

# **Evaluation of Help to Grow: Management**

End of Year 3 Interim impact evaluation

November 2024

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# Executive summary

## Introduction and background

The Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), now the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), has commissioned Ipsos, in partnership with the Institute for Employment Studies (IES), to undertake an independent evaluation of the Help to Grow: Management programme (HtGM). This summary presents headline messages from the interim impact evaluation of HtGM based on evidence gathered between November 2021 and March 2024. It presents updated evidence on HtGM programme delivery, although the full process evaluation findings can be found in the earlier evaluation reports published in [February 2023](#) and [June 2023](#).

HtGM 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 12 modules 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 expected to use the learning gained to drive change within their business and therefore improve their productivity.

The findings are based on evidence collected through analysis of programme monitoring data and surveys of programme completers, non-completers, mentors and eligible SME leaders who have not participated in the programme. It also draws on qualitative evidence collected through a programme of depth interviews with programme completers, mentors, business schools and wider stakeholders.

## Activities and outputs

- Since its launch, HtGM has stimulated demand amongst a breadth of SME leaders operating in sectors across the UK. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, a total of **9,144 SME leaders had enrolled** onto an HtGM cohort and **6,504 had completed** the programme. Aside from those still completing the course, the most common reasons for non-completion related to competing time commitments rather than fundamental issues in the programme<sup>1</sup>.
- SME leaders who have completed the programme report **high levels of satisfaction** with HtGM and the majority (91%) said they would be likely to recommend the programme to another business leader. Satisfaction levels with programme delivery were particularly high amongst leaders of microbusinesses and those based in Scotland.
- There was broad consensus amongst completers that the structure of the programme was about right in terms of **frequency, duration, volume of sessions and delivery mode**. Programme completers in Year 3 were particularly satisfied with the time between the different elements of the programme and the amount of face-to-face delivery.
- The programme **curriculum was considered comprehensive and largely relevant**, covering topics that almost all programme completers deemed to be applicable to their business. There were slight differences in perceived relevance by business size, with microbusinesses rating content relating to customer engagement particularly highly, whereas leaders of larger SMEs preferred content relating to strategies for growth and business sustainability.
- **Mentoring continues to be a highly valued part of the programme**. There was a drop in participants' satisfaction levels and their perceptions of the quality of matching and mentor

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<sup>1</sup> The enrolment and completion figures may be different to official releases due to the differing times that data was collected.

engagement in Year 2 following the introduction of the new voluntary mentoring model. These measures have since returned to earlier levels as the new delivery model has become more embedded within programme delivery.

- Programme participants used their mentoring relationships to 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, including for signposting to tools that could improve productivity.
- Levels of engagement in the HtGM Alumni Network (launched in 2022) and business schools' supplementary tailored alumni activities have been relatively modest but highly valued by those who have participated.

## Individual level outcomes

There is good evidence to suggest that HtGM is contributing to improvements in confidence and skills, as well as knowledge and understanding of key management and leadership practices amongst SME leaders participating in the programme.

- SME leaders who had completed HtGM were more **confident** in their ability to achieve their goals, even in the face of obstacles, than eligible SME leaders in the wider UK economy who did not participate in the programme.
- There is good evidence that HtGM has led to improved **skills, knowledge and understanding** amongst programme participants. Compared to SME leaders who had not completed the programme, completers were significantly more confident that they had the **skills** they needed to lead their employees and business. They were also more likely to report being more **knowledgeable** of the factors that drive growth compared to SME leaders in the wider population.
- Whilst there is self-reported evidence that the programme is deepening SME leaders' **understanding of their business needs**, the proportion of SME leaders who had created Growth Action Plans (GAPs) detailing changes to drive productivity improvements in their business was **lower than anticipated**.
- There is evidence to suggest that HtGM is effective at enabling some SME leaders to **expand their peer networks**. New peer relationships facilitated through the programme were often used for informal support and advice, rather than to formally share best practice.
- Participation in HtGM appears to have generated additional **unintended consequences**. The programme inspired a small number of programme participants to leave their original employer to take up new jobs and some participants have sought out additional development opportunities to build on their learning from HtGM.
- The **package of support** offered through the programme was found to have contributed to the realisation of individual outcomes, although in some cases specific elements (such as the mentoring support, modular content, case studies, peer learning or Alumni Network) was found to have made a distinct contribution.
- There is a positive relationship between SME leaders reporting at least one of individual level outcome and completing a Growth Action Plan or identifying as female. There was also a positive correlation between completing all or most of the mentoring sessions and reporting individual outcomes.

## Business level outcomes

There is good evidence to date that the individual outcomes accrued through HtGM are generating business-level benefits, including improved management and leadership practices, improved effectiveness and increased efficiency. There is also some early self-reported evidence of

improvements to business sales, cost savings and employment as a result of participation in the programme.

- The majority (90%) of SME leaders completing HtGM said they had **shared learning and knowledge** gained with others in their business within six weeks' of completing the programme. Leaders of microbusinesses were more likely to have shared their knowledge extensively than leaders of larger SMEs.
- There is good evidence to suggest that HtGM is leading to **more effective leadership and management practices**, particularly in relation to the **resilience** of firm-level leadership: SME leaders completing HtGM were found to have significantly greater confidence in their firm's ability to lead through change and uncertainty than leaders of similar SMEs in the wider UK economy.
- Whilst the proportion of completers who developed a Growth Action Plan has fallen short of HtGM targets, HtGM completers were found to have significantly **greater confidence in their firm's ability to implement a business plan or strategy** compared to similar SME leaders not involved with the programme.
- HtGM was found to be associated with a significant positive effect on self-reported firm-level capabilities and experiences that are often **precursors to longer-term improvements in firm level productivity**: operational effectiveness, operational efficiency and digital adoption.
- Self-reported survey evidence indicates that participating in HtGM has a positive impact on a **range of other business outcomes** including resilience, increased sales, cost savings and increased headcount.
- There is a positive association between completing a GAP and SME leaders reporting at least one business level impact.

## Conclusions

Overall, the HtGM programme appears to be contributing positively to all individual outcomes set out in the programme's Theory of Change, particularly those related to personal development: skills, knowledge and understanding, business planning and strategy, and networks and collaboration. There is good emerging self-reported evidence to suggest that these individual outcomes are translating into a range of business-level outcomes, including improved management and leadership practices, implementation of growth plans and knowledge sharing. However, these early business level impacts should be interpreted with a degree of caution because they are based on self-reported evidence and are therefore likely to be subject to a degree of bias. The next phase of the evaluation will incorporate analysis of administrative datasets. This will inform a more robust assessment of the programme's impact to date and build upon the findings outlined here.

# Introduction

The Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), now the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), has commissioned Ipsos, in partnership with the Institute for Employment Studies (IES), to undertake an independent evaluation of the Help to Grow: Management 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 is the third interim report of the evaluation and presents findings based on impact evidence collected from November 2021 until March 2024. It presents updated evidence on HtGM programme delivery, although the full process evaluation findings can be found in the earlier evaluation reports published in [February 2023](#) and [June 2023](#).

The report highlights differences between the years of programme delivery and between sub-groups of programme participants where they are statistically significant. Where there are no statistically significant differences, findings are reported at the aggregate level.

## Help to Grow: Management programme

The Government announced the Help to Grow: Management programme in March 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 expected to use this learning to inform growth planning to ultimately drive change within their business aimed at improving firm-level productivity.<sup>2</sup> A number of changes have been made to the HtGM programme since its launch (detailed in Annex C) and referenced, where relevant, throughout the report.

The programme was launched by Government in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as a key mechanism to support the UK's economic recovery. It is important to acknowledge the unprecedented challenges the pandemic and subsequent economic uncertainty have posed for SME decision making relating to growth. The findings set out in this interim impact evaluation of the HtGM programme should be interpreted within this context.

## Evaluation scope 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 business 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 business practices)
- Generate evidence to inform **future** programme design and funding
- Embed effective data collection practices to enable **longer-term** impact evaluation
- Evaluate the programme's impact on **productivity and recovery** using administrative data
- Understand the **impacts of COVID-19** on delivery and businesses over time.

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<sup>2</sup> It is expected that most participants will develop a bespoke Growth Action Plan through participation in HtGM, but others might use the learning from the programme to update existing growth plans or strategies for their business.

These aims and objectives are incorporated within five high-level questions to be addressed through the evaluation (Table 1). A key focus for this interim impact report is on evidence to date in relation to questions 4 and 5 but the latest evidence on questions 1-3 is also presented.

**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 evaluation ITT documents

## Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** provides an overview of HtGM and sets out the Theory of Change
- **Chapter 3** summaries the methodology for the impact evaluation and limitations
- **Chapter 4** presents evidence on the inputs and activities involved in delivering the programme, updating existing evidence of the quality of programme delivery
- **Chapter 5** sets out evidence to date on the effectiveness of the programme in generating individual-level outcomes for programme participants
- **Chapter 6** summarises the evidence to date business-level outcomes from the programme
- **Chapter 7** presents summary conclusions and highlights the key priorities for the final phase of the evaluation.

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

- **Annex A** – provides an overview of the changes to HtGM introduced since its launch
- **Annex B** – profile of demand for HtGM
- **Annex C** – theory-based evaluation judgement criteria
- **Annex D** – sets out the full results of the Propensity Score Matching analysis
- **Annex E** – provides more detail on the counterfactual survey.

## Chapter 2: Help to Grow: Management programme

### Context

Productivity performance stimulates higher profits and wages, increases competitiveness, and improves standards of living. Productivity growth in the UK has slowed and lagged behind comparable economies since the 2008 recession and the gap between the most and least efficient firms has widened.<sup>3</sup> The 'long tail' of low productivity firms is dominated by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), who account for a large share of the UK economy: 60% of all private sector employment, and their number has risen by 64% since 2000, compared to 4% amongst large firms.<sup>4</sup>

The patterns in the UK economy have led to several calls to improve the entrepreneurial ecosystem, enabling SMEs to realise their growth potential and close the productivity gap between the UK and other leading economies. ONS research found that management practices (relating to performance, promotion, training, use of targets) are positively, strongly and significantly related to measures of business success (e.g., labour productivity, profitability, business survival).<sup>5</sup> SMEs in the UK are reportedly less likely to adopt leadership and management practices, ranking fifth in the G7, and perform particularly poorly on people management.<sup>6</sup>

### Policy landscape

Government support for businesses seeking to grow can be justified by the fact that SMEs are important for economic development. There is a broad range of provision for leadership and management training in the UK but the majority of it is **tailored to medium and large sized companies**: courses are catered to a limited number of specific sectors, participation is often time intensive, sometimes require qualifications (e.g. MBAs) and the content is either related to larger firms (e.g. middle management training).

Business support is also a key part of the Government's suite of policies to achieve its strategic objectives of fostering economic growth, boosting productivity and earning power. In March 2021, the Government set out its plan to Build Back Better after the COVID-19 pandemic, which included a commitment to upskilling UK businesses through high-quality, intensive skills and training programmes. The Help to Grow: Management programme was announced by the Chancellor in the Spring Budget 2021.

There are three specific types of **market failure** arguments to support public intervention in SME management and leadership policy: information asymmetries, externalities, and lack of competition in the provision market. Table 2 provides an overview of how these apply to the HtGM programme.

**Table 2: Market failure arguments for Help to Grow: Management**

Market failure	Description
Information asymmetries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Information asymmetry amongst SMEs of the support available to them:</b> SME investment in leadership, management and soft skills development is limited by a lack of understanding of the support available and limited time and resource to navigate the complex business support landscape. There is also a lack of information available to SMEs about the quality of support available, reducing incentive to pay for it and creating an unwillingness to invest the necessary finances required to access the support.</li></ul>

<sup>3</sup> Bank of England (2019) "The UK's Productivity Problem: Hub No Spokes – speech by Andy Haldane"

<sup>4</sup> Small Business and Productivity, Fifteenth Report of Session 2017-19, House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> ONS, "Management practices in Great Britain: 2016 to 2020", May 2021

<sup>6</sup> HM Government, Industrial Strategy (2019)



Market failure	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Information asymmetry between high productivity and low productivity firms:</b> there has been a sharp contraction in the 'diffusion' of best practice between businesses since the 2008 recession. This has meant that fewer SMEs have been able to learn from leading organisations on how to make their workplaces more technologically savvy, innovative and competitive.<sup>7</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Externalities</b>	The benefits of improved leadership and management practices are likely to 'spillover' beyond the firm of the SME leader that completes the programme. The aggregated improvements to firm-level productivity that the programme is expected to generate will lead to improvements in the UK economy overall, generating wider public benefits. Firms are unlikely to consider the UK-wide benefits of participating in the programme when accessing support to improve their leadership and management training, leading to a suboptimal uptake and untapped positive externalities.
<b>Lack of competition</b>	Providers of leadership and management training may lack the incentives to provide support for low productivity SMEs (proven to display low demand for business support). The cost of provision may exceed SME's perceived value of the training, and therefore the price they are willing to pay. Consequently, the market for leadership and management training will be predisposed to deliver support only to larger firms that can afford it and have the time, resources and skills to assess its value.
<b>Financial constraints</b>	Financial constraints prevent SME leaders from accessing support and making the changes to the business that require investment or involve costs of reorganisation. Smaller firms might also be less likely to be able to have managers take time out of the business to access training or support.
<b>Managerial skills constraints</b>	Limited or lacking skills to manage businesses and organisational change are consistently reported by businesses as a barrier to process innovation and have been shown to be limited to the diffusion of management practices. <sup>8</sup> Skills constraints are also likely to apply for smaller businesses and might be expected to be worsened by changes precipitated by COVID-19 and the measures to contain it.

Source: BEIS SME Management Business Case (2021), Help to Grow: Management evaluation scoping report (Ipsos, 2021)

## Help to Grow: Management overview

The HtGM programme offers an intensive **50 hours** of structured learning, mentoring and peer networking to SME leaders, typically over a **12-week period** through a combination of online and face-to-face contact.<sup>9</sup> It is being delivered to individual cohorts of up to 30 SME leaders at a time by Business Schools across the UK, coordinated by the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS). The mentoring model is delivered in partnership by a consortium comprising Enterprise Nation, Association of Business Mentors (ABM) and Newable. The programme aimed to support 30,000 SME businesses to improve their productivity over the course of the first three years, but this was revised to 10,000 in 2022 to reflect actual levels of demand. A summary of the programme module content is provided in Table 3.

<sup>7</sup> Be the Business (2018), "How good is your business really? Raising our ambitions for business performance"

<sup>8</sup> Valero, A (2021), Oxford Review of Economic Policy, "Education and management practices", Vol. 37, Issue 2, pg 302-322

<sup>9</sup> In some cases, participants start or continue their HtGM mentoring relationship beyond the 12 weeks of modules.

**Table 3: Overview of Help to Grow: Management curriculum**

Part 1: Strategies for Growth		
Module 1: Strategy and Innovation	Module 2: Digital Transformation <sup>10</sup>	Module 3: Winning New Markets (Case Study) <sup>11</sup>
Part 2: Engaging with Customers		
Module 4: Vision, Mission and Values	Module 5: Developing a Marketing Strategy	Module 6: Building a Brand (Case Study)
Part 3: Building a Sustainable and Agile Business		
Module 7: Organisational Design	Module 8: Employee Engagement and Leading Change	Module 9: High Performance Workplace (Case Study)
Part 4: Operations and Financial Strategies		
Module 10: Effective Operations	Module 11: Finance and Financial Management	Module 12: Implementing Growth Action Plans (Case Study)

Source: DBT

Three overarching aims were developed for the programme when launched in 2021, which are to:

- **Support SME business leaders to develop and implement a Growth Action Plan (GAP) and pursue growth planning**, identifying potential productivity enhancing measures to adopt in their business. The programme has since evolved to take into consideration businesses that have existing business plans.
- **Improve firm-level productivity amongst UK SMEs**, by providing and encouraging access to high quality, consistent and easily accessible management and leadership training.
- **Support participating SMEs to increase turnover** as part of their recovery from the initial economic shock associated with COVID-19 and other economic shocks relative to other similar sized firms. This has evolved into building general business resilience since.

## Theory of change

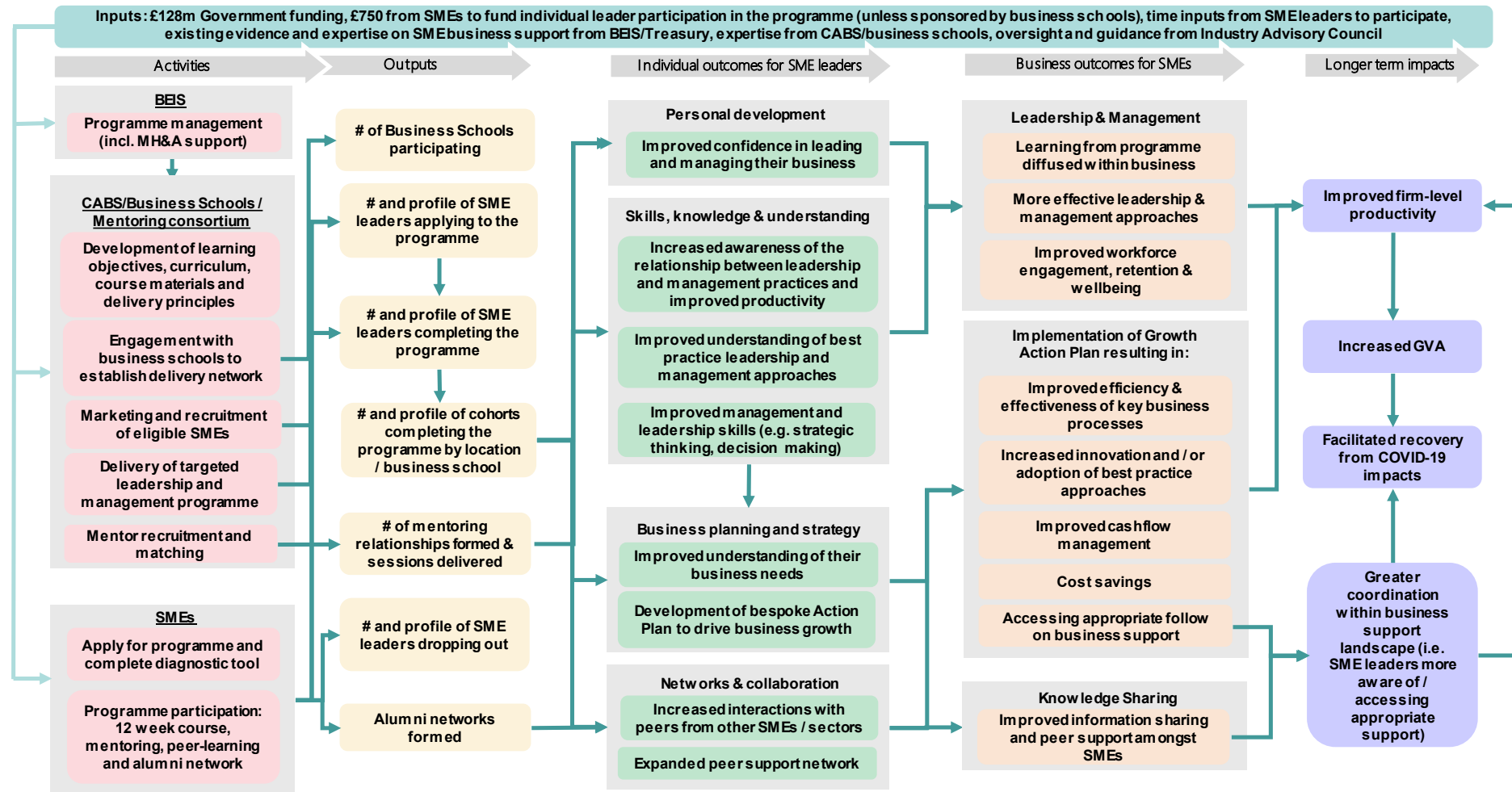
A Theory of Change (ToC) for HtGM was developed during the initial scoping and design phase of the evaluation in December 2021 (Figure 1). This was based on a desk review of background documentation on the purpose, aims and objectives of the programme and scoping consultation with key stakeholders. A key focus of the evaluation has been to collect evidence to test and, where necessary, develop and refine the ToC. This has involved collecting data on outcomes from individuals who completed HtGM, as well as on the hypothesised causal pathways / mechanisms between activities, outputs and outcomes at both the individual and firm level.

<sup>10</sup> Formerly named Digital Adoption

<sup>11</sup> Formerly named Internationalisation and Winning New Markets

**Figure 1: Theory of Change for Help to Grow: Management**

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.



