in their firm's understanding of ways to improve operational efficiency and ability to effectively adopt digital solutions to help grow their business. SME leaders most commonly rated their firm as weak or very weak in relation to using data to inform decision making and developing and introducing new products or services.

As with the individual level outcomes, this narrative is also consistent with the Theory of Change (see Annex D): in the short term, it is expected that business outcomes relating to the individual leader (i.e., skills and understanding of financial management) will accrue and that other benefits that require expenditure and additional upskilling (e.g., sourcing, purchasing and installing a new software; developing a new product; accessing external finance) will take longer to come to fruition. It is anticipated that more business level benefits will have been accrued at the time of the six month follow up survey (launched in May 2022).

Figure 28: How would you rate your own firm’s capabilities and experience in the following business practices? (Up to six weeks post completion)

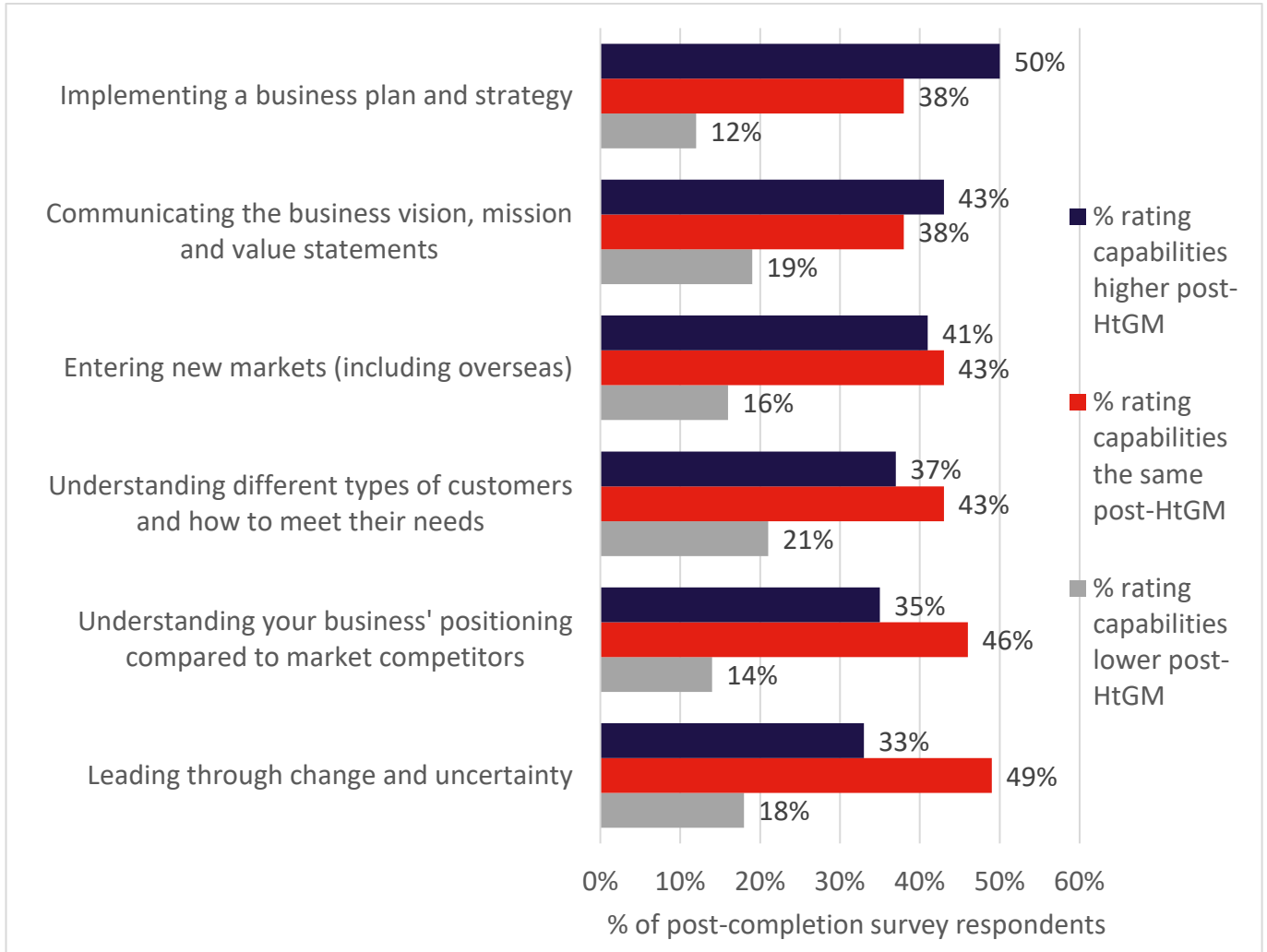


Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=171); Question type: single choice per statement; Note: in some cases, figures do not sum to 100% because of rounding

