



Department for  
Business & Trade

# **Evaluation of Help to Grow: Management Phase 1 (2021-2025)**

Final Evaluation Report – Process and impact evaluation

June 2026

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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), commissioned Ipsos, in partnership with the Institute for Employment Studies (IES), to undertake an independent evaluation of the Help to Grow: Management (HtGM) programme. It is focused on phase 1 of programme delivery from the programme's launch in 2021 to March 2025. This summary presents headline messages from the final impact evaluation of HtGM based on evidence gathered between November 2021 and March 2025. 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](#), [June 2023](#) and [November 2024](#).

HtGM was announced in the March 2021 Spring Budget and delivery started in June 2021. It is a 12-week training programme for SME leaders delivered by a network of business schools across the UK. SME leaders are required to pay £750 to participate and are assigned to a cohort of other participating SME leaders for the duration of the programme. It comprises 12 modules and wraparound support for small and medium-sized enterprise (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 apply learning gained from the programme to drive organisational change and productivity improvements within their businesses.

The findings are based on **econometric analyses** of administrative datasets; **quantitative 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; and **qualitative evidence** collected through a programme of depth interviews with programme completers, mentors, business schools and wider stakeholders.

## Activities and outputs

- HtGM attracted diverse SME leaders from sectors across the UK. Between 2021 and 2025, the programme delivered 617 cohorts<sup>1</sup> through 66 business schools, reaching **9,847 SME leaders**.<sup>2</sup>
- Overall **satisfaction with HtGM was high** and almost all programme completers were likely to recommend the programme to other business leaders. Programme completers commonly valued the programme above the £750 fee, with most willing to pay £1,000-£2,499.
- The programme **curriculum was considered comprehensive and largely** relevant, with broad consensus that the programme structure was appropriate regarding **frequency, duration, volume of sessions and delivery mode**. Satisfaction with levels of in-person delivery increased substantially over time as business schools launched a broader range of delivery modes (in person, online only, hybrid) – both a reflection of the ending of social distancing measures associated with the pandemic and business schools actioning feedback reported in earlier evaluation reports.

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<sup>1</sup> The programme is delivered in cohorts of 15-25 participants

<sup>2</sup> Programme enrolment and completion figures may be different to official releases due to the differing times that data was collected.

- **Mentoring support was consistently the highest rated element of the programme.** Most participants who engaged in mentoring were satisfied and felt their mentor's experience matched their needs well. However, engagement was lower than expected, with only one third of all participants completing the full ten hours of mentoring (around half of those matched with a mentor).
- 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.
- Fewer participants than expected used mentoring support for **help with their Growth Action Plan (GAP)**, the intended primary focus of the mentoring relationship. Despite this lower-than-expected usage, the quality of support was highly rated: almost all reported being well supported by their mentor in planning for growth, either through developing their GAP or building on existing growth plans.
- The most common reasons for non-completion were competing time commitments rather than programme issues: nearly two thirds (61%) of non-completers expressed interest in finishing the course at a later date.
- Engagement in the **HtGM Alumni Network** (launched in 2022) and business schools' tailored alumni activities was relatively modest, but those who participated valued these opportunities highly.

## Individual level outcomes

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

- HtGM supported participants' **personal development**: SME leaders who completed the programme were significantly more confident in their management and leadership skills and their ability to achieve business goals despite obstacles, compared to eligible non-participants in the wider economy.
- HtGM generated improvements in self-reported **skills, knowledge and understanding** across a range of topics, most commonly in management and leadership skills and awareness of productivity drivers.
- While the most frequently reported individual outcomes remained consistent throughout the evaluation, some notable differences emerged. Year 4 completers were more likely to report improvements in **financial management awareness; equality, diversity and inclusion practices** and the use of **metrics to monitor growth and support strategic decision making**.
- Despite self-reported evidence that the programme deepened SME leaders' understanding of their business needs, **fewer participants than anticipated created Growth Action Plans (GAPs)** detailing changes to drive productivity improvements.
- Evidence suggests that HtGM enabled some SME leaders to **expand their peer networks**. These new relationships were typically used for informal support and advice rather than formal sharing of best practice.
- HtGM generated some unintended consequences: the programme inspired a small number of participants to change employers, whilst others sought out additional development opportunities to build on their learning from HtGM.