Source: Ipsos

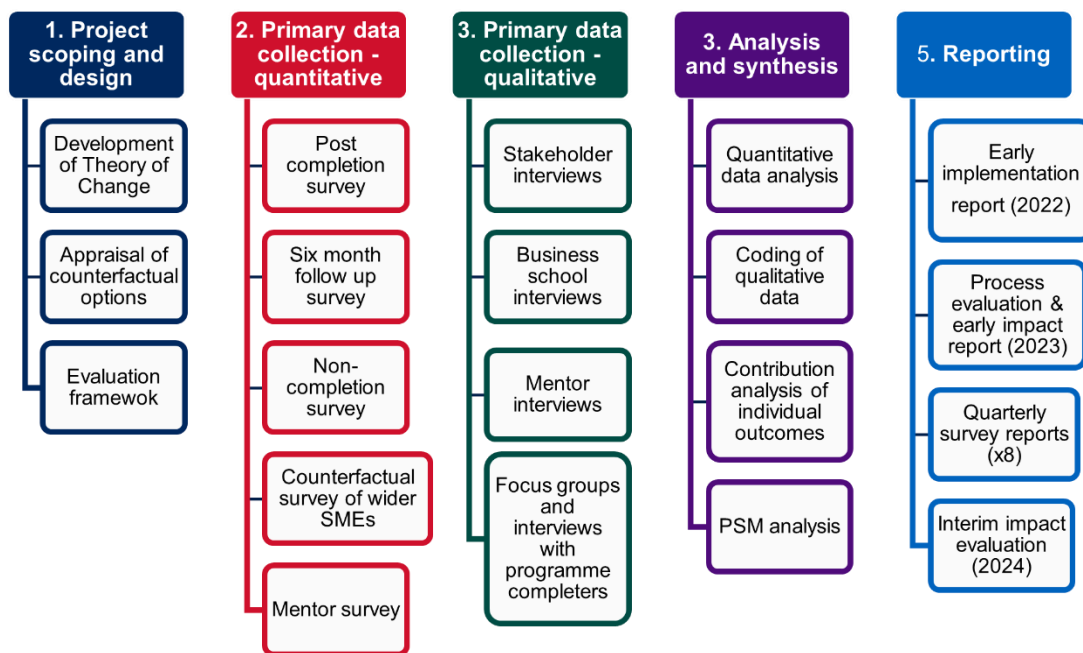
# Chapter 3: Methodology

## Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the methodology for the impact evaluation of HtGM, comprising a theory-based assessment of progress towards the individual outcomes set out in the Theory of Change and counterfactual analysis of impacts accrued to businesses. At this interim stage, the counterfactual assessment is limited to matched analysis comparing self-reported survey evidence from beneficiaries of the programme with self-reported survey evidence from eligible SMEs in the wider UK business population who have not taken part in the programme.

Figure 2 provides an overview of the evaluation activities conducted to date and the sections that follow provide further detail on the primary and secondary data collection and subsequent analysis and synthesis that has been undertaken to inform this report. This report also draws on evidence collected through a supplementary piece of research into HtGM mentoring delivered by Ipsos and IES in Autumn 2023.

**Figure 2: Overview of Interim Impact evaluation activities**



Source: Ipsos

## Primary data collection – quantitative

The quantitative data collection for the HtGM evaluation comprises five separate surveys, as detailed below. This interim impact evaluation draws on analyses and syntheses of the evidence collected through each of these. The post-completion, six month follow-up, non-completion and mentor survey results are also presented in a series of published [quarterly reports](#). An overview of the survey programme and respective response rates is provided in Table 4.

### Post completion survey

The post-completion survey is issued monthly to all SME leaders who have completed more than 75% of the HtGM modules. It is sent to all participants within six weeks of their programme completion date. The survey is administered online and designed to gather feedback on participants' experiences of the programme as well as early self-reported evidence on progress towards intended outcomes. Programme completers are initially sent an email invitation that contains information about the survey and a link that takes them to the online questionnaire. This is followed by up to two reminder emails to those who have not taken part.

### **Six month follow up survey**

The follow up survey is administered quarterly to all those who enrolled on HtGM and went on to complete more than 75% of the programme modules. It is conducted approximately six months after completion of the programme. The survey is administered by telephone and covers similar themes to the post completion survey, with a greater focus on gathering evidence on business-level outcomes and participants' engagement in the Alumni Network.

### **Non-completion survey**

The non-completion survey is issued to SME leaders who enrolled on to a HtGM cohort but completed less than 75% of the programme modules. The survey is administered by telephone on a quarterly basis alongside the six-month follow up survey. The aim of the questionnaire is to gather feedback on why they did not complete the programme, and if anything could have changed their experience.

### **Mentor survey**

The mentor survey is issued quarterly to all voluntary mentors who have completed their first mentoring relationship in the previous quarter. It asks questions about their experience of the onboarding and training processes, any feedback on engagement with their mentees and their intention to continue mentoring through the programme. Mentors are sent an initial email invite to the survey, which is followed up with up to two reminders to those who haven't taken part.

### **Counterfactual survey**

The counterfactual survey is a longitudinal survey that was administered in October 2022 (Year 2) and October 2023 (Year 3). It is a telephone survey of business leaders that were eligible for HtGM but had not engaged in the programme. The sample for this survey is constructed to reflect the size and sector profile of SME participants. It is used as a counterfactual group for the interim impact evaluation ahead of the pipeline analysis that will be conducted for the final impact evaluation in 2025.

**Table 4: Help to Grow: Management survey programme**

Survey	Mode	Launch date	Number of waves	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
<b>Post-completion survey</b>	Online	September 2021	29	1,246	20%
<b>Six month follow up survey</b>	Tel	June 2022	8	1,220	40%
<b>Non completion survey</b>	Tel	June 2022	8	77	29%
<b>Mentor survey</b>	Online	December 2022	6	450	13%

<b>Counterfactual survey (Baseline)</b>	Tel	October 2022	1	1,004	_12
<b>Counterfactual survey (endline)</b>	Tel	November 2023	1	222	36% <sup>13</sup>

Source: Ipsos

## Primary data collection - qualitative

This interim impact evaluation report draws on the following qualitative data:

- **11 focus groups (comprising 42 programme completers)** to gather evidence on the extent to which the programme's intended outcomes and impacts have occurred, if not why not, and the role of the programme (and its composite parts) relative to other factors. The focus groups were delivered online and grouped SME leaders with other programme completers from the same year of delivery. In practice, this meant that focus groups with Year 1 participants were focused more on business-level outcomes and focus groups with Year 3 participants were focused more on shorter-term outcomes for individuals.
- **17 depth interviews with programme completers**, both those completing the programme in Year 3 and longitudinal interviews with participants interviewed in the first two years of the evaluation. The interviews built on the data collected through the surveys to explore in more detail participants' experiences of the programme and the perceived current and future benefits to them and their businesses.
- **15 depth interviews with Business Schools** involved in delivering the HtGM programme. The discussions gathered evidence on their experiences of delivering the programme, engaging SME leaders/businesses, levels of participation, key enablers / barriers to effective delivery and elements of the programme they thought could be improved, governance and support, and perceptions of outcomes and impacts for businesses.
- **9 depth interviews with key stakeholders** involved in the delivery of HtGM and the design and implementation of key changes to the programme. These discussions explored design and delivery and how well or otherwise elements of the programme are currently working, recruitment of SME leaders onto the programme, the impact of changes made to the programme, governance and support and views on the future of HtGM.
- **10 depth interviews with mentors** who had supported SME leaders on the HtGM programme on a voluntary basis. These discussions explored the mentor recruitment, training and onboarding processes, the key characteristics of an effective mentor and mentoring relationship in the context of HtGM, how the mentoring support was being used in practice, outputs from mentoring and outcomes, monitoring and governance, what was working well and any aspects of the mentoring offer that could be further developed or improved.

## Secondary data collection

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<sup>12</sup> The counterfactual survey was administered to a sample of SMEs that were eligible for HtGM but had not participated. The fieldwork aimed to achieve 1,000 responses to allow for subsequent matching analysis at the end line stage. Fieldwork completed once the target had been met. As such, a standard response rate is not reported here.

<sup>13</sup> The response rate is calculated as a percentage of respondents to the baseline survey who agreed to be recontacted (610 agreed in total).



The evaluation draws on **secondary monitoring data** collected by business schools and Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) on delivery of HtGM, including registrations and enrolments to the programme, engagement of programme participants and status of programme cohorts. It also uses evidence collected by business schools from programme participants before they begin the programme, covering business characteristics (registration form) and baseline metrics on management and leadership practices (diagnostic form).

The final phase of the evaluation will draw on administrative datasets accessed via the ONS Secure Research Service to explore the difference the programme has made to business level outcomes including turnover, productivity and employment.

## Impact evaluation approach

The evaluation has been designed to capture evidence of outcomes and impacts for individual SME leaders, their businesses, and the wider economy. It combines a theory-based approach to assess the extent to which HtGM is generating individual outcomes and a Quasi-Experimental Design (QED) to assess the extent to which the programme is generating business and economy wide outcome and impacts. These are described in detail below.

### 1) Individual level outcomes

Our evaluation uses **contribution analysis** to assess the extent to which HtGM is resulting in the intended individual outcomes set out in the Theory of Change for the programme. Contribution analysis is a theory-based approach that provides a framework to assess whether an intervention contributed to a set of hypothesised outcomes, and how and why the intervention made a difference. For the individual impact strand of the HtGM evaluation, the primary aim was to examine the extent to which there was evidence that supported (or conflicted with) a series of hypotheses underpinning the Theory of Change (see Table 5).

All primary data collection tools were designed to collect evidence for each hypothesis, exploring whether or not the outcomes of interest occurred and the contribution of HtGM (and its composite parts) relative to alternative explanations. All qualitative and quantitative primary data was classified based on its relative strength in favour of the hypothesis – covering, strong, good, emerging, some limited evidence, no evidence and inconclusive evidence. A detailed description of the judgement criteria is provided in Annex C.

**Table 5: Hypotheses for individual and business outcomes**

Hypotheses for individual outcomes
SME leaders who participate in HtGM will be more <b>confident</b> in their ability to manage their business and more aware of their strengths and potential areas for improvement
SME leaders who complete the HtGM programme will have a <b>better understanding of the importance of leadership and management practices</b> and how they can contribute to increases in firm-level productivity.
SME leaders who complete HtGM will have a <b>deeper understanding of their business needs</b> and will <b>produce a Growth Action Plan</b> , detailing changes to drive productivity improvements in their business
SME leaders who complete HtGM will <b>develop relationships with other SME leaders</b> providing a source of additional support to make decisions in their business, share best practice and build personal networks.

Source: Ipsos

### 2) Business level outcomes and wider economic impacts

The evaluation of business level outcomes and wider economic impacts is based on a quantitative counterfactual approach. The evaluation framework which appraised the feasibility of a range of counterfactual options and a **pipeline approach**, comparing Year 1 participants of HtGM with later participants of the programme, was identified as the most robust impact approach. The pipeline

analysis will be conducted in the final phase of the evaluation (2025) to allow sufficient timescales for the realisation of business level outcome (turnover, employment, GVA, GVA per worker) and due to lags in the publication of administrative data.<sup>14</sup>

At this interim impact evaluation stage, we have delivered **supplementary analysis of a counterfactual group of SME leaders in the wider UK economy**. A Propensity Matching Scoring (PSM) approach was applied to the Help to Grow Management survey data, such that firms participating in the programme and who took part in the 6-months follow up survey were compared with equivalent SMEs in the wider business population that did not take part in the programme. Both samples were interviewed at two points in time: before the start of the HtGM programme and after some time from its beginning<sup>15</sup>.

PSM is a statistical technique that enables comparison between two samples based on a set of observable pre-treatment characteristics. A propensity score is a number that estimates the likelihood of being treated (in this instance, the propensity of an SME to enrol in the HtGM programme). Once this score has been calculated, it is associated to cases in the control group. The algorithm matches those with the highest probability to be treated with units in the treated group, so that only very similar cases are compared.

In this instance we have matched the two groups of SMEs on the following pre-treatment characteristics:

- Turnover
- Region
- Number of years in operation
- Number of employees
- Answers to the leadership questions before enrolling in the scheme.

The matching algorithm applied is the “One-to-many matching with caliper<sup>16</sup> and replacement”. This method allows for one unit in the control group to be compared with multiple corresponding observations in the treatment group. As the HtGM survey sample was not large, we decided to apply the method that made the most efficient use of the control group, reducing cases being “wasted”. This is because matching techniques require large control groups to ensure that the comparator pool provides sufficient observations to find the best fit.

Evidence from the PSM analysis, alongside beneficiary surveys and focus groups, are classified based on its relative strength in favour of the hypothesis set out in Table 6 using the same judgement criteria for the individual outcomes in Annex C.

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<sup>14</sup> An early pipeline analysis will be delivered in Summer 2024 and again in Autumn 2025.

<sup>15</sup> The counterfactual group was interviewed at after 12 months from the baseline, while the treatment group 9 months after.

<sup>16</sup> A Caliper can be thought of as a ring around each unit that limits to which other units that unit can be paired. Calipers are based on the propensity score or other covariates. Two units whose distance on a calipered covariate is larger than the caliper width for that covariate are not allowed to be matched to each other. Any units for which there are no available matches within the caliper are dropped from the matched sample. Calipers ensure paired units are close to each other on the calipered covariates, which can ensure good balance in the matched sample.



**Table 6: Hypotheses for business-level outcomes**

Hypotheses for business-level outcomes
The skills, knowledge and understanding developed by programme participants are expected to be diffused within their businesses, resulting in more <b>efficient and effective leadership and management approaches</b> and <b>improved workforce engagement, retention and wellbeing</b> .
SME leaders completing HtGM will <b>develop and implement a Growth Action Plan</b> , leading to a <b>range of business outcomes</b> (e.g., improvements in efficiency and effectiveness of key business processes, increased innovation, adoption of best practice approaches). These will, in turn, generate additional business outcomes, such as improved cashflow management and cost savings.

Source: Ipsos

## Strengths and limitations

This report draws on a breadth and depth of perspectives: **4,202 survey responses** to five separate surveys and qualitative research with **93 individuals**, spanning programme participants, mentors, business schools, delivery partners and other stakeholders. Where sample sizes allow, distinctions have been made between responses over time, geography and business type. All reported differences are statistically significant at the 5% level (or lower). If a finding is statistically significant it means that there is a true difference between two groups (or time periods). It does not mean that the difference can be attributed to the programme at this stage.

Despite this evidence base, there are a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings in this report:

- **The findings are not based on representative samples.** Participation in the evaluation is voluntary and therefore likely to be subject to a degree of self-selection bias, where those who have participated in our research are likely to be those who were more engaged in the programme and / or viewed it more favourably.
- **All evidence reported is based on self-reported data** and therefore is likely to be influenced by optimism bias. In some cases, self-reported data is the best source of available evidence on outcomes (e.g., improved confidence). In other cases, for example business-level changes to size, sales, turnover, self-reported data is reported for illustrative purposes only. The final evaluation will report on these outcomes using administrative data.
- **PSM analysis is based on relatively small samples sizes** (222 in the control group and 657 in the treatment group) and therefore should be interpreted with a degree of caution.
- **PSM analysis uses a counterfactual group of wider SME leaders for the analysis.** The control group was recruited to ensure that they were eligible for the programme but had not otherwise participated in HtGM. It is not possible to control for any other unobservable differences that may have contributed to changes in the outcome of interest, such as motivation to participate in the programme.

This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for market research, ISO 20252.

## Chapter 4: Activities and outputs

### Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the key activities involved in delivering Help to Grow: Management, from recruitment to completion of the twelve modules and engagement in the Alumni Network. It includes an assessment of the quality of delivery, how this compares to expectations and reasons for any differences, including contextual factors. It draws on feedback gathered through surveys of programme completers (six weeks and six months after completion of Module 12) and mentors, as well as qualitative evidence from stakeholders, business schools, programme completers and mentors

### Profile of demand

Since its launch, HtGM has stimulated demand from SMEs across the UK, operating in a range of sectors and of varying size:

- **Location:** the programme has received interest from across all regions of the UK. Around one third of businesses registering or enrolling to HtGM were based in London or the South East (32% registering, 31% enrolling). These figures broadly align to the wider UK SME population (with 5-249 employees), for which London and the South East account for the largest share (29%).
- **Sector:** businesses that registered for HtGM operate across a broad range of industry sectors. The largest proportion of SMEs who registered / enrolled on the programme operate in 'Other services' (16%). This includes activities of member organisations, repair of computers and other personal / household goods and personal services, such as hairdressers, beauty salons and gyms. This is followed by the manufacturing sector (13% of registrations, 14% enrolments) and construction sector (both 11%). The remainder operate across a range of different industries.
- **Age:** around half of SMEs that registered (51%) / enrolled (49%) on HtGM had been in operation for between one and ten years and more than a third (36% registering, 37% enrolling) had been in operation for between 11 and 30 years.<sup>17</sup>
- **Size:** firms registering and enrolling for HtGM were typically micro and small SMEs but includes a greater number of businesses with more than 20 employees (35% registering, 36% enrolling) when compared to the wider SME population (22%).

The evidence to date suggests that the programme has been successful in stimulating demand amongst a diverse group of SME leaders, at both registration and enrolment, when compared to the wider business population. Around one in every three (38%) SME leaders enrolling in the programme identified as female and one in five (14%) are from an ethnic minority background.<sup>18 19</sup>

A detailed breakdown of registrations and enrolments to HtGM by business characteristics and SME leader characteristics is provided in Annex B.

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<sup>17</sup> Note: businesses that have been operating for less than one year are not eligible for the programme.

<sup>18</sup> Women owned and women led SME businesses provide a total of 18% private sector employment Small Business Survey, 2022, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN038/SN06838.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> 6% of SMEs are led by people from an ethnic minority background - <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06152/SN06152.pdf>

## Recruitment and retention<sup>20</sup>

As of 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2024, a total of **56 business schools** were delivering the HtGM programme across the UK. Participating schools had formed a total of 469 cohorts comprising of programme participants (Table 7). Of these, **429 cohorts** had been delivered, comprising **6,504 programme completers**<sup>21</sup>. There were 40 cohorts still in delivery at the end of Year 3 that were scheduled to complete in Year 4.

In Year 3, DBT reduced the number of cohorts to reflect the level of demand for the programme, reported as lower than original expectations in earlier evaluation reports, and to ensure a better geographic spread. Consultation evidence with business schools indicated that recruitment to the programme had become easier year on year. This was largely attributed to the broadening of eligibility criteria, increased flexibility in delivery mode (e.g., online only courses), introduction of sponsored places and dedicated budget for business schools to promote the programme. In Year 3, some business schools reported that they were unable to meet demand for the programme due to the new limits on cohort numbers.

**Table 7: Status of HtGM cohorts**

	No. of cohorts			Total
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	
Completed	133	187	109	<b>429</b>
In delivery	-	-	40	<b>40</b>
Total	133	187	149	<b>469</b>
Cancelled	122	66	3	<b>191</b>

Source: DBT monitoring data; Note: All data in this table are from 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2024

**HtGM programme completers applied to the programme to address a range of barriers to growth their business was facing at the time of application.** The majority (80%) of SME leaders clearly understood the aims and objectives of the programme and most expected to improve their management and leadership skills (76%) and drive improvements in firm-level productivity (74%) at the time of applying.

As of 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2024, a total of **9,144 SME leaders** had enrolled onto an HtGM cohort, representing a conversion rate of 81% of the **11,323** who had registered for a specific cohort (Table 8). Registrations to the programme have increased year-on-year, although the conversion of these registrations into enrolments has fluctuated across the three years of delivery. This decline could be attributed to the limit placed on the number of cohorts that could be delivered per business school during Year 3.<sup>22</sup> Feedback from stakeholders and business schools indicated that, in some cases, the limit meant that business schools were unable to meet the demand for the programme that had been stimulated through continued marketing and referrals from programme alumni. In contrast, other business schools found the cohort limit helped them to fill their cohorts more efficiently because interested SMEs had fewer options to choose from.

<sup>20</sup> Year 1 refers to FY 2021/22, Year 2 refers to FY 2022/23 and Year 3 refers to FY 2023/24.

<sup>21</sup> The enrolment and completion figures may be different to official releases due to the differing times that data was collected.

<sup>22</sup> The number of cohorts varied by business school. The limit was introduced to ensure the number of cohorts matched demand for the programme and sought to create a more even geographical spread.

**Table 8: Number and percentage of registrants enrolling on HtGM**

	No. / % of SME leaders			Overall
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	
<b>Registrations</b>	3,328	3,963	4,032	11,323
<b>Enrolments</b>	2,639	3,365	3,140	9,144
<b>% Conversion<sup>23</sup></b>	79%	85%	78%	81%

Source: DBT Monitoring data Note: All data in this table are from 2nd April 2024

**Four in every five (84%) SME leaders who enrolled on HtGM over the first three years of delivery went on to complete the programme**, defined as completing at least nine out of 12 modules. **Around one in ten (11%) SME leaders enrolling on to HtGM did not complete the programme**, either withdrawing (6%) or partially completing HtGM (5%).<sup>24</sup> Evidence from the survey of SME leaders who partially completed the programme indicates that ‘non-completers’ tend to complete fewer than nine of the modules because of competing time commitments rather than fundamental issues with the programme – two in three (61%) would be interested in completing HtGM at a later stage. Feedback from business schools indicate high levels of participant engagement; instances of ‘non-completion’ were limited and tended to occur in the first few modules because SME leaders underestimated the time commitment involved. There was broad consensus amongst business schools that this resulted in a final cohort that were highly engaged and open to growth (Table 9). This has been consistent since the programme launched.