Following completion of the programme, SME leaders reported improvements to a range of firm level strategic capabilities and experience. Figure 29 presents the self-reported changes in these areas before the programme and after completing. SME leaders are reporting a range of improvements, reflecting the breadth of topics covered in the HtGM curriculum and the different capabilities, interest and experience firms have at the beginning of the programme. Though there was no particular business-level outcome commonly reported by programme completers, half of SME leaders thought that their firm was better able to implement a business plan and strategy (50%) and a four in ten agreed their firm had improved in its ability to communicate its vision, mission and value statements (43%) This finding suggests that HtGM is generating the learning outcomes in line with SME leaders’ expectations: the business strategy and vision modules were of most interest to programme completers at the time of applying (See Figure 3).

Despite initial reservations on the relevance of the internationalisation module (see Section 3, Figure 26), around two in five programme completers reported that their firm’s capabilities to enter new markets (including overseas) had improved.

Figure 29 Changes in firm-level strategic capabilities (pre- and post-HtGM)

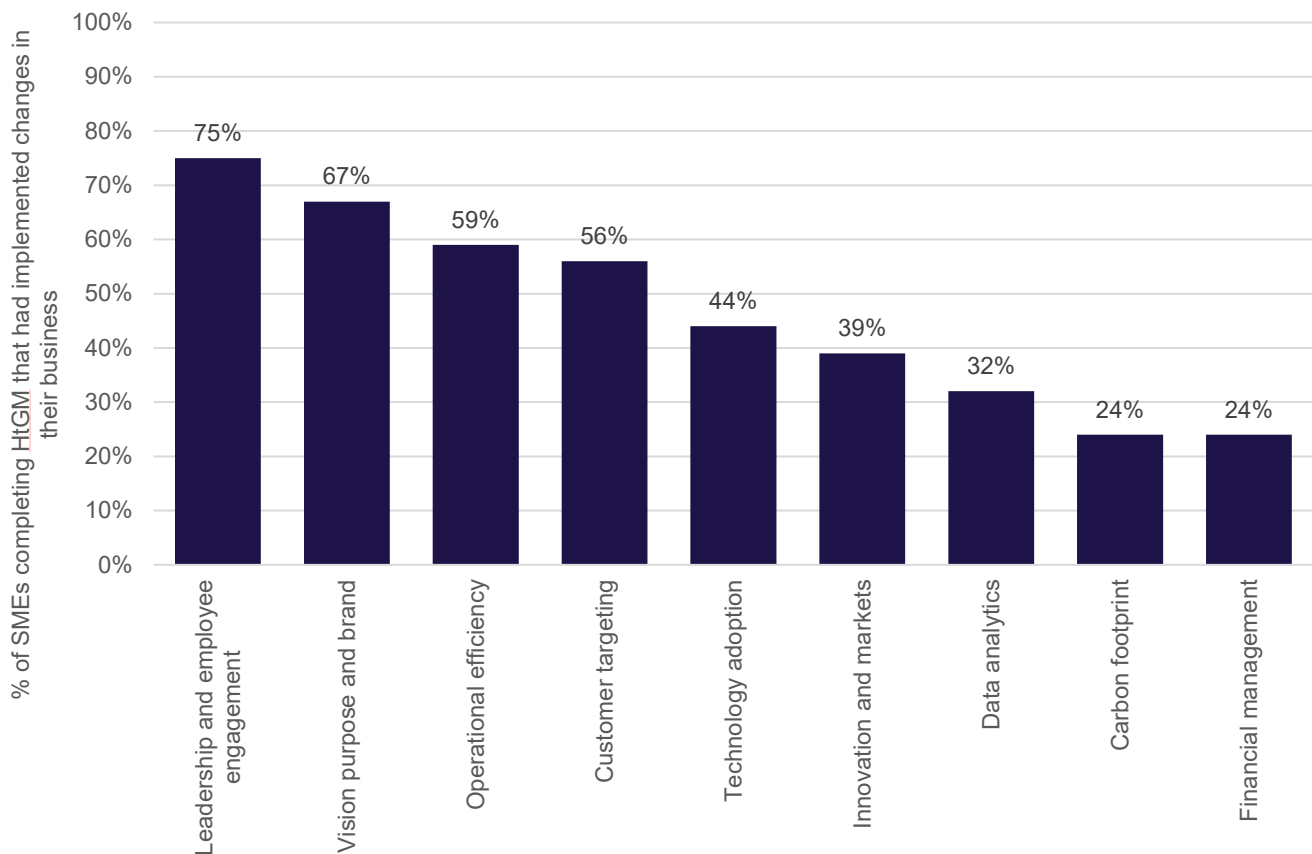


Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey and BEIS HtGM Diagnostic Tool (n=161 respondents to the question “How would you rate your own firm’s strategic capabilities and experience?” in both the diagnostic and the survey)

Changes implemented within businesses

Around half (54%) of HtGM participants who responded to the post-completion survey had already made changes to the way they manage, organise, or operate their business since completing the programme. These changes focussed on leadership and employee engagement, company vision, operational efficiency and customer targeting (Figure 30). The nature of the changes implemented to date are closely related to the individual leader, facilitated by the informal diffusion of knowledge reported in the previous section. To date, there is limited evidence of organisational changes relating to formal business structures and operations (e.g. customer targeting, data analytics). **This is in line with the expectations set out in the programme Theory of Change** – i.e. that early outcomes from the programme will be concentrated on the individual leader and that over time we can expect to see these translated into outcomes for the business as leaders apply the learning gained from the programme to make changes to business practices.

Figure 30: Self-reported changes to the way SME leaders manage, organise, or operate their business?



Source: Ipsos (March 2022) Post-completion survey (n=93, asked only to those that had reported that they had already made changes to their business in the post-completion survey); Question type: multiple choice

Looking in more detail at what businesses have done differently as a result of HtGM, examples provided by those who were interviewed included:

- **New staff strategies and wellbeing events** (e.g., social events, staff wellbeing policies, away days to understand company values)
- **Reconsideration of vision, purpose and branding**, with some reporting a renewed focus on sustainability (e.g., sourcing sustainable suppliers, materials and packaging) and adopting more inclusive practices (e.g., recruitment strategies).
- **Introduction of new software** to improve operational efficiency (e.g., Google Workspace and JobSheet to track progress and streamline invoicing).