- The programme's **package of support** contributed to individual outcomes, although specific elements (mentoring support, modular content, case studies, peer learning or the Alumni Network) sometimes made distinct contributions.

## Business level outcomes

There is good self-reported evidence that the individual outcomes accrued through HtGM generated business-level benefits, including improved management and leadership practices, improved effectiveness and increased efficiency.

- The majority (90%) of SME leaders who completed HtGM said they had **shared learning and knowledge** gained with others in their business within six weeks of completing the programme. Leaders of microbusinesses, female SME leaders and those from ethnic minority background were most likely to share their knowledge extensively<sup>3</sup>.
- There is good evidence that HtGM improved leadership and management practices, particularly **firm-level resilience**: HtGM completers showed significantly greater confidence in their firm's ability to lead through change and uncertainty compared to similar non-participating SME leaders.
- Whilst the proportion of completers who developed a Growth Action Plan fell short of HtGM targets, programme completers demonstrated significantly **greater confidence in their firm's ability to implement business plans or strategies** compared to similar non-participating SME leaders.
- Completers generally reported positive business outcomes following completion such as improved employee engagement, improved relationships between leadership and increased innovation.
- A significant positive correlation was found between **completing a GAP and self-reported firm-level capabilities** that typically precede productivity improvements: operational effectiveness, operational efficiency and digital adoption.

## Business level impacts

Econometric analysis of administrative data indicated that HtGM participation increased business survival rates, suggested it contributed to greater resilience to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic shocks. This aligns with the Theory of Change and the programme's original objectives. The evaluation found no statistically significant evidence of business growth or improved firm-level productivity. However, as the programme only began in 2021 and the available data only extends to March 2023, this finding is not unexpected – such impacts typically emerge at least five years post-intervention. This analysis should be continued in consequent years.

Whilst there was not yet any evidence the programme contributed to business growth, primary data collected for the evaluation indicated that participation helped some firms retain staff, improve cashflow management, generate cost savings and access follow-on business support.

## Conclusions

HtGM successfully recruited businesses and supported them through to completion. The programme delivered high quality business support to SME leaders across the UK. Programme

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<sup>3</sup> Help to Grow Management's eligibility criteria allows businesses with at least 5 employees join the programme. The term microbusinesses refers to those with 5-9 employees, as opposed to the typical definition of 1-9 employees.

completers were satisfied with overall programme quality, and those who engaged with the mentoring valued the one-to-one support received. Almost all programme completers would recommend HtGM to other business leaders, and most would pay more than the £750 fee charged.

The programme contributed positively to all individual outcomes outlined in the Theory of Change, particularly in relation to personal development; skills, knowledge and understanding; business planning and strategy; and networks and collaboration. There is emerging self-reported evidence that these individual outcomes are translating into business-level benefits, including improved management and leadership practices, implementation of growth plans and knowledge sharing.

HtGM participation improved business survival rates, indicating that it contributed to SME's resilience to COVID-19 and subsequent economic shocks in the years following scheme launch. There was no statistically significant evidence to suggest the scheme improved firm-level performance (growth and productivity), however, this was not expected within the evaluation timeline. This could reflect the effect being too small to detect, the challenging economic context or considerable data lags. Future evaluation should assess the economic performance of participating firms, identify ways to better support business growth, and repeat econometric analysis as data become available to detect medium-term business growth and productivity improvements.

The evaluation evidence highlighted possible areas to improve future programme delivery: updating the branding and marketing to target demographic groups that appear to benefit most from the scheme and emphasise HtGM's role in supporting business survival and resilience; consider whether the cost of participation is appropriate or could be increased; and introduce measures to increase engagement in mentoring and GAP completion and implementation.