**Table 9: Programme completion and engagement levels**

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Overall
No. of SME leaders enrolled on completed cohorts	1,350	2,966	3,469	7,785
No. of SME leaders who attended > 75% of modules ( <i>Programme completers</i> )	1,128	2,506	2,870	6,504
Programme completion rate	84%	84%	83%	84%

Source: DBT monitoring data; NB: The figures here are based on cohorts that were fully delivered and completed within that delivery year (May 2024). At the time of writing 50 participants were missing data on engagement with the course.

<sup>23</sup> This calculation is based on the overall registration and enrolment data reported in the table: % of registrations who went on to enrol in the course.

<sup>24</sup> Note: the percentage of programme completers in Table 9 and non-completion rates in Table 10 do not total to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 10: Non-completion rates for HtGM cohorts**

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Overall	% of enrolments
No. of participants who withdrew from HtGM <sup>25</sup>	53	148	227	428	6%
No. of participants who dropped out of the programme	65	145	195	405	5%
No. of participants who completed <75% of the modules ( <i>Programme non-completers</i> )	98	165	135	398	5%

Source: DBT monitoring data

## Programme management and delivery structures

### Roles and responsibilities

DBT is responsible for overall management of the programme. DBT also oversees programme delivery, through chairing the Operations and Delivery Board and the Programme Board. The Operations and Delivery Board monitors progress on supply and demand, marketing, curriculum development, mentoring, business school engagement, participant engagement, registrations, data reporting, evaluation, and operating procedures.<sup>26</sup> The Programme Board takes strategic decisions on the overall shape of the programme and has responsibility for ensuring it achieves the benefits identified in the business case. In addition, DBT leads composite workstreams to the main Project Board, covering data monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

CABS is responsible for developing the programme learning objectives, curriculum content (including reviewing and refreshing content), course materials, the Virtual Learning Environment (through which the programme is delivered) and delivery principles to ensure it is delivered cohesively and consistently across the UK. CABS was tasked with establishing a delivery network of business schools across the UK to provide access to HtGM to SMEs. It is responsible for managing relationships with all business schools involved in delivering the programme and onboarding new schools throughout delivery.

The mentoring consortium is responsible for recruiting and training mentors to the programme and matching them with SME leaders through a dedicated platform. This involves delivering an introductory seminar to participants within the first few weeks of starting the programme, which includes instructions on how to navigate the mentoring platform to initiate a match with a mentor. The mentoring consortium also offers support to business schools and programme participants when issues arise.

### Governance

There are four key pillars of programme governance, as outlined in Figure 3. Stakeholders interviewed generally considered the governance arrangements to be effective because of the 'co-design' approach taken with HM Treasury and other relevant departments during the design of the programme. This approach differed from other government programmes and enabled ministers and HM Treasury to provide input early on, minimising instances of misaligned expectations and ensuring buy-in of key stakeholders ahead of launch and throughout delivery.

<sup>25</sup> This combines 'dropped out' and 'withdrew' categories from DBT monitoring data.

<sup>26</sup> Help to Grow: Management, Project Board reports 2021

Feedback from interviewees suggests that regular management meetings are attended by the right people to provide effective programme oversight and that appropriate evidence is used to inform monitoring. One interviewee said that evidence collected through the evaluation is reflected upon and incorporated into delivery, where possible, at speed. One interviewee suggested the governance programme could be improved by closer involvement of the Expert Advisory Council in the decision-making process on changes to the programme.

Stakeholders across organisations involved in programme governance viewed the level of contact with delivery partners to be highly ‘pressurised’ at the start of HtGM (e.g., volume of data collection, frequency of engagement). Interview evidence suggested that there may still be too much contact, although there were efforts underway to reduce burden at the time of the interviews.

**Figure 3: HtGM Governance structures**

Grant Management	Programme Board	Operations and Delivery Board	Expert Advisory Council (EAC)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grant Management meetings occur on a quarterly basis and are responsible for managing and monitoring performance, KPIs, finance, programme risks and issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Programme Board meet every four months with the SRO chairing to discuss strategic priorities of the programme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Operations and Delivery Board meet on a bi-monthly basis and oversee programme implementation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The EAC is chaired by Goldman Sachs twice a year and is attended by expert business stakeholders to provide guidance on programme design and delivery.</li> </ul>

Source: DBT

### Feedback on the regional delivery model

Regional business school delivery was viewed by stakeholders as the most effective method of delivering HtGM and several were of the view that the programme would have been less successful had it been delivered centrally. Stakeholders thought that business schools had a good understanding of their local economies (incl. the local drivers of low productivity) and are therefore well placed to recruit, promote and deliver a business support programme. The number of schools involved in delivery was also deemed to provide a degree of flexibility in delivery mode – e.g., business leaders can access online only or blended cohorts – that removed some key barriers to SME engagement (e.g., time constraints, long travel times to nearest business school delivering HtGM).

Some stakeholders expressed concern that delivery of the programme may be spread across too many business schools. The high volume of business schools delivering the programme made it challenging to monitor quality and consistency of delivery of HtGM. One stakeholder reflected that it would be easier to identify examples of best practice and understand what works well in regional delivery if the number of schools was reduced without reducing the number of cohorts. Interviews with business schools also highlighted some challenges with the current delivery model. There were instances of some business schools competing for registrations from SMEs within the same area and other examples where business schools were required to only deliver the programme from one of their campuses, rather than across different areas of the UK.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> In these instances, business schools had campuses in more than one region of the UK and could only deliver the programme in one.

## Quality of programme delivery

### Overall satisfaction

SME leaders completing the programme report **high levels of satisfaction** with HtGM delivery and the majority (91%) said they would be **likely to recommend the programme** to another business leader. Figure 4 shows that nine in ten programme completers (91%) were either very or fairly satisfied with their experience of the programme from the first module to the end of their mentoring relationship. The proportion of programme completers reporting the highest levels of satisfaction increased by almost 15 percentage points between Year 1 and 3 of delivery, from 47% to 61%. Analysis of the self-reported survey data indicates that there is a positive statistically significant association between overall satisfaction with the programme and reporting individual level outcomes (see Chapter 5).

Satisfaction levels are particularly high amongst SME leaders of firms based in **Scotland** who were more likely to be “very satisfied” with delivery and slightly more likely to recommend HtGM to peers than programme completers overall.<sup>28</sup> This was reflected in feedback from focus group participants based in Scotland who particularly valued the quality of course tutors (who were often SME leaders themselves); that their business school was “*business-focused*” and not overly academic; and the diversity within their cohorts, which enhanced their experience on the programme. One business school in Scotland noticed that their first HtGM cohort was largely populated with degree-educated business leaders (e.g., financial advisors, legal practitioners). In response, they proactively targeted SMEs that might not have otherwise engaged with the university or business school but were important parts of the local economy (E.g., mechanics, beauticians, coffee shop owners) for subsequent cohorts.

**SME leaders of microbusinesses** (10 employees or less) also reported higher levels of satisfaction than their larger counterparts (11-50 employees).<sup>29</sup> This is reflected in later chapters, where SME leaders of microbusinesses were also more likely to report individual benefits from HtGM soon after completing the programme.

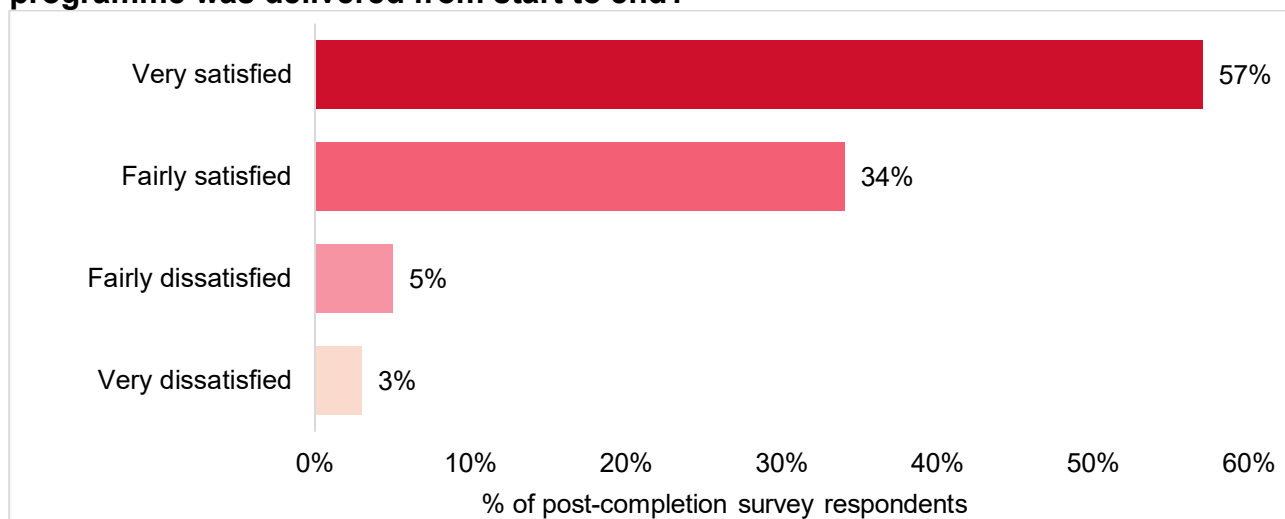
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<sup>28</sup> 69% of programme completers from SMEs based in Scotland reported they were “very” satisfied with programme delivery, compared with 57% overall. 95% of programme completers from SMEs based in Scotland reported they were likely to recommend the programme to another business leader, compared to 91% overall.

<sup>29</sup> 60% of programme completers from firms with 10 or less employees reported they were “very” satisfied with delivery, compared to 52% of those from firms with 11 to 50 employees.



**Figure 4: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with how the HtGM programme was delivered from start to end?**



Source: Post completion survey (n=1246)

### Frequency, duration and volume of delivery

The majority of SME leaders completing HtGM were satisfied with the **frequency** and **duration** of sessions involved in HtGM, reporting that the length and time between sessions was ‘about right’.<sup>30</sup> Satisfaction with the time between sessions has improved between the first year of delivery and Year 3 across all elements (peer groups, 13 percentage point increase; case studies, 12 percentage point increase; modules, 19 percentage point increase and mentoring, 11 percentage point increase). This is likely a result of changes made by DBT in Year 3 to encourage fortnightly module delivery in response to feedback from business schools and programme completers that weekly delivery did not always leave enough time to reflect on the content and make best use of the peer group and mentoring sessions.

Programme participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the **length of sessions** across all elements of the programme (at least 70% agreed the duration was ‘about right’<sup>31</sup>) and at least half (50% or more) thought the **number** of sessions involved in HtGM was about right across all elements (see breakdown by programme element in Figure 5).

Despite the overall positive results, programme completers expressed an interest in:

- **More case studies:** one in three would have valued more **case study workshops** (36%) in the HtGM curriculum and more **one-to-one mentoring** (28%), although interest in the latter dropped by 10 percentage points in Year 3 relative to earlier years of delivery.<sup>32</sup>
- **More time between webinars sessions** (23%) and **peer group calls** (26%): as reported in the process evaluation, peer learning calls and modules were typically scheduled within one week of each other, meaning that some SME leaders felt they did not always have enough time

<sup>30</sup> Percentage of programme completers that thought frequency of sessions was ‘about right’: 72% (webinars), 76% case study workshops, 67% peer group calls and 69% mentoring support. Percentage of programme completers that thought duration of sessions was ‘about right’: 70% (webinars), 73% case study workshops, 73% peer group calls and 77% mentoring support.

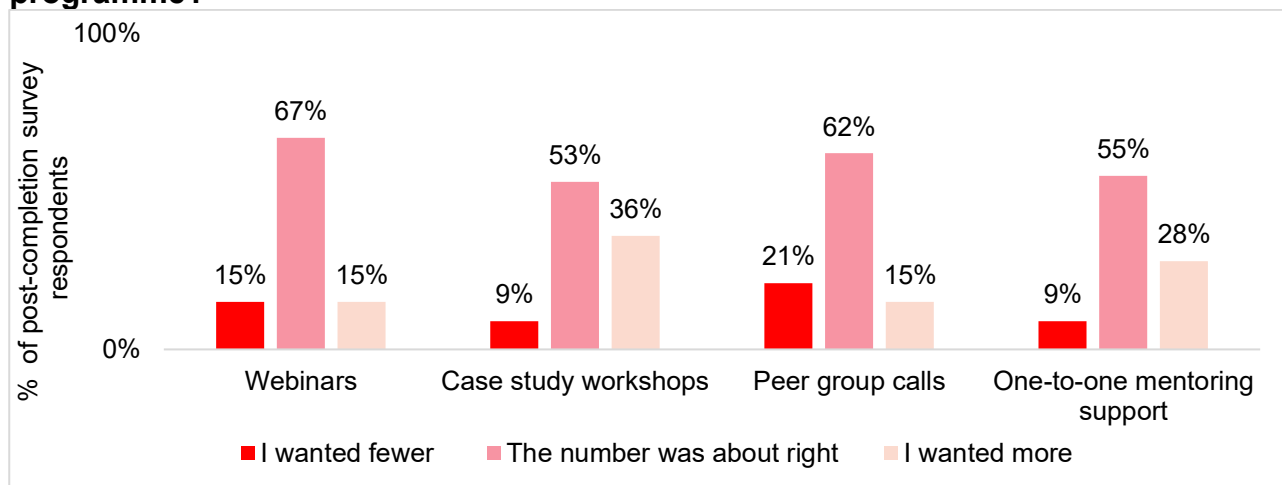
<sup>31</sup> Percentage of programme completers reporting duration of sessions was ‘about right’: mentoring (77%), case study workshops (73%), peer group calls (73%) and webinars (70%)

<sup>32</sup> 32% of programme completers wanted more mentoring sessions in Year 1 and Year 2 compared to 22% of programme completers in Year 3.



to reflect on the modular content in order to make best use of the peer learning sessions. This was also reflected in evidence collected through focus groups. Year 3 survey responses suggest that this has become less pronounced since changes to the frequency of sessions were introduced (cited above).

**Figure 5: What are your thoughts on the number of sessions involved in the HtGM programme?**



Post completion survey (n=1,246)

There is consensus amongst programme completers, business schools and stakeholders that the time commitment of 50hrs required to complete HtGM is proportionate to the volume of content. However, the time commitment required was the most commonly cited reason (48%) for non-completion provided by SME leaders who completed less than 75% of the modular content<sup>33</sup> and some focus group participants fed back that they found the volume and intensity of the programme sometimes detracted from how much they were able to learn and engage with.

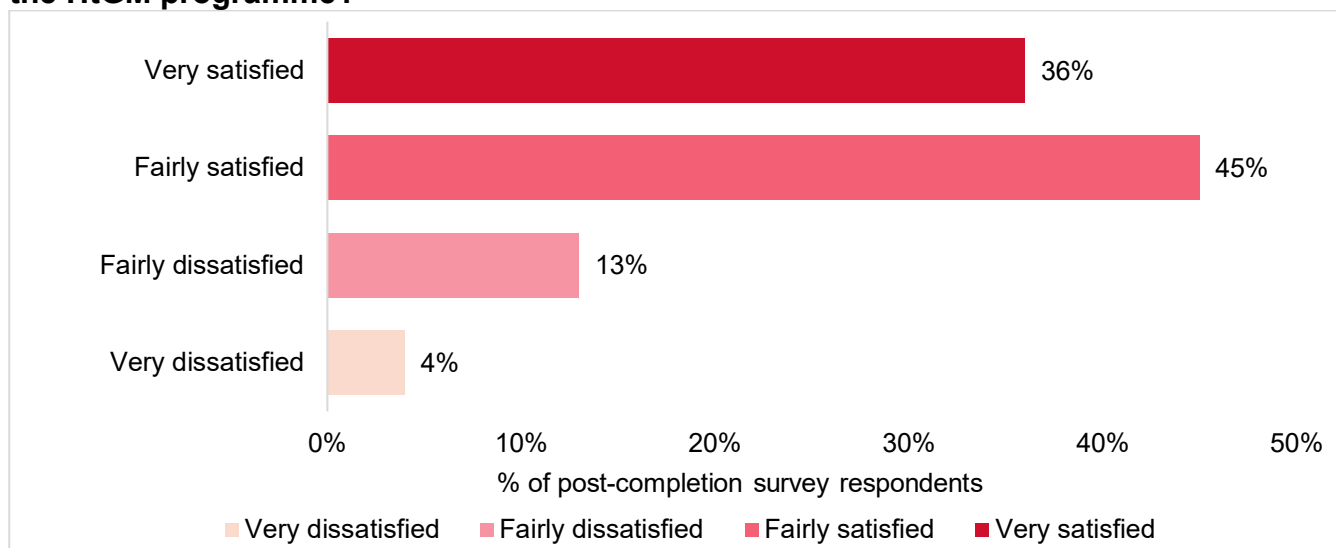
## Delivery mode

**Most programme participants (81%) were satisfied with the amount of in-person delivery** (Figure 6). Those completing the programme in the most recent year reported the highest levels of satisfaction to date – 42% of programme completers in Year 3 were “very satisfied”, compared to 27% and 32% in Years 1 and 2, respectively. This is likely a reflection of the COVID-19 restrictions that were in place during the early years of programme delivery and the subsequent flexibility for participants to choose a delivery mode that best suited them – participants in Year 3 were able to choose from blended or online only courses across a number of business schools.

Despite overall levels of satisfaction with programme delivery mode being high, there is some scope for improvement given that around two thirds (62%) of programme participants did not choose the highest measure of satisfaction.

<sup>33</sup> Small base size (n=77)

**Figure 6: Overall, how satisfied were you with the amount of face-to-face delivery in the HtGM programme?**



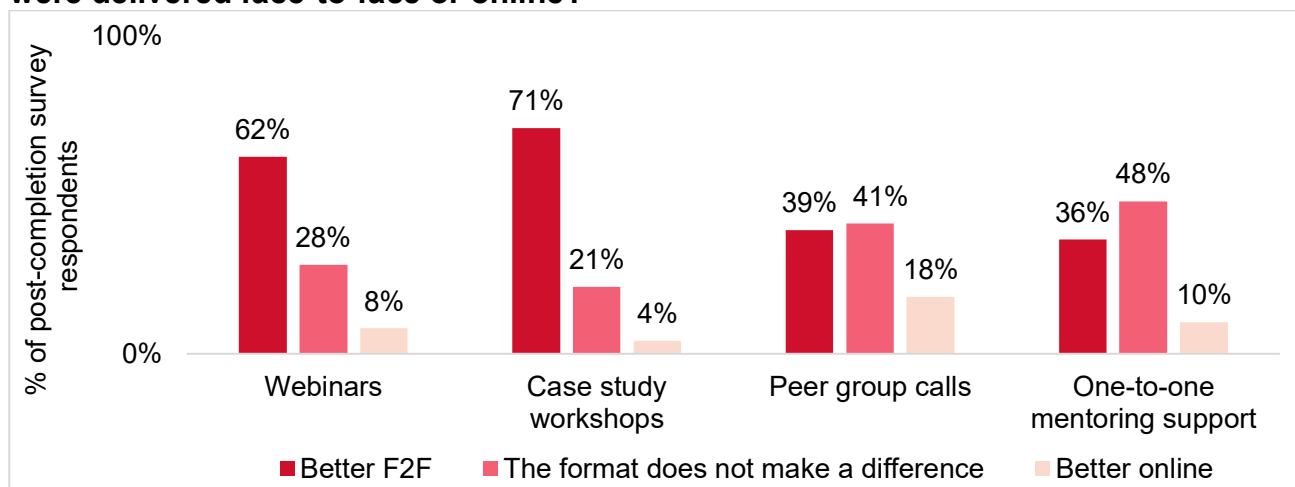
Source: Post completion survey (n=1246); Note: 'don't know' responses are not shown in the Figure but are include in the base

**Almost all programme completers participated in a combination of face-to-face and online sessions.** Whilst the overall amount of face-to-face delivery appears to have been consistent across the years of delivery, there has been variation in *which* elements of the programme are delivered in person. In the first year of HtGM, in-person delivery tended to be limited to the four case study modules. In Year 3, participants were twice as likely to attend face-to-face sessions for their induction and first module than in Years 1 and 2, increasing by ten and eight percentage points respectively. The proportion receiving in-person module delivery decreased by a similar proportion over the same time period.<sup>34</sup> Evidence from the depth interviews indicated that some business schools adopted this approach to help build stronger relationships between participants in the same cohorts and, in a few cases, the induction and first module were combined into a longer programme launch day.

**SME leaders completing HtGM expressed a clear preference for the module content to be delivered in person for both case studies (71%) and webinars (62%)** but were typically indifferent with regards to the delivery mode for mentoring and peer learning groups (Figure 7). There was a modest increase (six percentage points) in the preference for in-person case study workshops between Years 2 and 3, suggesting that the shift away from in-person case study delivery noted above is at odds with some participants' preferences.

<sup>34</sup> The percentage of programme completers receiving face-to-face delivery decreased between Year 1 and 3 across all case study modules: Internationalisation and Winning New Markets (82% to 70%), Building a Brand (82% to 71%), High Performance Workplace (82% to 69%) and Implementing Growth Action Plans (84% to 78%).