- **Accessed external business support** - one applied for an Innovate UK Innovation Award and another received a £170k grant from Knowledge Transfer Partnership
- **Restructured business model** (e.g., creation separate divisions for online and in person operations) and **filled strategic skills gaps** (E.g., hired managers with expertise set out as priority areas in the GAP).

Quotes from depth interviews with HtGM programme completers on the mentoring support received

HtGM programme completer

Being a responsible business, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is something that I'm really, really hot on now. So in every conversation about employment, or looking after people, or wellbeing, I'm there making a contribution probably based on my learning from the course."

HtGM programme completer

"We looked at our pricing and positioning structure and made the decision to increase our pricing in order to allow us to invest and improve the quality of customer service. That came about as a direct result of conversations about the value pyramid in the innovation module"

HtGM programme completer

"Our website looks completely different to the way it did before. We've actually got a vision on there which is very clear, which we wouldn't have had."

HtGM programme completer

"I've hired a manager to oversee our purchasing department because that was a weakness we identified that that department wasn't being managed effectively, and recruiting two more people for that department"

Source: Ipsos and IES depth interviews with SME leaders completing HtGM (March 2022);

4.4 Reflections on effectiveness of delivery

What were the biggest drivers behind individual and business outcomes?

- Mentors were flexible and ensured that the support was tailored to the SME leaders' needs:** evidence from the survey and depth interviews indicated that HtGM participants really valued their mentoring relationships and often reported that mentors exceeded their expectations (e.g., holding sessions out of work hours to accommodate SME leaders' schedules and to help them avoid discussing sensitive information in front of colleagues). Two out of ten SMEs interviewed remained in touch with their mentor and three others had paid (or intended to) for additional sessions with theirs.
- The mentoring relationships were an important mechanism to consolidate HtGM participants' learning and helped to 'fill the gaps' in their understanding.** Specifically, the one-to-one sessions were often seen as the 'key' to SME leaders implementing their knowledge: they were used to discuss aspects that participants had found challenging and helped them to identify which elements of the module were relevant to businesses now and which would be more pertinent later. There were a few examples where mentors had helped participants to form new contacts in their industry.
- The HtGM curriculum was comprehensive and included topics that were generally relevant to participants' business needs.** SME leaders reported that the programme was well-structured and designed and appreciated that it had a "*natural progression*": each week's theme was seen to build those from previous weeks. The curriculum covered a good range of topics and programme participants were able to find relevant materials in almost all of the modules. The theory learned in the module sessions were the "*building blocks*" and the other elements of the programme (such as the mentoring and peer group sessions) provided space for them to focus on elements that were most relevant to them.