# 1. Introduction

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT)<sup>4</sup> 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. The evaluation covered the first four years of HtGM programme delivery, spanning four financial years: FY 2021/22, FY 2022/23, FY 2023/24 and FY 2024/25. For the remainder of this report, these years are referred to Years 1-4, respectively.

This is the final report of the evaluation and presents findings based on process and impact evidence collected from November 2021 until August 2025 for participants who completed the programme. It presents the final process and impact evaluation evidence, although the emerging process and impact evaluation findings can be found in the earlier evaluation reports published in [February 2023](#), [June 2023](#) and [November 2024](#).

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

## Overview of Help to Grow: Management programme

The Government announced the Help to Grow: Management (HtGM) 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>5</sup> A number of changes have been made to the HtGM programme since its launch (detailed in Annex A) 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 posed for SME decision making relating to growth. The findings, particularly for the early years of programme delivery, should be interpreted within this context.

## Evaluation scope and objectives

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

- Understand how to improve **delivery**
- Measure the **early impacts** of the programme

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<sup>4</sup> Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) at the time of commissioning

<sup>5</sup> It was expected that most participants would develop a bespoke Growth Action Plan through participation in HtGM, but some may have used the learning from the programme to update existing growth plans or strategies for their business.

- 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.

These aims and objectives were incorporated within five high-level questions to be addressed through the evaluation (Table 1). This final report presents evidence across all five questions, however particular attention has been given to questions 3, 4 and 5.

Table 1: Help to Grow: Management evaluation questions

#	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** summarises the methodology for the impact evaluation and limitations
- **Chapter 4** presents evidence on the inputs and activities involved in delivering the programme
- **Chapter 5** sets out the final evidence relating to the effectiveness of the programme in generating individual-level outcomes for programme participants
- **Chapter 6** summarises the final evidence on the extent to which the individual level outcomes have led to business-level changes
- **Chapter 7** presents the evidence on emerging business-level impacts, drawing on secondary data sets.
- **Chapter 8** provides final conclusions against the evaluation questions.

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

- **Annex A** – provides an overview of the changes to HtGM since its launch
- **Annex B** – provides the full programme level Theory of Change

- **Annex C** – presents a detailed profile of demand for the programme
- **Annex D** – details the theory-based evaluation judgement criteria

The following annexes have been published as separate supplementary documents:

- **Annex E** – provides an overview of the programme of evaluation surveys and final questionnaires
- **Annex F** - sets out the final technical summary of the econometric analysis informing the final impact evaluation.

## 2. Help to Grow: Management programme

This chapter provides an overview of Help to Grow: Management, spanning the economic and policy context it was formed within, the operational and delivery model and structure of the course itself. It also sets out a summary of the programme Theory of Change (ToC) (the full ToC can be found in Annex B).

### 2.1 Context at programme design

Increases in productivity stimulate higher profits and wages, increased competitiveness, and improved 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>6</sup> At the time HiGM was designed, the 'long tail' of low productivity firms was dominated by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), who accounted for a large share of the UK economy: 60% of all private sector employment.<sup>7</sup>

The patterns in the UK economy 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>8</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>9</sup>

### 2.2 Policy landscape at programme launch

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 was 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 as a central pillar of the Government's economic recovery plan from COVID-19.

There are several market failure arguments to support public intervention in SME management and leadership policy including: information asymmetries, externalities, and lack of competition in the market for provision. The detailed market failure arguments are provided in Annex B.

### 2.3 Help to Grow: Management overview

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6 Bank of England (2019) "The UK's Productivity Problem: Hub No Spokes – speech by Andy Haldane"

7 Small Business and Productivity, Fifteenth Report of Session 2017-19, House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, 2018.

8 ONS, "Management practices in Great Britain: 2016 to 2020", May 2021

9 HM Government, Industrial Strategy (2019)

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>10</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 initially 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 2.