**Figure 7: Do you think the sessions in the HtGM programme would be better if they were delivered face-to-face or online?**



Source: Post completion survey (n=1,246)

## Course content

**The programme curriculum continues to be seen as comprehensive and largely relevant,** covering topics that almost all programme completers consider to be applicable to their business (Figure 8). The perceived relevance of the HtGM modules has been consistent since the programme launched, with the exception of modules relating to internationalisation, finance and implementing GAPs. The percentage of programme completers reporting that these modules were 'extremely relevant' increased by 14 percentage points (Module 3), 12 percentage points (Module 12) and 10 percentage points (Module 11) between Year 1 and Year 3. When compared to initial interest levels at the time of application, also shown in Figure 8, these modules were found to exceed initial expectations of the programme.

Interviews with business schools indicate that the increase in perceived relevance of these modules may be a result of their adaptation of curriculum content to reflect the changing economic climate, with topics such as the cost of living crisis, energy crisis and pandemic being discussed. Further to this, changes made to the module relating to finance may have increased its relevance to a wider proportion of businesses. Feedback from interviews with participants who completed the programme in Year 1 suggest that the finance module was sometimes considered to be too basic for senior leaders, whereas participants in later years reflected more positively on its relevance.

There were some notable differences in perceived relevance of the curriculum by SME size. Programme completers operating in microbusinesses (<10 FTEs) found modules with content relating to **customer engagement** particularly relevant:

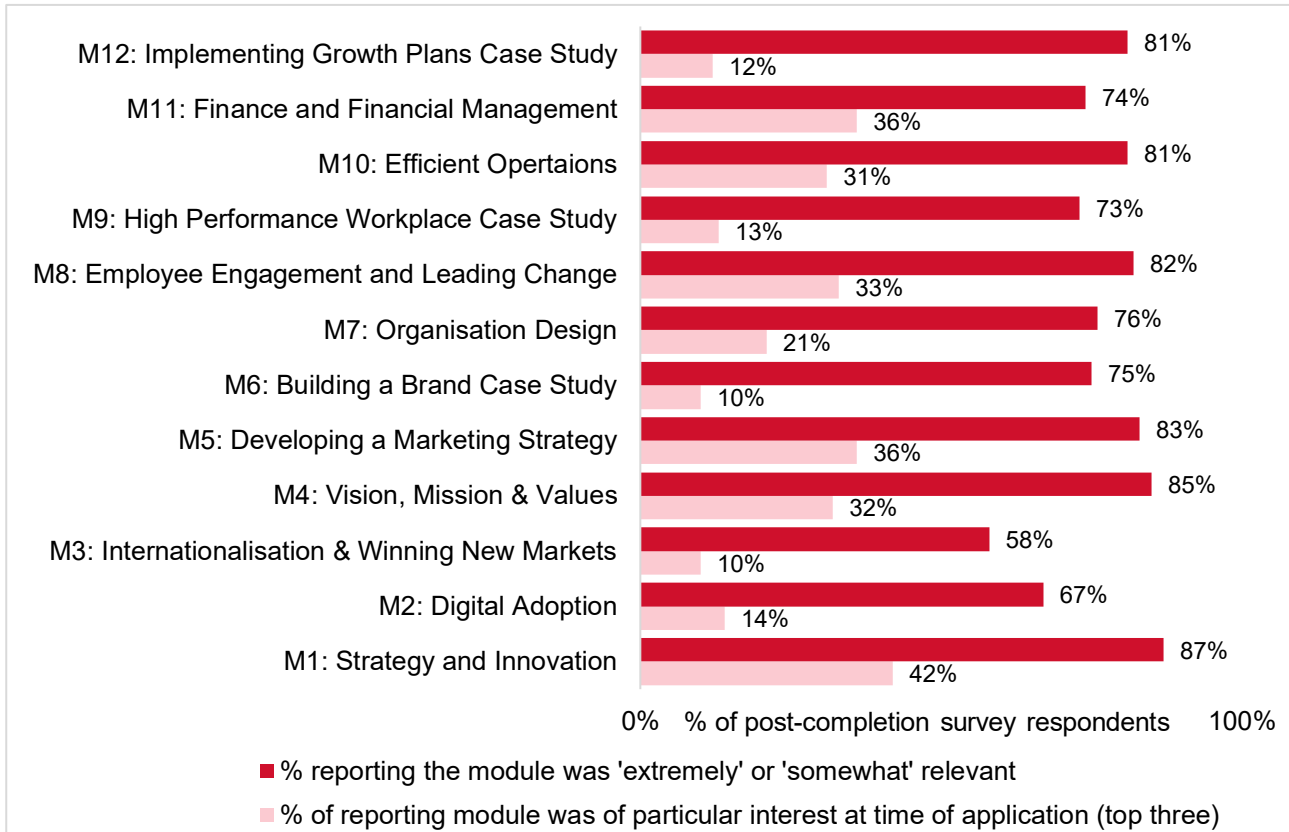
- Over half of micro businesses (54%) found the Developing a Marketing Strategy module extremely relevant, 15 percentage points higher than medium sized SMEs (51-99 FTEs).
- Around two fifths of micro businesses (37%) found the Building a Brand case study to be extremely relevant to their business, 6 percentage points higher than small SMEs (11-50 FTEs).

In contrast, leaders from larger SMEs (51-99 FTE) favoured content relating to **strategies for growth and innovation** and **building a sustainable and agile business**:

- Around half of large businesses (48%) reported that the Digital Transformation module was 'extremely relevant' to their business, 13 percentage points higher than those from micro-SMEs.

- Two thirds (65%) found the Employee Engagement and Leading Change module to be 'extremely' relevant to their business, 15 percentage points higher than their counterparts in micro-SMEs.

**Figure 8: Interest in HtGM at application vs perceived relevance upon completion**



Source: Post completion survey (n= 1,246); Note: the two bars relate to two different questions: (i) Which three modules were you most interested in when you signed up to the programme? and (ii) How relevant were each of the Help to Grow: Management modules to your business?

## Mentoring

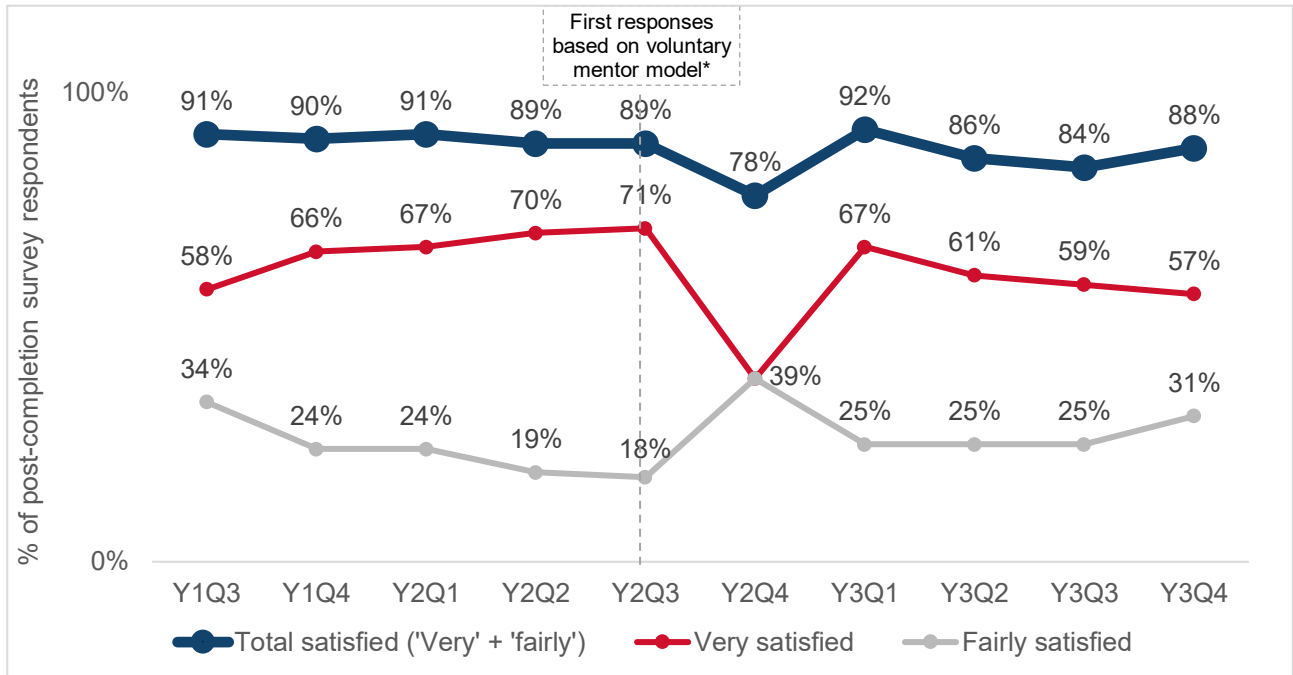
### Overall satisfaction

**The majority (89%) of programme completers who were matched with a mentor were satisfied with the one-to-one mentoring support they received through HtGM.**<sup>35</sup> Programme completers typically report the highest level of satisfaction (64% were 'very satisfied') with the mentoring element of the programme. This is higher than the proportion who were 'very satisfied' with the programme overall (57%) and aligns with high levels of satisfaction with the quality of the mentoring match: three quarters (77%) of programme completers agreed that their mentor's experience was well matched with their needs.

The introduction of a new mentoring model in August 2022, whereby participants can choose their own voluntary mentor, led to a sharp contraction in the proportion reporting they were 'very satisfied' with both the mentoring overall (32 percentage point decline between Y2Q3 and Y2Q4) and the quality of the match with their mentor (20 percentage point decline between Y2Q3 and Y2Q4). In the case of both measures, satisfaction quickly returned to earlier levels and have stayed relatively consistent as the new delivery model has become embedded into business as usual (Figure 9, Figure 10).

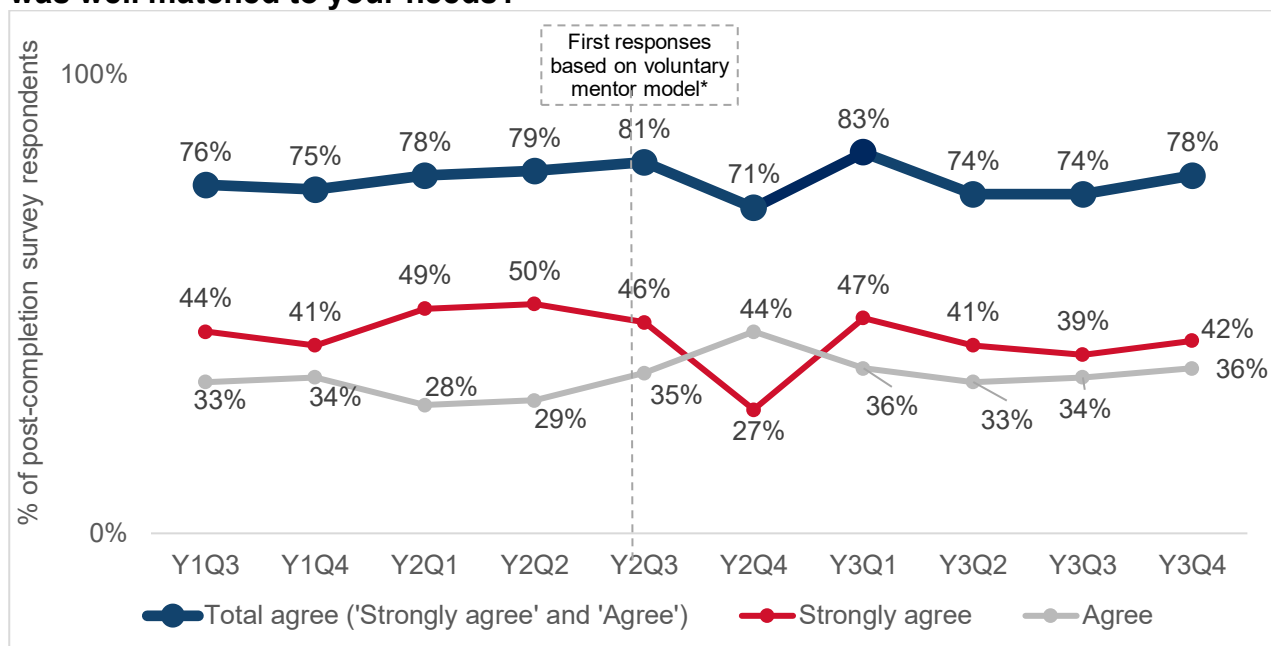
<sup>35</sup> 12% of respondents to the post-completion survey had not been matched with a mentor at the time of their response. The survey is administered between two and six weeks of completing module 12.

**Figure 9: Overall, how satisfied are you with the one-to-one mentoring support you received through the HtGM programme? (Participant feedback)**



Source: Post completion survey (n=1,017); Note: this question was only asked to respondents who were matched with a mentor and did all/some mentoring hours.  
 \*Dashed lined indicates the first quarter including responses from both participants with a paid and voluntary mentor. Y2Q4 is the first quarter where all responses are based on the participants on the voluntary mentor model.

**Figure 10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that your mentor's experience was well matched to your needs?**



Source: Post completion survey (n=1,086). Note: this question was only asked to respondents who were matched with a mentor; \*Dashed lined indicates the first quarter including responses from both participants with a paid and voluntary mentor. Y2Q4 is the first quarter where all responses are based on the participants on the voluntary mentor model.

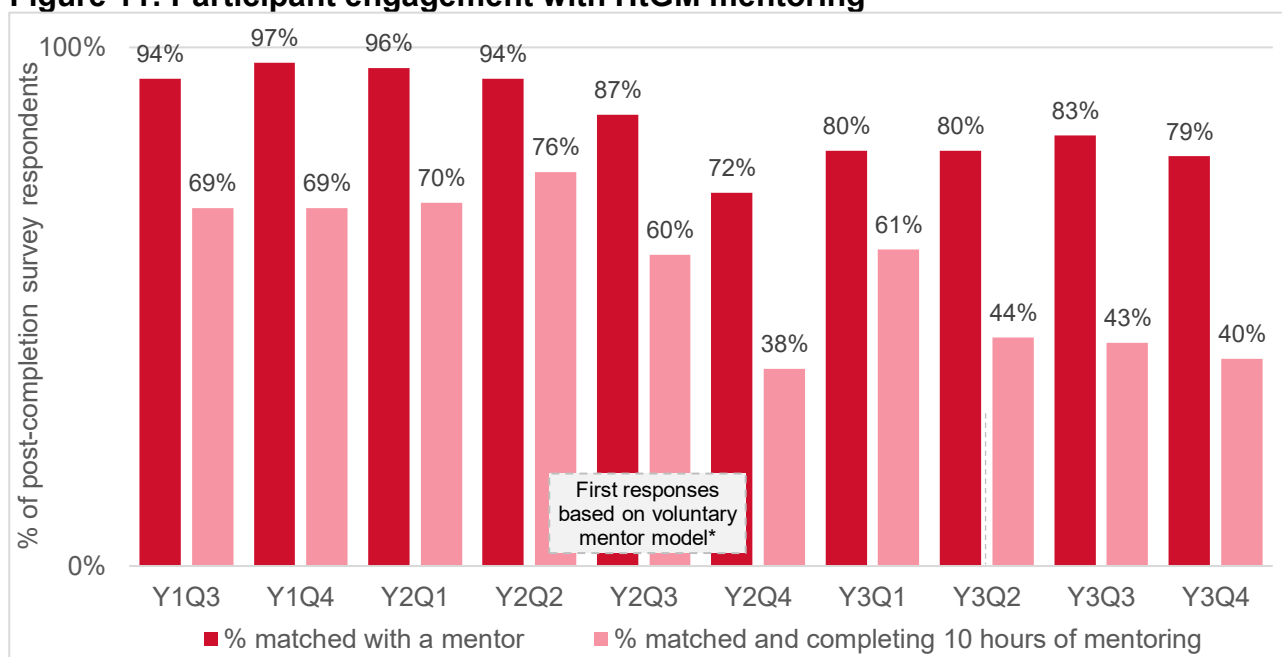
### The mentoring relationship

Programme completers' engagement in the mentoring element of HtGM has declined over time. The proportion of programme completers that said they had matched with a mentor dropped from 95% in Year 1 to 80% in Year 3. Similarly, the proportion of programme participants that completed all ten hours of mentoring with their mentor dropped by 19 percentage points (from 69% Year 1 to 50% Year 3) (see quarterly breakdowns in Figure 11).<sup>36</sup> This drop in engagement with the mentoring element has not led to a corresponding drop in overall satisfaction with the programme, suggesting that those who opt-out of mentoring are still content with their experience of HtGM.

**Engagement in the mentoring element of HtGM is lowest amongst programme completers who operate in microbusinesses.** They are less likely to have engaged with a mentor at all (11 percentage points lower than those in larger SMEs) and, where they have, they are less satisfied with the quality of match and less engaged in the relationship (ten and six percentage points lower, respectively). As referenced in the Year 2 evaluation report, interviews with programme participants indicated that the additional tasks associated with the new mentoring model (e.g., creating a profile on the mentoring platform, selecting a mentor, logging mentoring sessions) created addition burden on already time-constrained SME leaders. This is likely to be compounded for leaders of microbusinesses.

<sup>36</sup> Note: the survey is administered between two and six weeks after programme participants completed module 12, meaning some mentoring relationships will not be complete. In December 2022, the duration of the HtGM mentoring relationship was extended from four weeks after completing the final module to eight weeks. This change only applies to some respondents to the survey in Y2Q4.

**Figure 11: Participant engagement with HtGM mentoring**



Source: Post completion survey Note: the two bars relate to two different questions: (i) Were you matched with a mentor as part of the Help to Grow: Management programme? and (ii) Did you complete / attend all ten hours of mentoring with your mentor? \*Dashed lined indicates the first quarter including responses from both participants with a paid and voluntary mentor. Y2Q4 is the first quarter where all responses are based on the participants on the voluntary mentor model.

## Mentoring platform

The mentoring model introduced in August 2022 uses an online platform to facilitate the matching process between mentors and mentees. Whilst most (62%) mentees were satisfied with the mentor platform in Year 3, around one in four programme completers were fairly or very dissatisfied with their experience of the platform (Figure 12). This represents the lowest levels of satisfaction across all elements of the programme (see Figure 4, Figure 6, Figure 9).

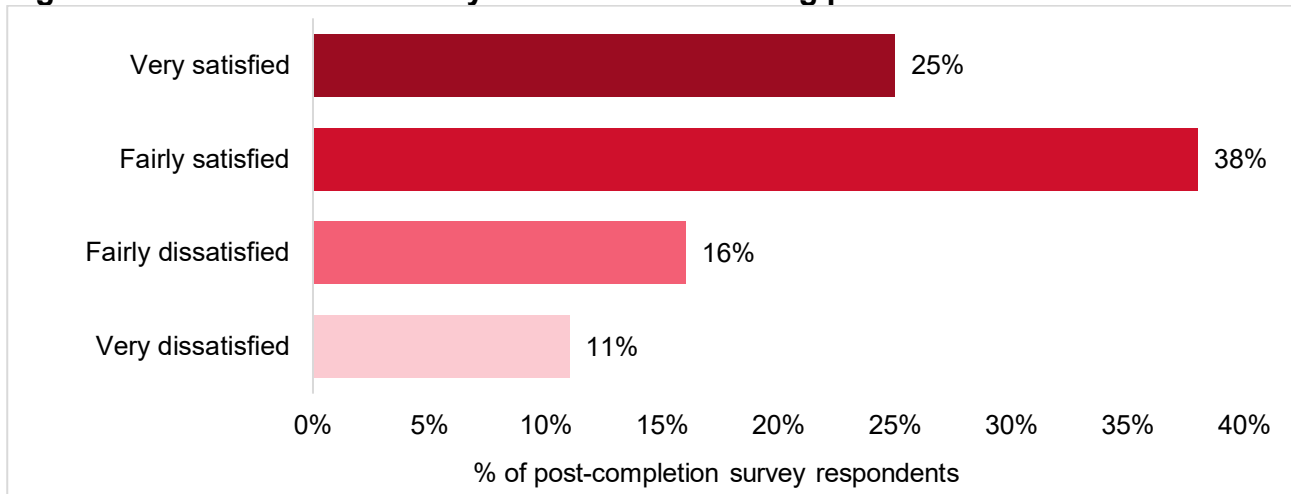
**Mentor feedback on the mentoring platform was mixed:** around half (56%) agreed that the platform was straightforward to use and half (43%) disagreed. Mentors responding to the survey provided some suggestions to improve the platform, including simplifying the user interface to make it easier to navigate and integrating a notification system to alert them when they have a message from a potential mentee.

Findings from the additional qualitative research into mentoring also revealed mixed views on the effectiveness of the platform. Those who completed their mentoring sessions typically found it straightforward, intuitive, easy to access and easy to use. However, those who did not form a successful mentoring relationship found it to be ‘clunky’ and ‘not very user-friendly’ when attempting to navigate the site. In addition, interviewees found the number of mentors listed on the platform and volume of information (mentor profiles) to consider when matching overwhelming. The lack of notifications from the platform was found to have affected communication between mentors and mentees, leading to a negative experience of the matching process for some.