- **Peer group calls gave participants the confidence to embed learning**, through providing space for them to share queries/questions and learning and to understand that others face similar challenges, which made them feel less alone when faced with strategic business decisions. Organisers were reported to be flexible and adaptable, with one example provided of where they changed the format of the last two sessions based on feedback that attendees wanted to talk about their own business issues rather than the course content. Instead of discussing the case studies, participants asked themselves challenging questions in pairs and discussed potential solutions. They found this to be more useful.

Where could delivery be improved to support individual and business level outcomes?

- **More time between sessions** (e.g., between module and peer learning calls) to ensure that participants have enough time to digest the modular content and identify areas where they would value more support through the mentoring or peer-learning sessions. SME leaders reported that more time between sessions would allow them to prepare and make better use of the non-modular activities. Sometimes participants found themselves unsure of how best to use the peer learning calls because they had not had a chance to reflect.
- **Streamline the content covered in the curriculum or extend the number of module sessions.** Business schools and programme participants agreed that there is too much content to be sufficiently covered in twelve sessions. Business schools reported that individual lecturers had to decide which topics to cover in detail and which to summarise in order to cover the curriculum. Programme participants reported finding the content “*overwhelming*” and felt that the course materials sometimes felt rushed. SME leaders would have preferred the modules to cover less content and allow more time for discussion and questions.
- **More flexibility to accommodate business demands on SME leaders.** This would help minimise last minute absences and address any resulting knowledge gaps. SME leaders would have valued access to a timetable with specific dates for their module and peer group sessions up front. They also suggested that the programme timetable should be mindful of dates that are likely to be difficult for business leaders (e.g. end of financial year, the lead up to Christmas, school holidays).
 - Linked to this, SME leaders expressed an interest in some flexibility in the design of the programme. There was a preference for **mentoring sessions to be offered earlier** in the course delivery to help consolidate knowledge in tandem with the course content, rather than using the earlier sessions to rapidly cover lessons to date.
 - Secondly, participants would have valued the option to have **changed the composition of peer group calls during the programme** to ensure that they could develop networks and share learning across their cohort more freely.

Conclusions

This report has presented emerging findings to date in relation to the key process questions that the evaluation is seeking to address. This final chapter provides a high level overview of what has worked well and areas for improvement to support ongoing delivery of HtGM. It is important to note that the findings presented in this report are not based on a representative sample. They are intended to provide emerging insights into the quality and effectiveness of HtGM rather than definitive findings and should be interpreted as such.

What is going well?

- The application process was perceived to be **straightforward**; the requirements were **clear** and in most cases the programme was considered to have started in a **timely manner**. Once enrolled onto HtGM, **SME leaders appear to be very engaged and committed to completing the programme**.
- Business leaders who participated in HtGM found the programme offer to be **relevant** and **relatable** to their business. Their expectations of the programme were found to be aligned to the Theory of Change, with participants most commonly expecting to become better equipped to lead and manage their business through increased confidence and improved leadership and management skills.
- There is some emerging evidence that the programme has been successful in stimulating demand amongst a **diverse group of SME leaders**.
- **SME leaders who have completed the programme so far report high levels of satisfaction with how it was delivered**. There was consensus amongst business schools, mentors and SME leaders that the programme is well designed and that the curriculum is fit for purpose. SME leaders have fed back positively on the quality of teaching, number and duration of sessions delivered through the programme.
- **There is emerging evidence that the programme is effective in teaching SME leaders new skills and that these are translating into benefits for their businesses**. There is evidence of diffusion of learning within participating businesses, with almost all of those completing the programme saying that they had shared what they learned or gained with others in their business.
- **Mentoring was found a key contributing factor to individual outcomes**: the one-to-one sessions enabled participants to seek advice, share opinions and further develop their management and leadership skills. **The peer learning groups were also highly valued**: SME leaders have learned from other organisations facing similar challenges and as a result have felt less alone when making significant business decisions.
- **Programme completers reported a range of improvements to confidence in their firm's skills and capabilities**. The breadth of results reported reflects the range of topics covered in the HtGM curriculum. While there was no particular business-level outcome commonly reported by programme completers, around four in ten of SME

leaders thought that their firm was better able to implement a business plan and strategy and communicate its vision, mission and value statements.