Table 2: Overview of Help to Grow: Management curriculum

Part 1: Strategies for Growth		
Module 1: Strategy and Innovation	Module 2: Digital Transformation <sup>11</sup>	Module 3: Winning New Markets <sup>12</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: Operational Design <sup>13</sup>	Module 8: Employee Engagement and Leading Change	Module 9: High Performance Workplace (Case Study)
Part 4: Operations and Financial Strategies		
Module 10: Effective Operations <sup>14</sup>	Module 11: Finance and Financial Management	Module 12: Implementing Growth Action Plans (Case Study)

Source: DBT

The programme has three overarching aims, which are to:

- **Support SME business leaders to develop and implement a Growth Action Plan (GAP)**, identifying potential productivity enhancing measures to adopt in their business.
- **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 relative to other similar sized firms.

## 2.4 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 and updated in 2024 to reflect changes to the scheme design and context it operates within (logic model presented in Figure 1 and full ToC in Annex B). This was based on a desk review of background documentation on the purpose, aims and objectives of the programme and scoping consultations with policy and operational stakeholders. A key focus of the evaluation has been to collect evidence to test and, where necessary, develop and refine the

<sup>10</sup> In some cases, participants start or continue their HtGM mentoring relationship beyond the 12 weeks of modules.

<sup>11</sup> Formerly named Digital Adoption

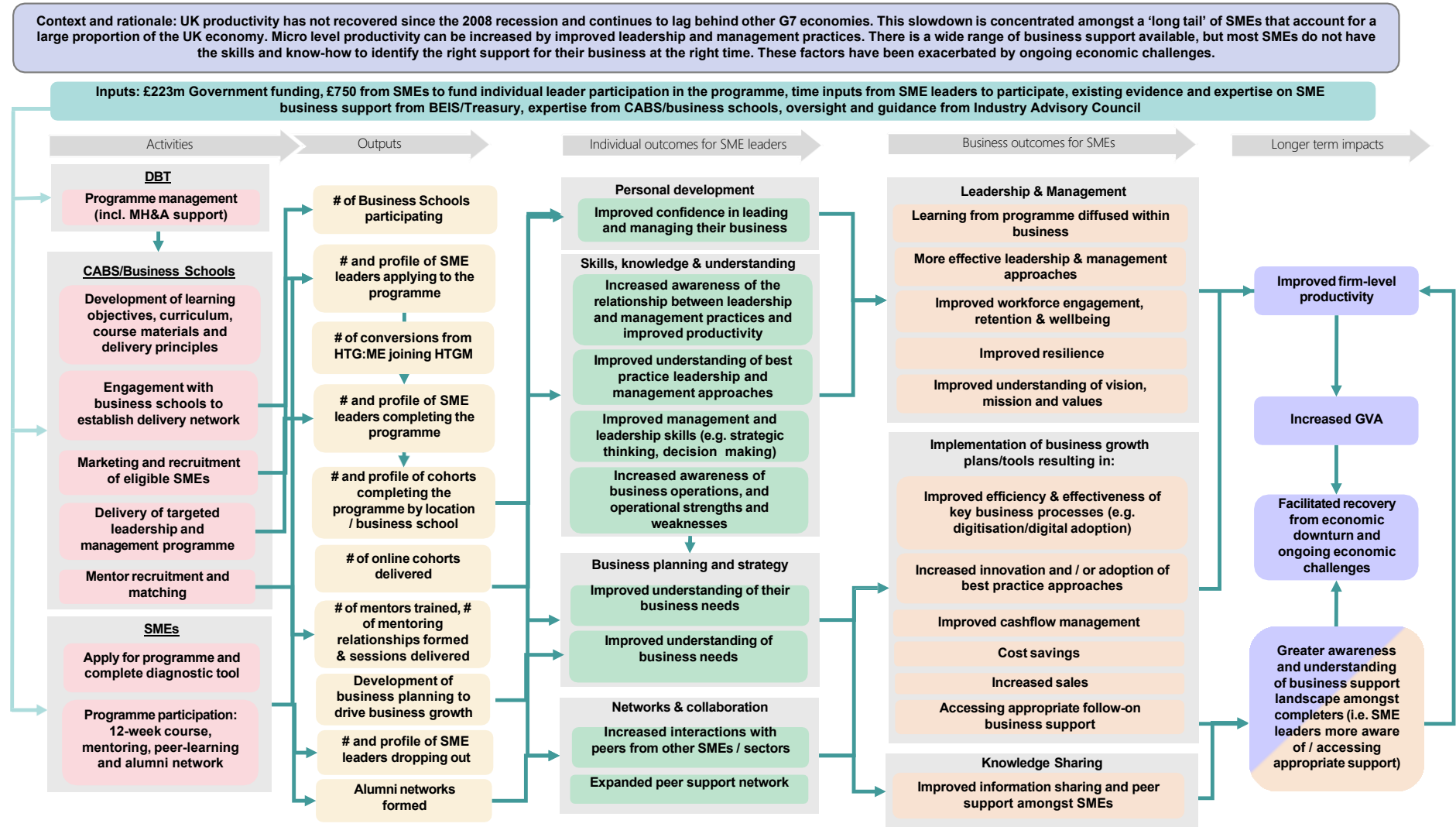
<sup>12</sup> Formerly named Internationalisation to Develop New Markets (Case Study)