Suggestions for potential improvements to the platform from mentors included:

- Adding links to LinkedIn profiles, business websites, and social media accounts to enhance the matching process and increase understanding of mentors/mentees background for the purpose of assessing suitability.
- Adding more tools to the platform to better facilitate mentoring sessions. A few suggestions include a section for taking notes, a space to add an external meeting link or the ability to host calls within the platform to improve the mentoring experience.

**Figure 12: How satisfied were you with the mentoring platform?**



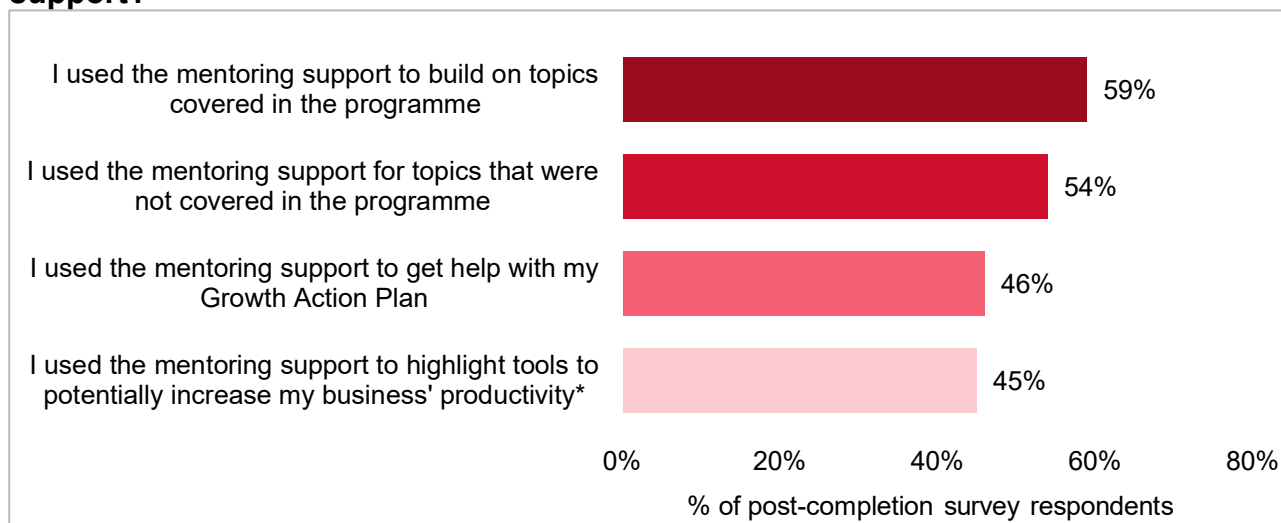
Source: Post completion survey (n=508, Year 3 participants only); Note: this figure does not include 'Don't know' or 'Not stated' responses

### **Mentoring activities**

Programme participants used their mentoring relationships to 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, including for signposting to tools that could improve productivity (Figure 13). Looking at annual data, programme completers in Year 3 were significantly less likely to use their mentoring relationship to discuss topics from the HtGM curriculum or to develop their Growth Action Plan (10 and 20 percentage points lower than Year 1 completers on these measures). This could be driven by personal preferences or by mentor understanding of the programme – findings from our research with voluntary mentors indicated that they were not always familiar with the HtGM curriculum and the role of mentoring in the programme overall.



**Figure 13: Which of the following describes how you used one-to-one mentoring support?**



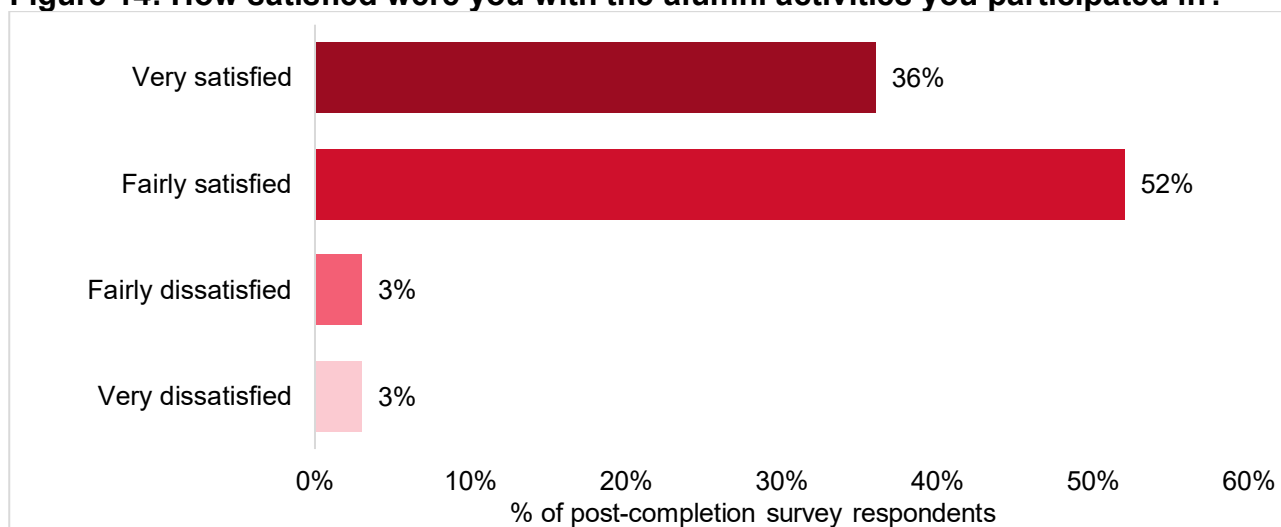
Source: Post completion survey (n=1,017); Note: \*this option was only added in Y2Q4 so has a smaller base

## Alumni Network

The HtGM Alumni Network was launched in September 2022 offering learning and networking opportunities for all alumni of the programme. Since its launch, around half (56%) of programme completers report that they had attended at least some alumni events. Most commonly, their engagement had been with light-touch remote activities – 39% had signed up to the HtGM alumni newsletter and 35% had accessed online alumni articles and videos, around one quarter (23%) had attended local events organised by a business school.

**Most programme completers (88%) were satisfied with the alumni activities they had engaged with** and around half (52%) said these had supported implementation of their growth planning. SME leaders reported a range of other benefits from engagement with alumni activities, including access to peer-to-peer support (11%), networking (10%) and knowledge sharing (7%).

**Figure 14: How satisfied were you with the alumni activities you participated in?**



Source: Follow up survey (n=320); Note: this question was only asked to programme completers who had taken part in alumni activities. The chart does not include 'don't know' responses

Feedback from depth interviews suggest that most **business schools have developed their own alumni offer** to complement the national network activities. Some of these activities and events

have been conducted independently of the programme, with costs absorbed by the business schools. Attendance at local events appeared to vary by business schools, with some reporting good levels of engagement and others experiencing difficulties engaging programme completers. However, business schools state that programme completers who attend alumni events report positive experiences, largely due to the opportunity to network and discuss topics not covered in the curriculum. Examples of the types of local events and activities being delivered by business schools include:

- **Additional sessions addressing topics not covered in HtGM modules.** Session topics are voted on by cohorts and have included public relations strategy, utilising generative AI for content development, effective recruitment strategies, how to use LinkedIn more effectively, customer relationship management, and personal impact statements. One business school was planning a website masterclass, in which participants will present and review each other's websites.
- **Production of supplementary documents:**
  - A '**Help to Grow Yellow Pages**' which serves as a directory where alumni can find services offered by other alumni. This network resulted from frequent business transactions amongst the school's alumni
  - **Tailored communications** containing new case studies, information on additional resources available at the business school and opportunities to hire graduates and offer internships.
- **Specialist panel events** with guest speakers to discuss business challenges identified through engagement with cohorts and events with local enterprise partnership representatives to discuss funding opportunities (e.g., a panel discussion of family-run business owners)
- **External trips** – e.g. sector-based site visits to demonstrate best practice for businesses facing challenges, a visit to the House of Commons with the local MP and a meet and greet with the Small Business Commissioner.

# Chapter 5: Programme effectiveness (individual outcomes)

## Introduction

HtGM aims to improve the **confidence, skills, knowledge and understanding** of key management and leadership practices amongst SME leaders participating in the programme. These outcomes are in turn expected to result in improvements to their leadership practices, including more informed and targeted **business planning and strategy** and access to a **peer network of support** to help them cope with the demands of their role.

This chapter reports on the extent to which the programme appears to have contributed towards these expected outcomes based on analysis of self-reported survey data, depth interviews and focus groups with programme completers. It also draws on matching analysis of self-reported pre and post data from programme completers compared to a 'counterfactual' group of SME leaders in the wider business population who meet the eligibility criteria for HtGM but did not participate in the programme.

For each outcome, a summary of the overall evidence and the strength of this is assessed against a 5 mark judgement criteria ranging from strong evidence to inconclusive evidence (more details in Annex C). This is provided alongside a discussion of contributing factors.

## Personal development

### GOOD EVIDENCE

There is good evidence to suggest that HtGM is contributing to improved confidence in SME leaders' ability to lead and manage their business.

**Evidence in support of this finding:**  
PSM analysis, beneficiary surveys, focus groups

**Contributing factors:** programme overall and peer-learning groups for SMEs

***Hypothesis:** SME leaders who participate in HtGM will be more **confident** in their ability to manage their business and more aware of their strengths and potential areas for improvement.*

**Evidence from across all strands of the evaluation indicate that SME leaders are more confident in leading and managing their business after completing HtGM.** SME leaders who had completed HtGM were found to be significantly more confident in their ability to achieve their goals, even in the face of obstacles, than eligible SME leaders in the wider UK economy who did not participate in the programme.<sup>37</sup> This is supported in the wider self-reported survey evidence, whereby improved confidence to lead and manage their business was the most commonly reported benefit from the programme amongst those completing the six months survey (reported by 91% of respondents). It was also found to be an early outcome from the programme, with two thirds (69%)

reporting confidence as a benefit from the programme within six weeks of completion.

Evidence from depth interviews and focus groups with programme completers suggests that HtGM leads to improvements in SME leaders' confidence by **validating existing ideas**, giving them the **conviction to implement these ideas** and **self-efficacy** (*belief in one's ability to complete a task or achieve a goal*). In some cases, participants reported a lack of self-confidence prior to the programme. Feelings of 'imposter syndrome' were most present amongst leaders who had been

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<sup>37</sup> This refers to the Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATT) and the difference between the treated and control groups is statistically significant at the 1% level

promoted to leadership positions because of their specialist technical skills without formal management and leadership training. In other cases, participants were experienced leaders but were less confident to lead their business through COVID-19 and the subsequent economic recovery. In both instances, SME leaders reported that the programme had helped improve their confidence and enabled them to be more effective in their leadership role.

Improved confidence was typically attributed to the **programme as a whole**, rather than one of its composite parts. However, a small number of focus group participants described how mentoring had improved their confidence through developing their leadership 'persona' – i.e., how they want to articulate themselves to colleagues, employees and other business leaders.

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*“Help to Grow [was transformative for me], it gave me the confidence to be a leader and not just do the day job” – Year 3 programme completer*

*“[HtGM] gave me some confidence that had been severely battered during the pandemic” – Year 2 programme completer*

*“It’s the best thing I’ve done within my working career in terms of the effect that it’s had on me and the increase in confidence” – Year 3 programme completer*

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Some focus group participants said that the programme had given them the **confidence to take on an enhanced role within their business**, typically in the form of a promotion or expanded responsibilities. A senior leader in a retail organisation explained that the programme led them to realise that, during the pandemic, they had taken on more responsibility and needed more authority within their business. This led to a change in role, title and an increase in salary. Another described how they were more confident to advocate for their ideas to the business owner and expand their responsibilities to include business growth as a result of the programme.

**Improvements in confidence appear to have been greater amongst leaders of smaller SMEs:** 70% of micro-SME leaders and 71% of small SME leaders reported improvements in confidence compared to 55% of leaders of larger SMEs. Interviews with small business leaders highlighted the particular importance of the **peer networking** opportunities available through HtGM as a mechanism to improving confidence. These participants often felt isolated in their leadership roles prior to the programme and found that meeting peers through HtGM had made them feel less alone, changed their perceptions on what was possible for their business and highlighted potential avenues for growth (e.g., via collaborations with other participants' businesses).

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*“HtGM gave me the confidence to move forward with new ideas...rather than just sitting back and letting my boss direct things. It helped me to grow and gave me the self-belief that I could contribute to the growth of the business” – Year 3 programme completer*

*“Thinking it is just you and you are hopeless, but then you realise that everyone is facing the same problems” – Year 2 programme completer*

*“[the peer learning groups] opened my eyes to all areas I hadn’t really thought about” – Year 3 programme completer*

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The evaluation evidence collected to date suggests that self-reported improvements in confidence amongst HtGM can be attributed to the programme. There was limited evidence of other

contributing factors to this from the depth interviews: a small number of participants had prior management and leadership training or had completed more training after the programme that had also contributed to their improved confidence.

## Skills, knowledge and understanding

*Hypothesis: leaders who complete the HtGM programme will have a better understanding of the important of leadership and management practices and how they can contribute to increases in firm-level productivity.*

**There is good evidence that HtGM has led to improved skills, knowledge and understanding amongst programme participants.** Programme completers were significantly more confident that they had the **skills** they need to lead their employees and business and more **knowledge** of the factors that drive growth compared to eligible SME leaders in the wider UK economy who did not participate in the programme.<sup>38</sup>

**HtGM was found to be generating improvements in skills, knowledge and understanding across a range of topics.** Almost all programme completers responding to the six month follow-up survey said they had learned or gained something from their engagement in HtGM.<sup>39</sup> These most commonly related to improved leadership and management skills (91%) and increased awareness of the factors that drive productivity (discussed below). Programme completers also report improvements across a range of best practice management and leadership approaches (e.g., employee engagement, business model innovation) and technical know-how (e.g., monitoring growth via metrics) that would make them better leaders (see Figure 15). Programme completers were less likely to say they had gained a better understanding of how to embed equality, diversity and inclusion practices (73%) or greater awareness of the key elements and principles of financial management (72%) through participation in the programme.

**There is particularly good evidence to suggest that the programme is contributing to improved awareness of the factors that drive business growth amongst SME leaders.** Programme completers were significantly more likely to be aware of these factors and have considered what this means for their business than comparable SME leaders in the wider UK economy.<sup>40</sup> Survey evidence suggests that awareness of these factors occurs in the very short term (91% report this within six weeks of programme completion). However, it can take SME leaders longer to understand *how* to translate this knowledge into tangible actions for their business; six weeks after completion, 54% of SME leaders said they understood **how** to improve operational efficiency compared to 85% six months after completion.

### GOOD EVIDENCE

The evaluation has found good evidence to suggest that HtGM is contributing to improved management and leadership skills and knowledge and understanding of factors that drive growth amongst SME leaders.

**Evidence in favour:** PSM analysis, beneficiary surveys, focus groups

**Contributing factors:** HtGM curriculum, case studies and peer learning groups

<sup>38</sup> This refers to the Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATT) and the difference between the treated and control groups is statistically significant at the 1% level

<sup>39</sup> 10 out of 1,220 respondents reported that they had not learned or gained any of the response options as a result of participating in the HtGM programme.

<sup>40</sup> Statistically significant at the 1% level – “I am aware of the factors that drive growth in SMEs and have considered what this means for my business”

In a few areas of the HtGM curriculum SME leaders in the most recent year of delivery were more likely to report improvements than their counterparts from earlier in the programme: greater awareness of the key principles of financial management (77% versus 69%), understanding of how to embed equality, diversity and inclusion practices (76% versus 70%) and understanding of how to use metrics to monitor growth and support strategic decision making (81% versus 75%).

Analysis of the self-reported survey data indicates that there is a positive statistically significant association between reporting at least one of the individual level outcomes listed in Figure 15 and completing a Growth Action Plan (discussed further below), completing all or most of the ten mentoring sessions or identifying as female. There were no statistically significant associations between these outcomes and engagement in the Alumni Network or being matched with a mentor. It is important to note that these findings cannot be assumed to be causal, rather indicating a relationship between these factors. The causal link will be explored in the final stage of the evaluation.

**Figure 15: Which (if any) of the following have you learned or gained from participation in the Help to Grow Management Programme? (Six months post-completion)**



Source: Six month follow up survey (n=1,220)

Programme completers who participated in depth-interviews and focus groups highlighted the central contribution of four elements of the programme to improving their skills, knowledge and understanding:

- **Webinars:** the breadth of topics covered has made programme beneficiaries more rounded strategic decision makers: not only did the curriculum refresh their understanding of topics they were familiar with (e.g., bookkeeping, cashflow management) but it deepened their understanding of elements of the business beyond their direct remit and how these areas interact to improve overall business performance (see examples in Chapter 6).
- **Case study modules:** some programme completers referenced the importance of case studies in illustrating how to apply the curriculum content in a real-world context and inspiring them to be more ambitious with their growth plans (e.g., to consider international distribution to new markets, setting more ambitious targets).



- **Mentoring:** was described as helping programme participants to shift their mindset from operational to more strategic, which was seen as an essential mechanism for translating the learning from the programme into their business. In one case, a mentor was an Angel Investor and was able to develop their mentee’s thinking in terms of short-, medium- and long-term plans, moving their focus from income generation to potential acquisitions and expanding into new markets.
- **Peer learning groups** were said to provide valuable opportunities between modules for programme participants to explore how they might integrate their knowledge from HtGM into their role and to learn from each other’s experiences.

**There were some limited examples of where programme completers had not gained new skills or knowledge from the programme.** Focus groups with programme completers revealed that participants sometimes found the combination of mentoring, peer group calls and case study workshops to be intense and the volume of content in the curriculum meant the delivery of modules was rushed. This feedback was typically provided by participants who had completed the programme prior to the changes in frequency of sessions set out in Chapter 3. In a minority of cases, SME leaders reported limited improvements in skills, knowledge and understanding because they had previously been on a leadership and management course covering similar content.

## Business planning and strategy

***Hypothesis:** SME leaders who complete HtGM will have a deeper understanding of their business needs and will produce a Growth Action Plan, detailing changes to drive productivity improvements in their business.*

There is evidence to suggest that improvements in skills and knowledge developed through the programme are leading to **improved understanding amongst SME leaders of their business needs**. Insights from focus groups indicate that participating in HtGM has provided an opportunity for SME leaders to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their business and take time away from day-to-day operational delivery to focus on strategic thinking and planning. Programme completers referred to the **Vision, Mission and Values module** as a catalyst for redefining their business purpose with clarity and assessing their business needs against it. Participants reported a range of specific business needs identified through the programme including a plan for digital transformation, a strategy to target larger customers, clearer sales targets and technical skills to support growth plans.

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*“[As a result of HtGM], I know what our business values are, why we’re there, why we do it and that helps me to make those difficult decisions. Whether it be taking on a client or dealing with suppliers...I use [knowledge from HtGM] almost every day” – Year 2 programme completer*

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### EMERGING EVIDENCE

The evaluation has found emerging evidence to suggest that HtGM is contributing to SME leaders developing a deeper understanding of their business needs and producing GAPs to drive productivity improvements in their businesses.

**Evidence in favour:** beneficiary surveys, focus groups

**Contributing factors:** HtGM modules, mentoring, GAP completion

Analysis of the self-reported survey data indicate a statistically significant positive associated between completing a GAP and reporting both individual level and business level impacts.

**Most (71%) programme completers had produced a Growth Action Plan (GAP)** to support implementation of lessons learned on HtGM. However, this remains below the target of 90% GAP completion, which is one of the three overarching aims of the programme. As reported in Chapter 4, the proportion of completers who had produced a GAP dropped by 10 percentage points between Year 1 and Year 3 and briefly fell in line with the introduction of the new mentoring model. Feedback from programme completers on developing a GAP was mixed, with some developing a bespoke plan, some developing an existing strategic plan and others not engaging with the GAP process at all. Reasons for not completing GAPs are discussed in detail below.

**Programme completers received high quality support to develop GAPs from mentors**, although instances of this have declined year on year. Of programme completers who produced a GAP, around half (48%) had used mentoring support to do so and this support was generally considered to be “very” helpful (68%). Looking at the annual survey data, the proportion of programme completers using mentoring support to help with their GAP and satisfaction with the support they received have a declined, following similar patterns reported with the mentoring engagement overall in Chapter 3.