- **Around half of HtGM participants had already gone on to make changes to the way they manage, organise or operate their business.** The types of changes implemented to date were closely related to the individual leader, with a focus on leadership, employee engagement, vision, purpose and brand.

Areas for improvement

- **Most business schools have struggled to meet their target numbers of recruits.** Business schools reported challenges stimulating demand amongst enough eligible SMEs to meet their recruitment targets. It was suggested that more consistent national marketing, including promotional activity that is more segmented and tailored to SMEs at different business stages or sectors, could be helpful. SME leaders themselves fed back that that marketing and promotion was most effective when it was tailored and relatable.
- The onboarding process could be improved by ensuring applicants are **clear on where to go with any queries** they might have and ensuring that initial applications are responded to within a reasonable time frame.
- SME leaders said they would value **more time between modules** to reflect on the content and embed the learning, which would enable them to make better use of the peer learning and mentoring sessions.
- Business schools are finding the **volume of modular content** to be a lot to deliver in the time available. As a result, some were making judgements on what topics to cover in detail and which to give a high-level summary. This could lead to some inconsistency in programme delivery. Feedback from SME leaders themselves was that the module sessions could sometimes feel rushed and that they would have liked more time for group discussions and Q&A.

Annex A – Post completion survey response rate

Table A1 presents the response rate to the post completion survey as of 1st April 2022. It is important to note that the recipients of the March survey had not yet received an email reminder at the time of writing and it can therefore be expected that this response rate will increase.

Table A1: Post completion survey response rates

Month	No. of programme completers	No. of survey responses	Response rate (%)
September 2021	93	24	26%
October 2021	124	42	34%
November 2021	256	79	31%
December 2021	73	9	12%
February 2022	21	5	24%
March 2022	80	12	15%
Total	647	171	26%

Source: Ipsos (2022)

Annex B – Business Schools delivering HtGM

As of 6th December 2021, the following 46 business schools had signed up to deliver the HtGM programme (with completed, live or scheduled cohorts):

- Aberdeen Business School (Robert Gordon University)
- Anglia Ruskin – Lord Ashcroft International Business School
- Aston Business School
- University of Bedfordshire Business School
- Birkbeck School of Business, Economics and Informatics
- Birmingham City Business School
- Bournemouth University Business School
- Brighton Business School
- University of Bradford School of Management
- Brunel Business School
- Cardiff School of Management (Cardiff Metropolitan University)
- Cardiff Business School (Cardiff University)
- Coventry Business School
- Derby Business School
- Edinburgh Business School (Heriot Watt University)
- Gloucestershire Business School
- Hertfordshire Business School
- Huddersfield Business School
- Hull University Business School
- Kent Business School
- Kingston Business School
- Lancaster University Management School
- Leeds Business School (Leeds Beckett University)
- Leeds University Business School
- University of Leicester School of Business
- Leicester Castle Business School (De Montfort University)
- University of Liverpool Management School

- Guildhall School of Business and Law (London Metropolitan University)
- School of Business (London South Bank University)
- Manchester Metropolitan University Business School
- Newcastle Business School (Northumbria University)
- Nottingham University Business School (University of Nottingham)
- Nottingham Business School (Nottingham Trent University)
- Oxford Brookes Business School
- Portsmouth Business School
- Salford Business School, Sheffield Business School
- Sheffield Business Schools (Sheffield Hallam University)
- Solent Business School
- Staffordshire Business School
- Stirling Management School, Strathclyde Business School
- Strathclyde Business School
- Teesside University Business School
- Ulster University Business School
- Bristol Business School (University of the West of England)
- University of The West of Scotland
- Winchester Business School

Annex C – Theory of Change

This annex presents a draft Theory of Change (ToC) for the HtGM programme. The development of a ToC is an essential first step in designing evaluations of public policies and programmes. It sets out the rationale for the intervention, the inputs, activities and outputs to be delivered and how these are expected to result in the intended outcomes/impacts. It essentially tells the story of the change that is expected to occur as a result of the intervention, detailing the key steps along the way and the hypothesised causal pathways/mechanisms between them. The ToC will provide the overarching framework to guide the data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting of the findings from the evaluation.

The annex provides a narrative description of the ToC, alongside a diagrammatic depiction of this (see Figure). This includes discussion of the key assumptions underpinning the ToC in terms of the hypothesised causal pathways between activities/outputs and outcomes/impacts at individual, business and systemic level.

Inputs

A total of £223m Government funding has been allocated to support deliver the first three years of the HtGM programme and cover 90% of programme costs for SME leaders. This will be the main source of funding for HtGM, although individual participants are required to make a £750 financial contribution to the cost of the programme. The programme design has drawn on existing expertise within BEIS and HM Treasury on the relationship between leadership and management practices and productivity; the current business support landscape for low-productivity SMEs; and existing expertise of CABS and business schools. Additional inputs are provided in the form of advice and guidance from an Industry Advisory Council and £750 payments from SMEs for their employee to participate in the programme.

Activities

The inputs to the HtGM programme will be used to develop and deliver a series of programme activities, which can be grouped by those delivered by BEIS, CABS / business schools and SME leaders.

BEIS are responsible for:

- **Programme management**, supported by subcontracted Project Management support (from MH+A), and oversight of programme delivery.
- **Leading the Project Board**, which monitors progress on curriculum development, mentoring, the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) through which the programme is delivered, business school engagement, participant engagement, registrations, data reporting, evaluation, and operating procedures.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Help to Grow: Management, Project Board reports 2021

- **Leading composite workstreams** to the main Project Board, covering for example data monitoring, reporting and evaluation.
- **Promotion and marketing** of the programme and recruitment of eligible SMEs.

CABS/business schools are responsible for:

- **Development of the programme** learning objectives, curriculum content, course materials and delivery principles to ensure it is delivered cohesively and consistently across the UK.
- **Establishing a delivery network of business schools** across the UK to provide access to the programme to SMEs across the country.
- **Programme delivery**, including providing targeted leadership and management training alongside wraparound support (case study workshops, mentoring, peer learning groups and alumni network).
- **Recruitment of mentors** to the programme and matching them with SME leaders.

SME leaders are responsible for:

- **Submitting applications** to the programme and completing initial registration and diagnostic tool to assess baseline business characteristics and performance.
- **Completing the programme**: participation in learning modules and case studies, as well as mentoring, peer learning and alumni network.

Outputs and individual outcomes

The programme is expected to generate short-term quantifiable outputs for BEIS: number and profile of SME leaders applying for, completing, and dropping out of the programme; number and profile of cohorts completing the programme; number of business schools participating; and number of mentoring relationships and alumni networks formed. Participation in the programme is expected to result in a series of short- and medium- term benefits (outcomes) for SME leaders. The pathways to impact are numerous and will vary by SME leader, depending on their size, sector, existing awareness of and aptitude in leadership and management. However, these outcomes can be broadly categorised as follows:

- **Personal development**: after completing the twelve modules, peer-learning and mentoring, SME leaders are expected to be more confident in their ability to lead and manage their business, and more aware of their areas for improvement.
- **Skills, knowledge and understanding**: participation in the programme is expected to result in SME leaders developing a better understanding of the importance of leadership and management practices and greater awareness of the relationship between them and improved firm-level productivity. Completion of specific modules is expected to result in improved individual leadership and management skills (e.g. strategic thinking, decision making), facilitating better understanding of their business' needs.
- **Business planning and strategy**: drawing on improved leadership and management skills, knowledge and understanding, as well as support from a business mentor, SME

leaders are expected to produce a Growth Action Plan. This will detail changes to drive productivity improvements within their business.⁵⁵

- **Networks and collaboration:** the peer-learning groups and subsequent alumni networks will result in increased interactions between SME leaders within and between sectors. These newly formed networks are expected to provide a source of additional support to SME leaders to make decisions in their business, share best practice and build personal networks. The alumni network is expected to be a key source of support for participants as they move forward with implementation of the Growth Action Plans developed through the programme.