**The process of developing a GAP was most beneficial to business leaders who were either new in their role or had no prior experience of business planning.** In these cases, the planning process helped to translate their new knowledge and skills from the programme into something implementable and achievable. It was also considered a useful tool for programme completers to hold themselves accountable. The HtGM programme was also helpful in formalising and developing existing growth plans, ensuring they were founded on an established business vision, aligned to their strategic priorities and had SMART objectives.<sup>41</sup>

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*“You don’t always carry out the things you know you should do, and [the GAP] made me carry them out” – Year 3 programme completer*

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**There was consensus amongst programme completers, mentors and business schools that a key barrier to GAP completion is the template.** It is deemed to be overly complex and some programme participants struggled to see the potential benefit of investing the time to complete this for their business. Whilst the GAP template was simplified in the first year of programme delivery, business schools reported making additional modifications to improve engagement and, in some cases, programme completers created their own templates or used templates from other sources. Reasons for not producing a GAP included: their business already had a strategic growth plan in place that they updated through the programme, they did not have time to complete one, they did not see the value in producing a plan or they did not know they were expected to produce a plan.<sup>42</sup>

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*“I did try to use it, and I tied myself up in knots, I just didn’t understand it, it was far too complicated for me, and I think I had quite a good stab at it compared to the rest of the cohort... and in the end I have to say I just didn’t use it.” – Year 1 programme completer*

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## Networks and collaboration

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<sup>41</sup> Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound

<sup>42</sup> This question was introduced to the post completion survey in March 2024 and therefore is based on a very small base (n=19) of firms not completing their GAP. These findings should be interpreted with caution.



**Hypothesis:** SME leaders who complete HtGM will develop relationships with other SME leaders providing a source of additional support to make decisions in their business, share best practice and build personal networks.

**There is evidence to suggest that HtGM is effective at enabling some SME leaders to expand their peer networks.** Around two in three (63%) programme completers agreed that participating in the programme had enabled them to expand their peer network to “some extent” or “to a great extent” and just over half (57%) had stayed in touch with at least some of the SME leaders from their programme cohort. Some business schools formed cohort-specific WhatsApp groups for participants to communicate during the programme and depth interview evidence from programme completers indicates that some cohorts are still using these to connect and share best practice up to two years later. In Year 3, around half (45%) of programme completers who had not stayed in touch with their cohort intended to connect in the future, representing a 27-percentage point increase from Year 2 completers. This could be driven by the expansion of the Alumni Network in the latest year of delivery, meaning programme completers have access to more opportunities to connect with their fellow participants through organised events rather than through their own efforts.

**Programme completers have developed relationships through HtGM that are an additional source of support.** Most said that participation in HtGM had contributed to them feeling better supported to make decisions about their business<sup>43</sup> (82%) and less isolated in their role as a business leader (72%) (Figure 16). Leaders of micro-SMEs were more likely than their larger counterparts to report that HtGM had contributed to them feeling better supported to make decisions ‘to a great extent’

Overall, just over half (54%) of programme completers said that HtGM had contributed to them expanding their network of peers to discuss business issues with. There was a statistically significant decrease (eight percentage points) in this measure between Year 2 and Year 3, from 61% to 53%. Programme completers appear to favour engaging with their peers through **informal networking activities** (70% of completers have informal discussions with other businesses at least quarterly).

### EMERGING EVIDENCE

The evaluation has found emerging evidence to suggest that HtGM is contributing to deeper peer relationships amongst SME leaders.

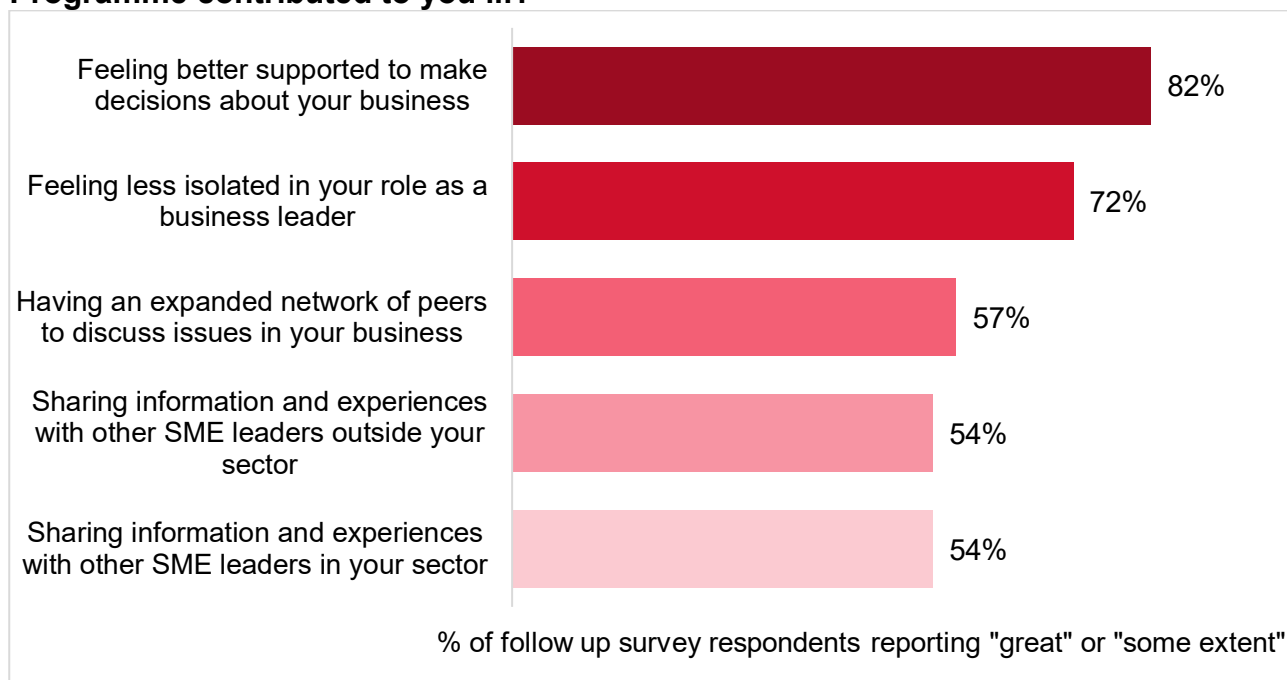
**Evidence in favour:** beneficiary surveys, focus groups

**Contributing factors:** HtGM overall, alumni network

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<sup>43</sup> Leaders of micro-sized SMEs were more likely than their larger counterparts to report that HtGM contributed to ‘a great extent’ to them to them feeling better supported to make decisions about their business ‘to a great extent’ (30% vs 21%). This difference is statistically significant.

**Figure 16: To what extent has participation in the Help to Grow Management Programme contributed to you ...?**



Source: Follow up survey (n=1,220)

## Unintended consequences

There is some self-reported evidence to suggest that the programme is contributing to unintended consequences amongst participants.

- **New jobs at different companies:** Evidence from business schools indicate that participation in HtGM has sometimes led to SME leaders leaving the jobs they occupied when they applied to take up new opportunities, either starting up their own business or taking on a different role in another firm. One business school reported six instances of this across their cohorts. In practice, this means that the benefits accrued to the individual participant will be realised by a different business, possibly outside of the HtGM target population.
- **New learning opportunities:** there were some examples in the focus groups of HtGM acting as a catalyst for individual leaders to access additional training opportunities, both in relation to management and leadership and more specialist areas relevant to their roles. This can be expected to compound some of the potential benefits to their business and suggests that the programme is effective in increasing participants' awareness of the wider business support landscape.

## Chapter 6: Programme effectiveness (business outcomes)

### Introduction

The individual level outcomes reported in Chapter 4 are expected to lead to improved management and leadership within firms and a range of business benefits associated with skills, knowledge and understanding from HtGM, ultimately leading to improvements in firm-level productivity.

This chapter reports on available evidence on the extent to which the programme is contributing towards these expected business outcomes based on analysis of self-reported survey data, depth interviews and focus groups with programme completers. It also draws on matching analysis of self-reported pre and post data from programme completers compared to a 'counterfactual' group of SME leaders in the wider business population who meet the eligibility criteria for HtGM but did not participate in the programme.

For each outcome, a summary of the overall evidence and the strength of this (assessed against judgement criteria detailed in Annex C) is provided alongside a discussion of contributing factors.

### Leadership and management

**Hypothesis:** *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.*

#### Diffusion of knowledge

**There is evidence to suggest that SME leaders completing HtGM diffuse the knowledge gained from the programme within weeks of completion.**

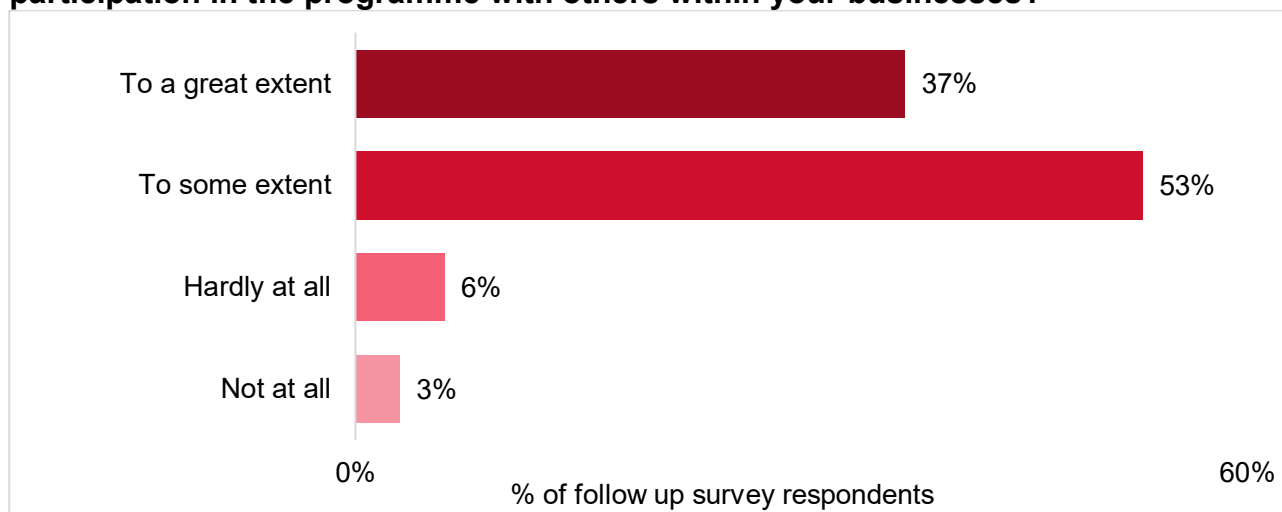
The majority (90%) of SME leaders who participated in HtGM shared what they had learned or gained with others in their business at least to some extent within six weeks of completing the programme (Figure 17). This measure was consistent in the six-month survey (91%), suggesting that most sharing from the programme occurs in the short term. Leaders of micro-SMEs were more likely to have shared this knowledge extensively than leaders of larger SMEs (32% had shared to a 'great extent' compared to 19%).

#### GOOD EVIDENCE

The evaluation has found good evidence to suggest that HtGM is contributing to improved management and leadership of SMEs.

Evidence in favour: PSM analysis, beneficiary surveys, focus groups

**Figure 17: To what extent have you shared what you have learned or gained from participation in the programme with others within your businesses?**



Source: Follow up survey (n=1,220)

Focus group participants reported diffusing learning from the programme within their business through sharing learning with colleagues and improved engagement with their workforce through the process of doing this. They had most commonly shared insights from the **Vision, Mission and Values** and **Developing a Marketing Strategy** modules, including with other senior leaders in their business, board members and employees. In some cases, the **mentoring** support was used to help develop strategies and plans for communicating course content to employees.

- One CEO said the course had prompted them to have a meeting with their staff to talk about their value proposition, during which they realised their staff had differing views of the business. They then developed a new shared value proposition that formed the basis of a new marketing strategy.
- Another participant reported working closely with their mentor to plan a brainstorming session on values with the rest of their team. This resulted in the development of a new set of values for the business, as well as increases in their own confidence and leadership skills.
- A co-owner of an organisation reported that their mentor had helped them create a plan for sharing new knowledge gained from the programme relating to branding and values. They organised a brainstorming Away Day with their staff to define the organisation's values. Dedicating time to employee engagement helped them to identify training needs within their organisation and resulted in new members of the team taking ownership of areas of the business. The charity is now investing more in continued professional development for their staff (see section below on improved employee engagement).

Programme completers also reported using tools gained from HtGM to support knowledge sharing within their organisation and to help them plan *how* they would diffuse knowledge. In some cases, SME leaders shared these tools directly with colleagues to use themselves in their roles. Some programme completers commented that they would have valued more tools, techniques and models that could be directly applied to make business improvements or shared with other team members for use. Participants also reported sharing their Growth Action Plans with colleagues (discussed in more detail later in this chapter).

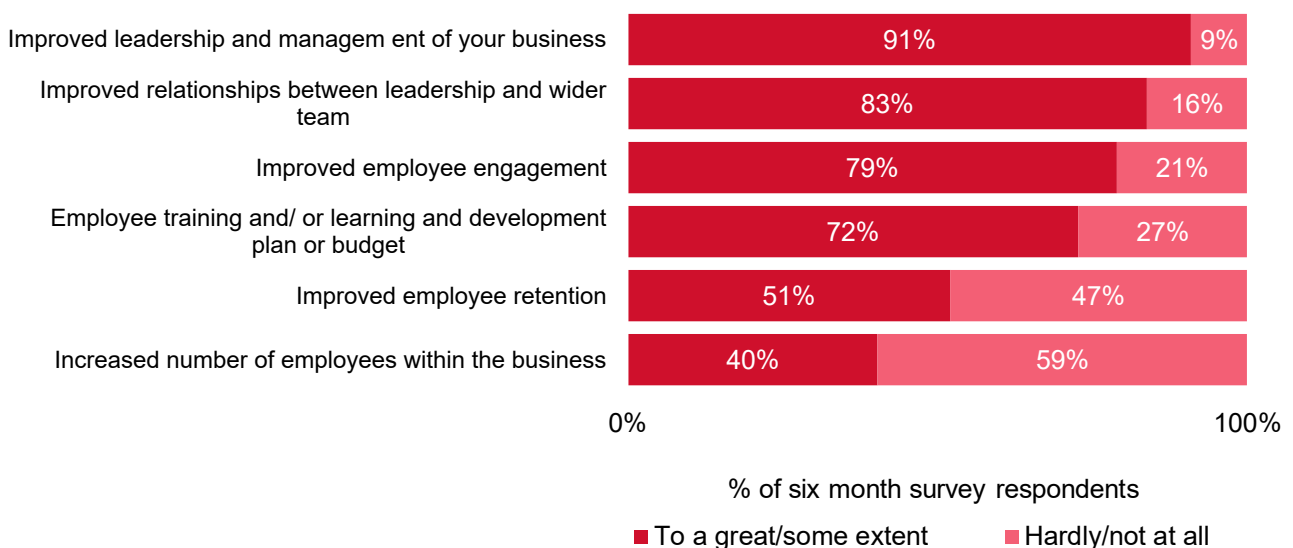
### **More effective management and leadership approaches**

**There is good evidence to suggest that HtGM is leading to more effective leadership and management approaches within participating SMEs. Within six months, most (91%)**

programme participants report that HtGM has contributed to improved leadership and management of their business (

Figure 18). The strongest evidence relates to the resilience of firm-level leadership: SME leaders completing HtGM were found to have significantly greater confidence in their firm’s ability to lead through change and uncertainty than leaders of similar SMEs in the wider UK economy. Second to this, the programme appears to be contributing to more effective **employee engagement**, both informally via improved relationships between leadership and the wider team (83%) and more formally through investments in employee development (e.g., training, development plans and dedicated training budgets) (72%). There is some evidence to suggest the programme is contributing to improved employee retention and employment growth amongst some participating businesses, but this should be treated as emerging.

**Figure 18: To what extent has participating in HtGM contributed to...? (Management and leadership approaches)**



Source: Follow up survey (n=1,220)

## Implementation of growth plans

**Hypothesis:** SME leaders completing HtGM will develop and implement a Growth Action Plan, leading to a range of business outcomes (e.g., improvements in efficiency and effectiveness of key business processes, increased innovation, adoption of best practice approaches). These will, in turn, generate additional business outcomes, such as improved cashflow management and cost savings.

### Implementing GAPs

Whilst the proportion of programme completers who develop a Growth Action Plan as a result of the programme falls short of HtGM targets (see Chapter 5), **evidence suggests that the programme has positively influenced firm-level capabilities and experience in implementing growth plans.** SME leaders who had completed HtGM were found to have significantly greater confidence in their firm’s ability to implement a business plan or strategy compared to a matched group of SME leaders who did not complete

**GOOD EVIDENCE**

The evaluation has found good evidence to suggest that HtGM is contributing to SMEs implementing plans for growth.

**Evidence in favour:** PSM analysis, beneficiary surveys, focus groups

the programme.<sup>44</sup> Factors identified as having contributed to this include the expectation that programme participants will complete a GAP, changes made by some participants to existing growth plans and strategies, as well as the improvements to confidence, skills, knowledge and understanding (discussed in Chapter 5). Analysis of the self-reported survey data indicates a positive, statistically significant correlation between completing a GAP and reporting business level outcomes. There was no comparable finding for engagement with the Alumni Network or mentoring.<sup>45</sup>

**Focus group participants who had developed GAPs discussed progress in implementing these and approaches to sharing them with colleagues.** These discussions were less common amongst Year 3 programme completers than those from earlier years, in line with findings presented in Chapter 3 on the decline in GAP completion rates. Participants reported having confidence to implement changes within their business irrespective of whether they had produced a GAP, typically as a result of having an improved understanding of the needs of their business and areas for development.

**Some early programme participants were continuing to use their GAP up to two years' after completing HtGM** and others were continuing to refer to content and materials from the course to respond to new and emerging business needs:

- A Finance Director who completed the programme in Year 1 had developed their own version of a GAP which had improved their decision-making and planning and was still being used three years later to launch new products.
- A Year 2 participant who developed a GAP on the programme said they referred back to it at the start of each financial year.
- A Year 1 participant who had taken over a business since completing the programme said they had 'banked' the learning from the HtGM curriculum to refer back to as they transitioned into their new role and had found this more useful than their GAP. Another, a manager who was soon to be promoted, said they were intending to come back to the materials from the programme once they were in a more senior position.

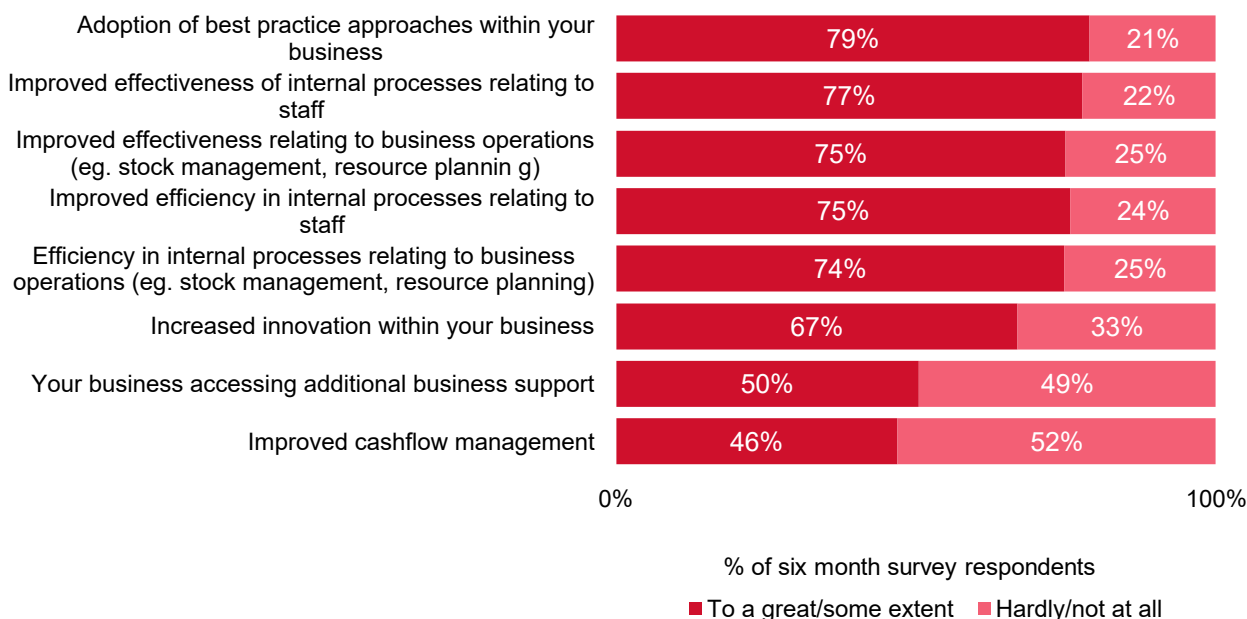
**SME leaders report a range of improvements to their business' capabilities as a result of their participation in HtGM** (Figure 19). The most commonly reported outcome (selected by 79% of respondents) was the adoption of best practice approaches, followed by improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of internal processes relating to staff and business operations. The following sections present more detailed evidence against these outcomes.

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<sup>44</sup> This refers to the Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATT) and the difference between the treated and control groups is statistically significant at the 1% level. After six months, 62% of programme completers report that their firm's capabilities and experience in relation to 'leading through change and uncertainty' are strong.

<sup>45</sup> This relationship cannot be assumed to be causal, rather an indication of a positive relation. The causality between elements of the programme and outcomes will be explored in the final stage of the evaluation.