Business outcomes

The individual outcomes for SME leaders are expected to contribute to short- and medium-term benefits for their firms through diffusion of learning within their businesses and implementation of their Growth Action Plans. As with individual level outcomes, the pathways to business level outcomes are likely to be diverse:

- **Leadership and management:** The skills, knowledge and understanding developed by programme participants are expected to be diffused within their businesses, resulting in more efficient and effective leadership and management approaches and improved workforce engagement, retention, and wellbeing.
 - At least 90% of participants are expected to adopt at least one new management technique (e.g. implemented KPIs)
- **Implementation of Growth Action Plan:** this is expected to happen within one month post-completion of the programme and will contribute to a range of potential business outcomes, such as improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of key business processes and increased innovation and / or adoption of best practices approaches. These changes can be expected to manifest in a range of outcomes such as improved cashflow management and cost savings. Moreover, SME leaders' improved understanding of their business needs could be expected to lead to them accessing relevant follow-on business support appropriate to their needs.
- **Knowledge sharing:** SME leaders' expanded peer support networks can be expected to contribute to improved information sharing and peer support amongst SMEs.

Impacts

The longer-term effects of SME leaders implementing changes within their businesses can be expected to take the form of:

- **Business resilience and survival:** the training and support provided through Help to Grow: Management are likely to help businesses address issues triggered by the

⁵⁵ Growth Action Plans are recorded in an excel spreadsheet and detail specific business issues/opportunities, strategies to address the issue, how these strategies will be applied, resource requirements, barriers, KPIs, monitoring and responsibilities.

pandemic (e.g. cashflow), strengthening their balance sheets and ensuring the business can continue operating.

- **Firm expansion (turnover, GVA and employment) business performance:** successful implementation of Growth Action Plans should contribute to expansion of participating firms in terms of turnover, output (GVA) and employment. These types of effects are expected to be particularly significant amongst those implementing more than one change and where learning has been effectively diffused within the business.
 - within 2-3 years, turnover of participating firms is expected to be an average of 9.5% higher than similar sized firms. ⁵⁶
- **Improved firm-level productivity:** implementation of Growth Action Plans are expected to result in firms being better able to serve their customers at lower costs, attain higher prices for their products or services, or improved output per worker.
 - participating businesses are expected to experience an average 0.85% increase in productivity per worker. ⁵⁷

In the longer term, these early impacts amongst 30,000 low-productivity SMEs could aggregate to increased UK GVA and facilitated recovery from COVID-19. Moreover, the programme can be expected to simplify and better coordinate the UK business support landscape on both the supply and demand side.

- On the **demand side**, SME leaders' improved understanding of their business needs, support from peer networks and embedded learning from alumni networks could contribute to them being better able to navigate the business support landscape. They are also likely to have the skills to judge the quality and suitability of provision to their needs.
- On the **supply side**, the provision of a coordinated nationally branded programme in Help to Grow can be expected to improve accessibility and consistency in the leadership and management support available to individual SMEs. The content is tailored to SME barriers and delivered through a network of business schools that understand the SME landscape and how to support SME leaders. Moreover, the government branding is likely to provide a 'rubber stamp', providing SME leaders with a market signal that the programme is high quality.

Underlying assumptions

The Theory of Change is underpinned by a set of key assumptions set out in the table below.

⁵⁶ Help to Grow: Management BEIS target as set out in the ITT, informed by existing work delivered by BEIS/HMT

⁵⁷ Help to Grow: Management BEIS target as set out in the ITT.

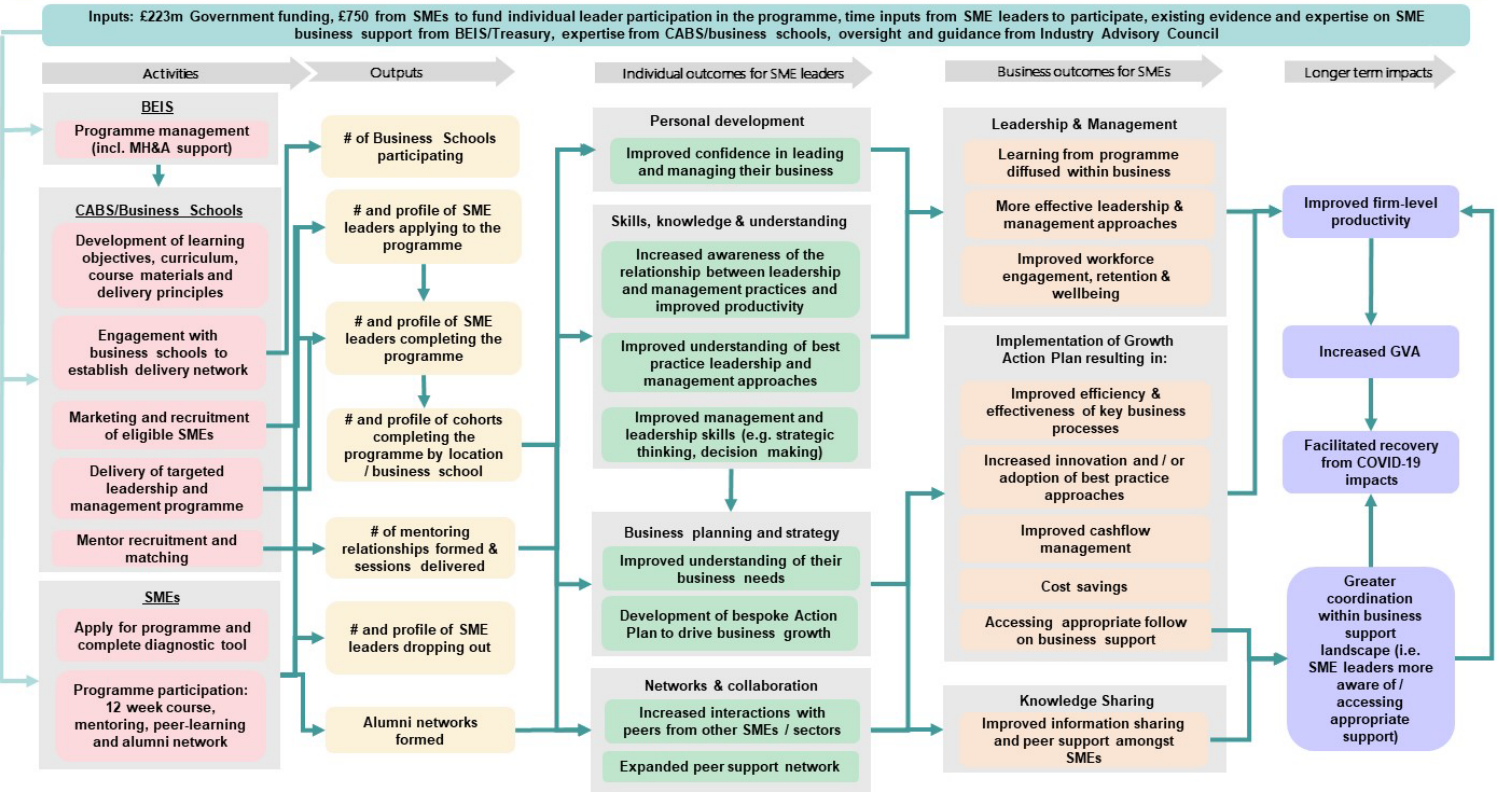
Assumptions underpinning the Help to Grow: Management Theory of Change

Design	Delivery	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Productivity can be improved by changes in leadership and management practices. • The curriculum sufficiently covers the breadth of topics required to drive productivity in long-tail SMEs. • The time inputs required by the programme are not too onerous for target SMEs to participate. • SME leaders have sufficient information to assess the quality of the programme and are willing to pay £750 to participate. • More intensive training programmes have greater impact than light-touch programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and promotion materials are effective in reaching target SMEs. • Sufficient numbers of business schools sign up to delivery to facilitate local provision to SMEs. • SME leaders complete all elements of the programme. • The programme is delivered consistently across business schools. • COVID-19 conditions enable the programme to be delivered both in-person and online. • SME leaders are matched to appropriate mentors who are able to provide high quality and relevant advice, guidance and support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SME leaders develop Growth Action Plans that are SMART. • Businesses have the required resources to implement the changes set out in their Growth Action Plans. • Businesses have adequate skills in the wider workforce to implement change. • Alumni networks work effectively to embed best practice and share learning, including supporting implementation of Action Plans (also applicable to delivery). • Curriculum remains relevant to the social-economic context that SMEs operate in.

Source: Ipsos

Figure: Help to Grow: Management programme draft logic model

Context and rationale: UK productivity has not recovered since the 2008 recession and continues to lag behind other G7 economies. This slowdown is concentrated amongst a 'long tail' of SMEs that account for a large proportion of the UK economy. Micro level productivity can be increased by improved leadership and management practices. There is a wide range of business support available but most SMEs do not have the skills and know-how to identify the right support for their business at the right time. These factors have been exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic crisis.



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