**Figure 19: To what extent has participating in HtGM contributed to...? (Outcomes relating to implementing GAPS)**



Source: Follow up survey (n=1,220)

### Improved efficiency and effectiveness of key business processes

HtGM was found to be associated with a significant positive effect on firm-level capabilities and experiences that are often precursors to longer term improvements in firm-level productivity when compared to a matched group of business who did not participate in the programme. This provides evidence in support of the overarching aim of the HtGM programme.

#### 1) Effectiveness

SME leaders completing HtGM rate their firm's **understanding of operational effectiveness and how it can be improved** significantly higher than SME leaders who have not completed the programme.<sup>46</sup> Within six months, three quarters of programme completers attribute improvements in the effectiveness of internal staff processes (77%) (e.g., annual review process, line management arrangements, performance reviews) and the effectiveness of their business operations (75%) (e.g., stock management, resource planning) to HtGM to a 'great' or 'some' extent (Figure 19). Focus group participants provided additional insights into improvements to their operational efficiency as a result of participating in HtGM, most commonly associated with improvements to **cashflow management** - also reported by around half (46%) of programme completers (see Figure 19). Two examples from focus group participants are provided in the boxes that follow.

<sup>46</sup> This refers to the Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATT) and the difference between the treated and control groups is statistically significant at the 1% level.



#### Example of improved operational effectiveness, Year 2 participant

The Managing Director of a technology consultancy for SMEs shared that their business had made a major pivot through COVID-19 from IT to App Development. They enrolled on HtGM to support with this transition, particularly to help increase their low turnover. The finance and employee engagement modules were the most impactful on the participant and led to tangible changes to their management style and cashflow management. HTGM was viewed as: *“a platform to build our structure and create our systems and infrastructure that have now been relatively painless to scale up. We've got the infrastructure in place that will allow us to continue to scale up.”* Since completing the programme, the business has increased its turnover from £50k to £1million.

*“We wouldn't have survived the [pivot in our business] if we hadn't made those changes, because we wouldn't have known where we were losing money until it was too late, and we'd have gone out of business through cashflow problems.”*

#### Example of improved operational effectiveness, Year 2 participant

An Operations Manager within a family-run haulage firm developed a GAP to improve their cashflow systems. Prior to joining HtGM, the firm did not have any formal systems in place and was running on negative cashflow. Their HtGM mentor had a financial background and used their one-to-one sessions to run through the basics of financial management (building on the HtGM curriculum). This process made it clear that some of their operations were not profitable. Following implementation of some changes, they now have positive cashflow each month, extensive systems and processes in place and new accountants. Whilst their turnover is similar, their operational efficiency has improved by 80%. They are still in contact with their HtGM mentor.

*“If we hadn't done this process, we would be one of the 400 haulage companies failing each year.”*

## 2) Efficiency

Within six months, programme completers report efficiency improvements to internal processes relating to staff (75%) and business operations (74%). Evidence suggests that these improvements could be due to digitalisation: SME leaders completing HtGM were significantly more confident in their firm's capabilities and experience of **digitalising systems and process** than leaders in

similar SMEs who had not completed the programme.<sup>47</sup> This was corroborated by evidence from focus groups with programme completers, who reported that they had achieved efficiency gains through streamlining business processes, particularly via digitisation.

- A Manager of an English branch of a larger international organisation reported that the different departments within their organisation (e.g. operations, marketing, sales) were very siloed. As a result of knowledge gained through HtGM, the firm incorporated online communication channels into their internal processes and have become much more efficient at collaborating to identify new market opportunities, which has contributed to improvements in their financial position.
- A participant who was in a technical role as a Scientist said that the Digital Transformation module made them aware that their business could benefit from reviewing their digital processes such as SharePoint and Microsoft 365. They presented their GAP to the board and have agreement from them to review their digital processes in the coming financial year.

### 3) Digital adoption

The improvements in digitalising systems and processes appear to be translating to improvements in firm-level capabilities in the use of data and digital adoption. SME leaders completing the programme were significantly more confident in their firms' ability to **use data to inform decision making** and **digital technology to support growth** than those in similar non-participating firms. In practice, this included adopting new technologies (e.g., online booking systems for customers, project management tools (incl. [Base Camp](#)), investing in cyber security, and cloud data centres)) and integrating data into key strategic decisions. There was limited evidence from focus groups of firms making investments in new technologies. One example is provided below.

#### Example of digital adoption, Year 2 participant

A Sales Director at a water hygiene company reported that their business had seen significant technological adoption attributable to HtGM. Part of their delivery network was reorganised across the country once a month to review informational outputs. This was previously inefficient as the company grew and costs of fuel increased. As a result of the 'Data and Innovation' and 'Digital Adoption' modules, they invested in an ERP system and moved data centres into their office buildings which send them information with less delay. They also built new CRM systems that have improved their efficiency and *bottom line*".

#### SOME LIMITED EVIDENCE

The evaluation has found some limited evidence to suggest that HtGM is contributing to other business level benefits.

**Evidence in favour:** beneficiary surveys, focus groups

### Other business level outcomes

#### Self-reported survey evidence indicates that

**participating in HtGM has had a positive impact on a range of other business outcomes.**

Most (74%) programme completers reported that the programme had increased their **business' resilience to external economic factors** (Figure 20). This is pertinent given that SMEs participating in the programme during or in the aftermath of an unprecedented global pandemic. It also provides an early indication that the programme may have supported SMEs to recover from the pandemic and subsequent economic crisis – a key impact of the programme set out in the Theory of Change.<sup>48</sup> There is also evidence to suggest the programme has enabled businesses to survive challenging economic times through better cashflow management (as evidenced in the

<sup>47</sup> This refers to the Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATT) and the difference between the treated and control groups is statistically significant at the 1% level.

<sup>48</sup> 42% of programme participants reported that the programme had directly supported their recovery from COVID-19.

examples above) or accessing follow-on business support – particularly amongst micro-SMEs who were more likely than their larger counterparts to report either.<sup>49</sup>

The improvements to management and leadership practices and implementation of knowledge from the programme has reportedly contributed to **increased sales**: for two in three (62%) programme participants, ranging from modest increases of one to three percent (23%) to more substantial increases (17% reported sales increased by 10 percent or more).<sup>50</sup> In fewer cases (47%), firms had realised cost savings as a result of HtGM, often through savings on staff time associated with digitalisation – this was slightly more common amongst Year 3 programme completers than their counterparts in Year 2 (51% versus 44%).

**Figure 20: To what extent has participating in HtGM contributed to...? (Other business outcomes)**



Source: Follow up survey (n=1,220)

There was no evidence from the depth interviews that cost savings had led to a reduction in staff, but this will be explored more fully in the final stage of the evaluation using administrative datasets. In contrast, there was some limited evidence of programme completers **hiring new staff** to support their growth plans either by addressing skills gaps, freeing up capacity amongst senior leaders to focus on strategic decision making and to meet increased customer demand.

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*“[We have] invested in a couple more members of staff just to meet capacity and demand of new contracts that are coming through. This time last year we were turning customers away...Hopefully this time next year we can take another member of staff on, and so on, and so on. So, initially, this first 12 months, there*

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<sup>49</sup> 52% of micro-SMEs improved their cashflow management to ‘a great / some extent’ compared with medium sized SMEs (42%). The ten percentage point difference is statistically significant. 55% of micro-SMEs reported that HtGM had contributed to their business accessing additional support compared with medium sized firms (47%). The eight percentage point difference is statistically significant.

<sup>50</sup> Out of survey respondents who reported HtGM contributed to increased sales, 23% stated sales have increased by 1 to less than 3 percent, 21% reported sales have increased by 3 to less than 5 percent, 14% reported sales have increased by 5 to less than 7 percent, 12% reported sales have increased by 7 to less than 10 percent, and 17% reported sales have increased by 10 or more percent. (n=354)

*is going to be a [loss] due to the investment, but we'll see the benefits of this next year.” – Year 3 programme completer*

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Focus group participants provided some **early evidence of business-level impacts**:

- A Year 3 participant (MD of an architectural practice) reported that after increasing their understanding of the foundations and structure of their business, and developing and implementing a GAP, they were able to increase their profit margin from 17% to 30%, with a 25% increase in turnover. They credit this to changes made as a result of the programme including underpinning all decision-making with clarity on their vision, mission and values. They also referenced the support from mentoring and the Alumni Network as valuable in supporting their growth journey.
- A Year 2 participant (MD of a consultancy business) was facing challenges due to a slowdown in the construction industry, which was their main source of sales. Taking part in the programme enabled them to grow as well as retain staff despite the challenging economic context. They attributed this to the value proposition process and case studies, which supported them in diversifying their client base to move away from 95% reliance on a single sector to just 50%.
- A Year 2 participant with a retail business was planning to open a new store prior to joining HtGM, but attributed successful implementation of this plan for growth to learning from the programme on the importance of employee engagement. Similarly, a Year 3 participant reported greater sales as a direct result of actions taken to improve their workforce engagement.

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*“With the addition of the new store last year, we tripled our turnover in 2023 and we are currently looking at another site to add a fourth physical location. And it's all down to Help to Grow, they were things that I wanted to do, but I think Help to Grow has provided some clarity, the tools and also it really encouraged me to empower my team.” - Year 2 programme completer*

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## Conclusions

This report has presented emerging findings to date in relation to the impact evaluation questions for Year 1-3 of the HtGM programme. It also provides updated evidence for the process evaluation. This final chapter provides a high-level overview of the evidence against four of the five evaluation questions.<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that the findings to date are not based on representative samples, participation in primary research will be subject to a degree of self-selection bias and all analyses on impacts are based on self-reported data. As such, at this interim stage, these findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than conclusive. The final impact evaluation stage will incorporate a counterfactual analysis using a pipeline approach to assess the extent to which HtGM has generated its anticipated business-level outcomes and impacts.

### Process evaluation

*EQ1: How effective is the programme in recruiting businesses and ensuring they complete the programme?*

Recruitment to HtGM has improved year on year, although the proportion of SMEs registering to the programme who go on to enrol has fallen slightly in the most recent year. This improvement in recruitment was largely attributed to the changes in the programme eligibility criteria in Year 2, additional marketing budget allocated to business schools for regional marketing and word of mouth referrals. Business schools are better able to fill cohorts with SME leaders from across the UK, operating across a breadth of industry sectors. In a small number of cases, business schools reported not being able to meet levels of demand for the programme. The evidence to date suggests that the programme has been successful in stimulating demand amongst a diverse group of SME leaders in terms of ethnicity and gender when compared to the wider business population.

As of 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2024, a total of 9,144 SME leaders had enrolled onto an HtGM cohort and 6,504 had completed the programme. The most common reasons for non-completion related to competing time commitments rather than fundamental issues in the programme design.

*EQ2: To what extent is the programme successfully delivering high quality business support?*

Satisfaction with programme delivery is high, particularly amongst leaders of microbusinesses and those based in Scotland. The majority (91%) of programme completers reported that they would be likely to recommend the programme to another business leader in their network. There was broad consensus amongst completers that the structure of the programme was about right in terms of frequency, duration, volume of sessions and delivery mode. Programme completers in Year 3 were particularly satisfied with the time between the different elements of the programme and the amount of face-to-face delivery.

The programme curriculum is considered comprehensive and largely relevant, covering topics that almost all programme completers deem to be applicable to their business. There were slight differences in perceived relevance by business size, with microbusinesses rating content relating to customer engagement particularly highly, whereas leaders of larger SMEs preferred content relating to strategies for growth and business sustainability.

Mentoring continues to be a highly valued part of the programme. After an initial drop in satisfaction levels, quality of matching and mentor engagement in Year 2 following the introduction of the new voluntary mentoring model. These measures appear to have returned to earlier levels as the new delivery model has become more embedded within programme delivery. Programme participants used their mentoring relationships to build on the topics covered in the HtGM

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<sup>51</sup> The fifth evaluation question will be answered in the final phase of the evaluation.

programme curriculum and to seek advice, guidance and support on ad hoc issues they or their businesses were facing, including for signposting to tools that could improve productivity.

Levels of engagement in the HtGM Alumni Network (launched in late 2022) and business schools' supplementary tailored alumni activities has been relatively modest but highly valued by those who have participated.

## Interim impact evaluation

*EQ3: To what extent is the programme effective at teaching new skills and encouraging business leaders to adopt new practices?*

There is good evidence to suggest that HtGM is leading to improvements in confidence and skills, knowledge and understanding of key programme management and leadership practices amongst SME leaders participating in the programme:

- SME leaders who had completed HtGM were more **confident** in their ability to achieve their goals, even in the face of obstacles, than eligible SME leaders in the wider UK economy who did not participate in the programme.
- Whilst there is self-reported evidence that the programme is deepening SME leaders' **understanding of their business needs**, the proportion of SME leaders who created GAPs detailing changes to drive productivity improvements in their business is **lower than anticipated**.
- There is evidence to suggest that HtGM is effective at enabling some SME leaders to **expand their peer networks**. New peer relationships facilitated through the programme were often used for informal support and advice, rather than to formally share best practice.
- The package of support offered through the programme was found to have contributed to the realisation of individual outcomes, although in some cases specific elements (such as the mentoring support, modular content, case studies, peer learning or Alumni Network) was found to have made a distinct contribution.

There is a positive relationship between SME leaders reporting at least one individual level outcome and completing a Growth Action Plan or identifying as female. There was also a positive correlation between completing all or most of the mentoring sessions and reporting individual outcomes. Participation in HtGM appears to have generated additional **unintended consequences**: the programme inspired a small number of programme participants to leave their original employer to take up new job opportunities and participants have sought out additional development opportunities to build on their learning from HtGM.

*EQ4: What early changes are businesses making as a result of participating in the programme?*

There is evidence to suggest that SME leaders completing HtGM share knowledge gained from the programme within weeks of completion, resulting in more efficient and effective leadership and management approaches and improved workforce engagement:

- Most programme completers reported having diffused knowledge from HtGM within their business within six weeks of completing the programme. This typically happened through sharing learning with colleagues, improved workforce engagement and using tools gained from the HtGM curriculum. Leaders of microbusinesses were more likely to have extensively shared their knowledge than leaders of larger SMEs.
- There is good evidence to suggest that HtGM is leading to **more effective leadership and management approaches**, particularly in relation to the **resilience** of firm-level leadership: SME leaders completing HtGM were found to have significantly greater confidence in their firm's ability to lead through change and uncertainty than leaders of similar SMEs in the wider UK economy who did not complete the programme.

- Whilst the proportion of programme completers who develop a Growth Action Plan as a result of the programme falls short of HtGM targets, programme completers were found to have significantly **greater confidence in their firm's ability to implement a business plan or strategy** compared to a matched group of SME leaders who did not complete the programme.
- HtGM was found to be associated with a significant positive effect on firm-level capabilities and experiences that are often **precursors to longer-term improvements in firm level productivity**: operational effectiveness, operational efficiency and digital adoption.
- Self-reported survey evidence indicates that participating in HtGM has had a positive impact on **a range of other business outcomes** including resilience, increased sales, cost savings and increased headcount.
- There is a positive association between completing a GAP and SME leaders reporting at least one business level impact.



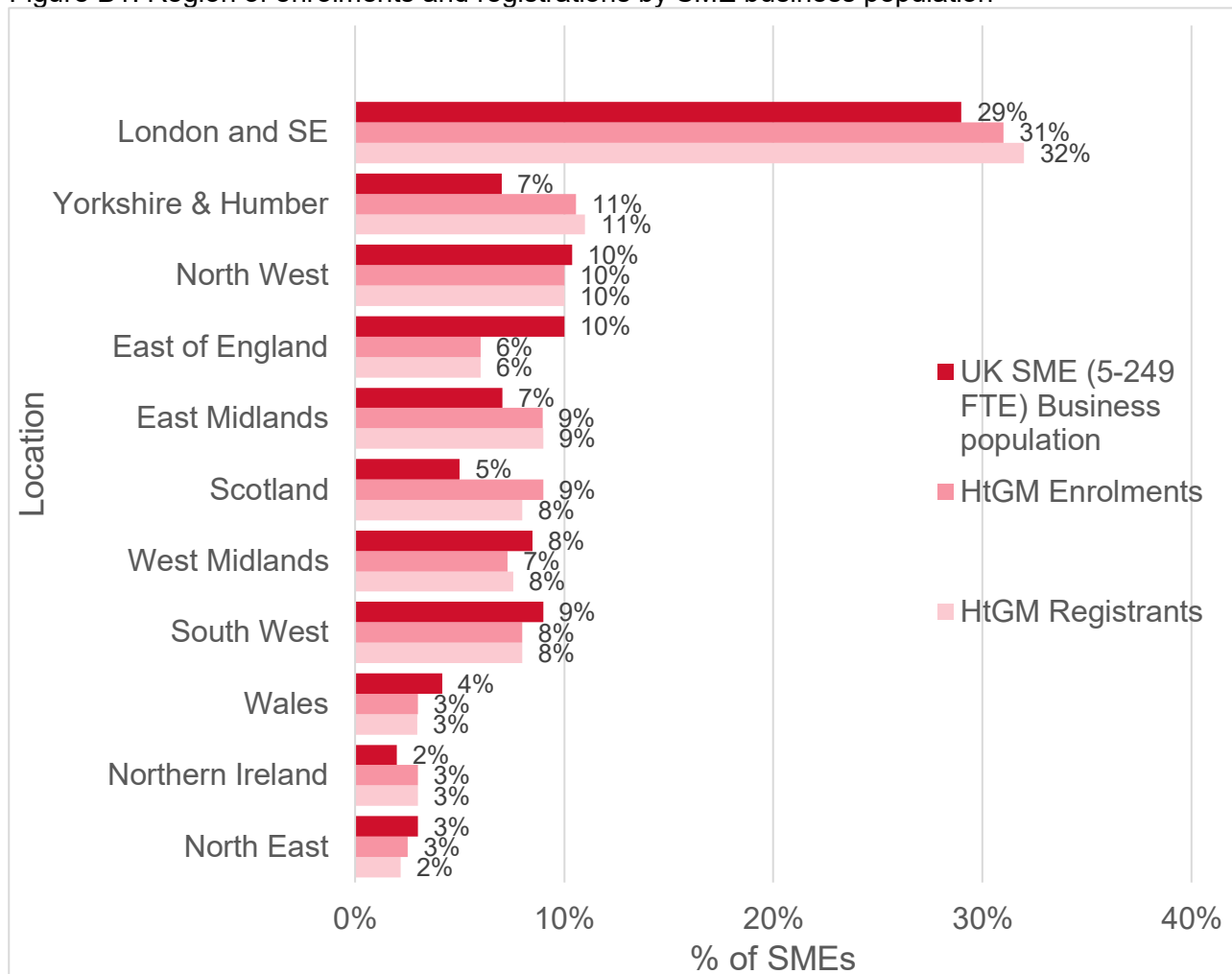
## Annex A: Overview of programme changes

Programme element	Changes introduced in 2023/24	Date of introduction
Mentoring	The mentoring consortium increased the number of Mentoring Relationship Advisors. MRAs attended all cohort onboarding sessions and have built working relationships with business schools. Video assets have been used at onboarding sessions to better promote value of mentoring.	Sept/Oct 2023
Mentoring	Development of interactive mentoring planner to support shared understanding of aims of mentoring and how best to use the time.	Will be rolled out from April 2024
Marketing/demand generation	HtGM LinkedIn Social media channel and podcast both launched.	December 2023
Supply	New criteria introduced on filling and distributing cohort, to improve cohort utilisation and prevent cancellations/postponements.	Upcoming – not introduced yet
Curriculum	V3 of the curriculum rolled out.	February 2023

## Annex B: Profile of demand for HtGM

This annex provides an overview of the profile of demand for HtGM broken down by SME leaders enrolling and registering for cohorts. It aggregates data from the launch of the programme in 2021 until 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2024<sup>52</sup>.

Figure B1: Region of enrolments and registrations by SME business population

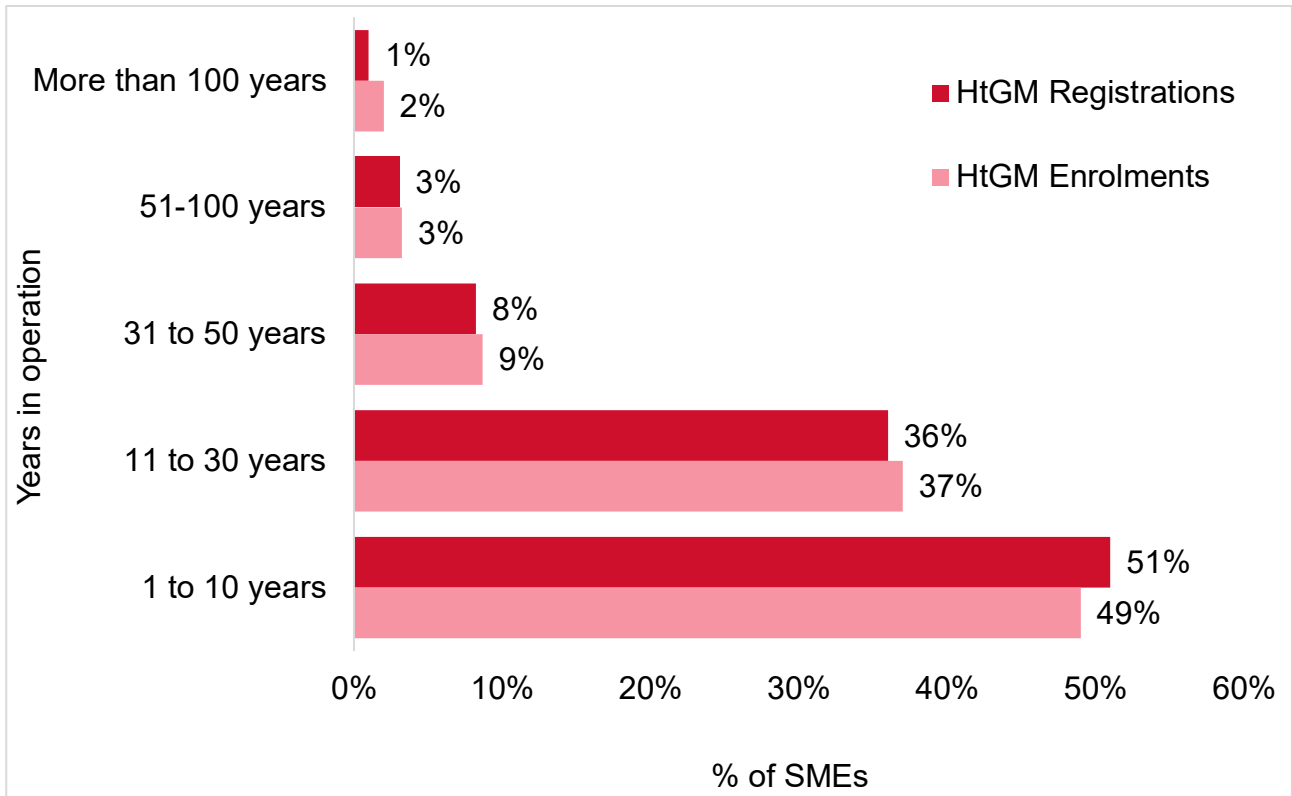


Source: DBT monitoring data,

National statistics, Business population estimates 2023

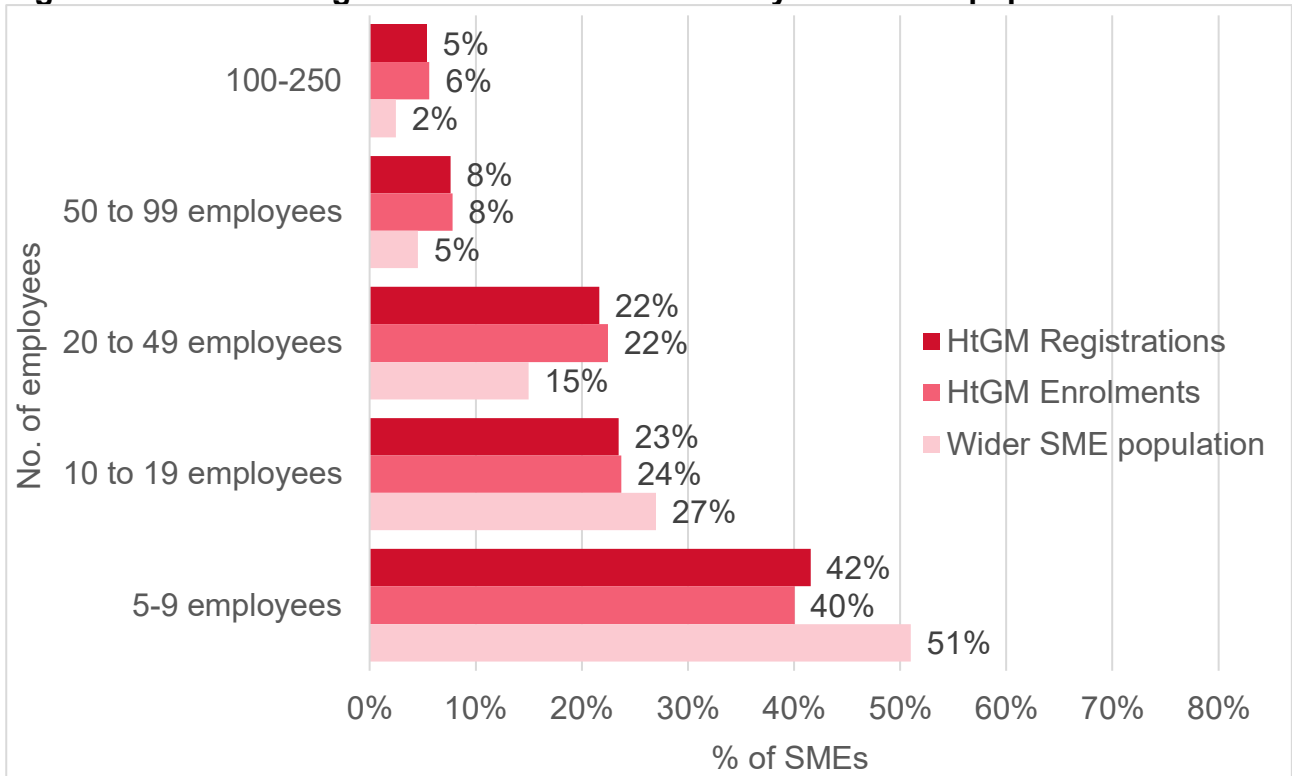
<sup>52</sup> The enrolment and completion figures may be different to official releases due to the differing times that data was collected.

**Figure B2: Years in operation**



Source: DBT monitoring data

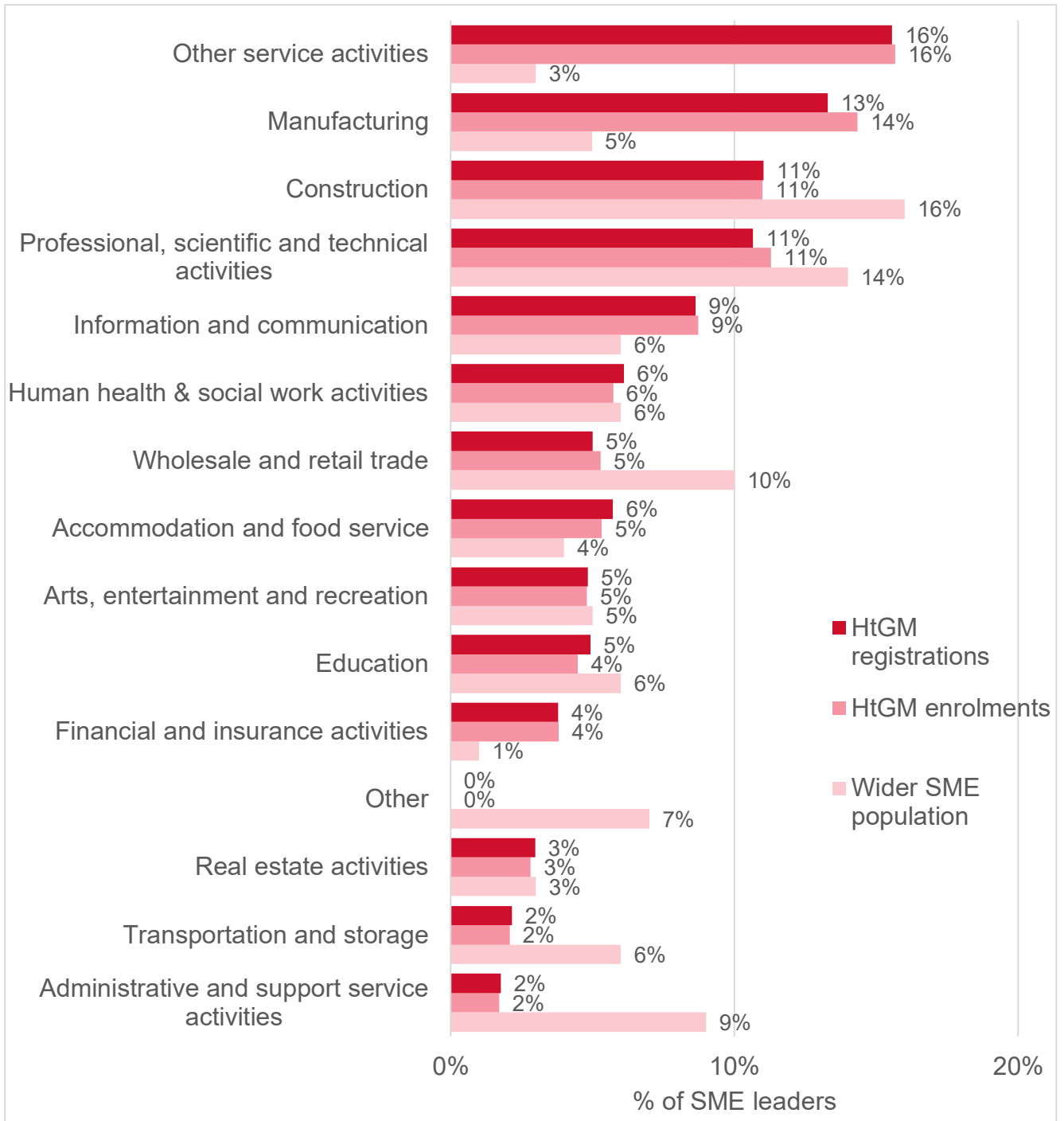
**Figure B3 – Size of registrations and enrolments by wider SME population**



Source: DBT monitoring data,

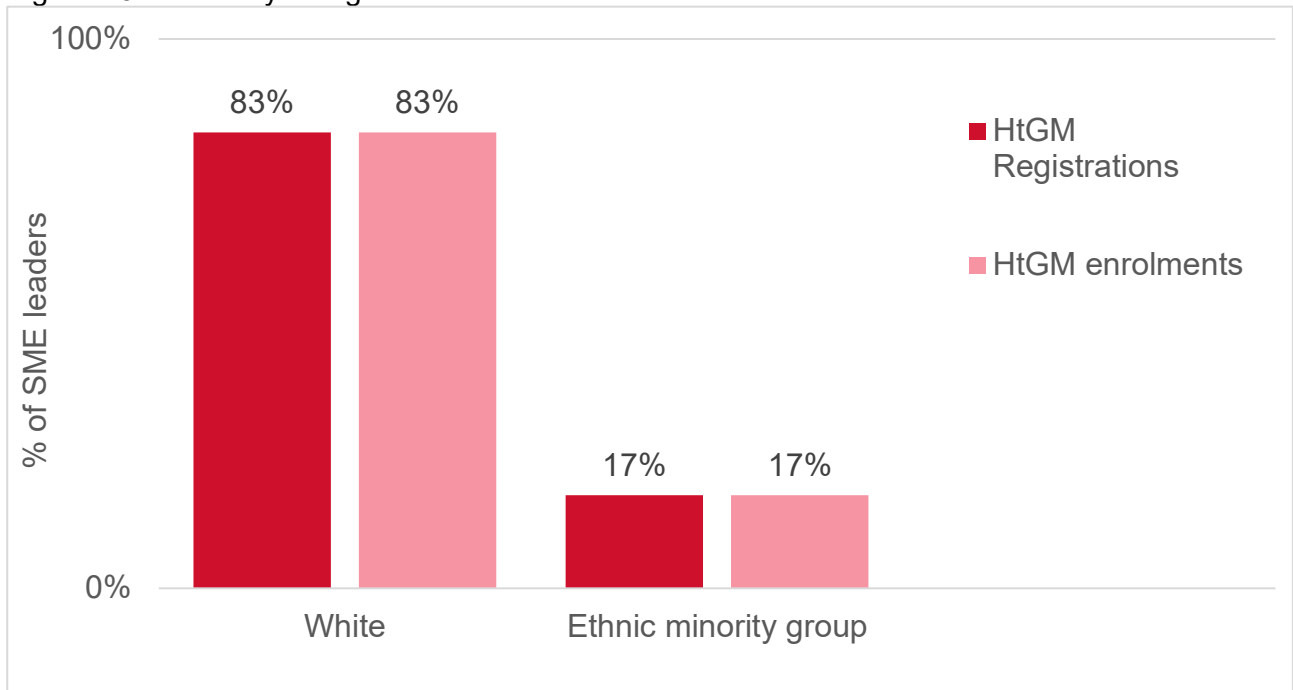
National statistics, Business population estimates 2023

**Figure B4 – Sector of registrations and enrolments by wider SME population**



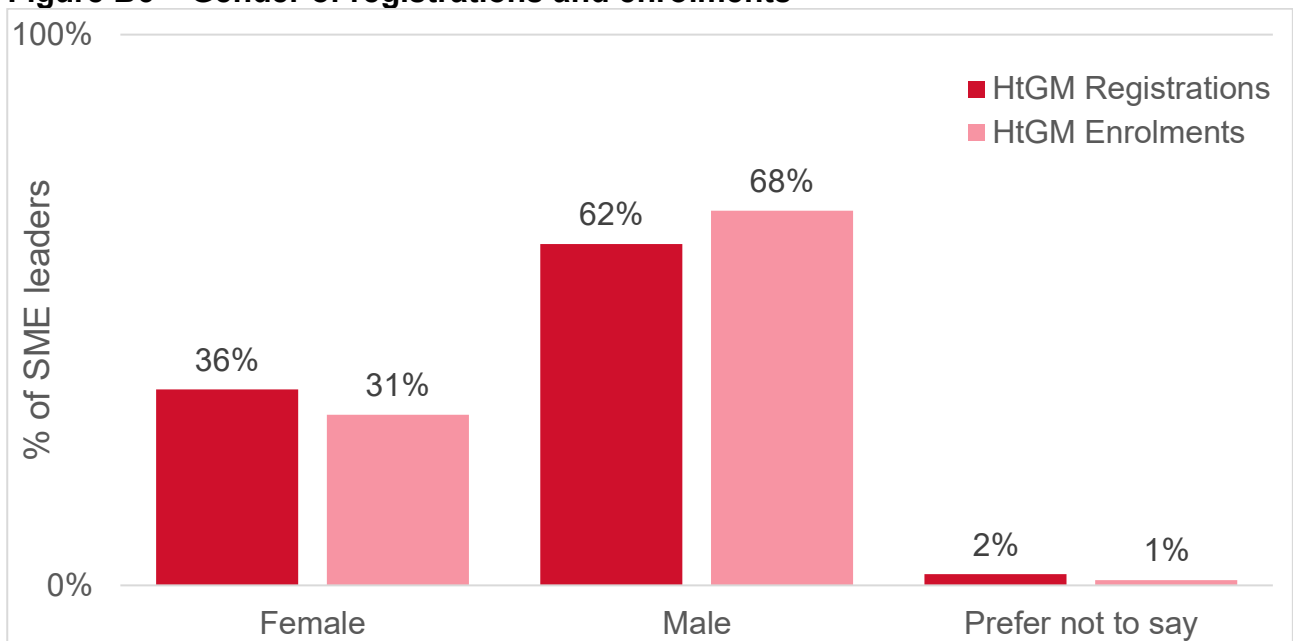
Source: DBT monitoring data,  
National statistics, Business population estimates 2023

Figure B5 – Ethnicity of registrations and enrolments



Source: DBT monitoring data

Figure B6 – Gender of registrations and enrolments



Source: DBT monitoring data

## Annex C: Judgement criteria

This annex provides an overview of the judgement criteria used to assess the strength of evidence collected to date against each of the outcomes and impacts set out in the programme Theory of Change. The criteria are set out in Table C1.

Evidence from self-reported surveys, focus groups and depth interviews with programme completers and PSM analysis of the counterfactual survey was scored against the judgement criteria for each of the individual outcomes associated with the hypotheses set out in Chapter 3. This was used to formulate an overall judgement of the strength of evidence for each hypothesis as presented in Chapters 5 and 6. The highest possible strength of evidence at this stage is 'good'. The final evaluation stage will include a pipeline counterfactual analysis using administrative datasets that may provide 'strong' evidence against those hypotheses relating to business-level impacts.

**Table C1: Judgement criteria for interim impact analysis**

Category	Description
Strong evidence	There is statistically significant evidence from a robust counterfactual in support of the hypothesis. The analysis is based on sufficient sample sizes to draw inferences about causation and is based, where possible, on administrative datasets rather than self-reported.
Good evidence	There is a strong positive indication (e.g. a majority agreement of 75% or more) from multiple sources that the programme may be contributing to this outcome. It cannot be considered strong evidence because it is self-reported and/or based on small sample sizes.
Emerging evidence	There is a modest positive indication (e.g. a majority agreement of 50-75%) from multiple sources that the programme may be contributing to this outcome. It cannot be considered strong evidence because it is based on self-reported measures and/or small sample sizes.
Some limited evidence	There is evidence from one source that suggests the programme may be contributing to the outcome but there are limitations with the source (e.g., self-reported, self-selection bias, small sample size).
No evidence	There is no evidence from any sources in support of the hypothesis.
Inconclusive evidence	There is evidence both for and against the hypothesis.

Source: Ipsos

## Annex D: PSM technical annex

The following section describes the quantitative approach applied to the Help to Grow Management programme six months follow up and counterfactual surveys.

### Methodology

A Propensity Matching Scoring (PSM) approach has been applied on the Help to Grow Management survey data, such that firms that participated in the programme and took part in the 6-months follow up survey were compared with similar SMEs in the general population that did not take part in the programme. Both samples have been interviewed at two points in time: before the start of the HtGM programme and after some time from its beginning.<sup>53</sup>

PSM is a statistical technique that allows the comparison of two samples based on a set of observable pre-treatment characteristics. A propensity score is a number that estimates the likelihood of being treated (in this instance, the propensity of an SME to enrol in the HtGM programme). Once this score has been calculated, it is used to associate cases in the control group to treated units. The algorithm matches those with the highest probability to be treated with units in the treated group, so that only very similar cases are compared.

In this instance we have matched the two groups on the following pre-treatment features:

- Turnover
- Region
- Number of years in operation
- Number of employees
- Answers to the leadership questions (QC1) before enrolling in the scheme.

The matching algorithm applied is the “One-to-many matching with caliper<sup>54</sup> set at 0.01 and replacement”. This method allows for one unit in the control group to be compared with multiple corresponding observations in the treatment group. As the HtGM survey samples were not large, we decided to apply the method that made the most efficient use of the control group, reducing cases being “wasted”. This is because, matching techniques require large control groups to ensure that the comparator pool provides sufficient observations to find the best fit.

Table D1 shows how many cases from the treated and the control group were eventually matched. All units in the control group were compared with 98 HtGM beneficiaries. Of the treated, 44 had a propensity score that was outside the established caliper distance (and so considered too dissimilar for comparison), for this reason these cases were discarded.

**Table D1: PSM common support**

	Off support	On support	Total
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<sup>53</sup> The counterfactual group was interviewed 12 months after the baseline, while the treatment group was interviewed nine months after.

<sup>54</sup> A Caliper can be thought of as a ring around each unit that limits to which other units that observation can be paired. Applying caliper matching means that those individuals in the comparison group are chosen as matching partners for a treated individual that lies within the caliper (‘propensity range’) and is closest in terms of propensity score. Any units for which there are no available matches within the caliper are dropped from the matched sample. Calipers ensure paired units are close to each other, which can ensure good balance in the matched sample.

Untreated	0	222	222
Treated	44	98	142
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>364</b>

Source: Ipsos

### Table D2: treatment and control group averages

Table 1.2 provides an overview of treatment and control groups averages in the pre-treatment period. Groups are broadly aligned with respect to turnover and answers to the leadership skills questions, however treatment group businesses seemed to have been in operation for longer and to have, on average, more employees.

	Treatment group (number of observations)	Control group (number of observations)	Mean treatment	Mean control
Turnover	657	1,004	2,578,103	3,101,567
Years in operation	646	1,004	17	6
Employees	632	169	22	3
Skills I need to lead employees	449	1,004	3.2	3.8
Skills I need to lead business	449	1,004	2.9	3.8
I feel I can achieve goals even if obstacles	449	1,004	4.0	4.0
I am able to adapt even if changes	444	1,004	4.2	4.3
I am aware of factors that drive growth in SMEs	187	1,004	3.3	3.9

Source: Ipsos



## **Annex E: Counterfactual survey technical annex**

To help assess how effective this programme is, Ipsos conducted a survey with SMEs that have not taken part in the Help to Grow courses. This survey aimed to understand the context that these businesses are working in, as well as checking in on any support that respondent's feel would benefit their businesses. This data was compared to other data that has been collected in other surveys to check how these contexts and needs are impacted by attending the HtGM programme.

The survey was completed via telephone. Fieldwork for each wave lasted around 2 months (for example wave two ran from 24<sup>th</sup> November 2023 to 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024). Respondents were called multiple times over that period until contact was made to maximise chances of obtaining an interview with them.

The sample for wave 1 of the counterfactual survey was purchased from Datascope, a commercial database supplier. A total of 19,261 records were purchased. For wave 2 of the counterfactual survey the sample was made up of the 610 individuals who took part in wave 1 of the counterfactual survey and agreed to be recontacted for wave 2.

1,226 surveys were completed across two waves. This comprised of 1,004 completes in wave 1 and 222 completes in wave 2.



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