<sup>13</sup> Formerly named Organisational design

<sup>14</sup> Formerly named Efficient Operations

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.

Figure 1: HtGM programme logic model



Source: HtGM evaluation scoping report (updated in Year 2024)

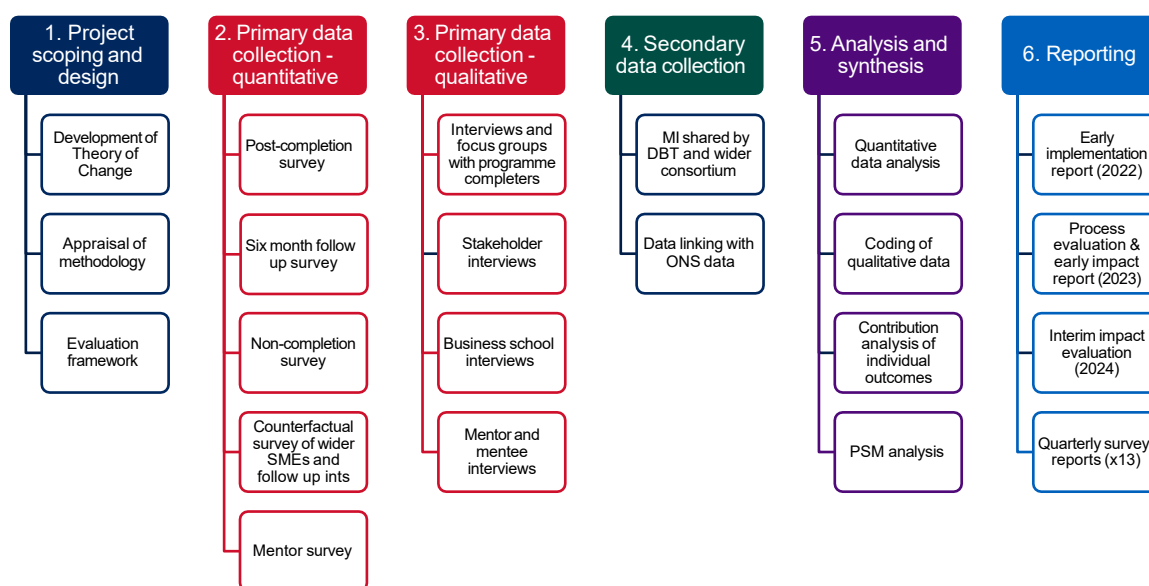
# 3. Methodology

## Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology for the evaluation of HtGM. The impact evaluation comprised a theory-based assessment of progress towards the self-reported individual outcomes in the Theory of Change and counterfactual analysis of impacts accrued to businesses drawing on secondary data sources.

Figure 2 provides an overview of the evaluation activities and the sections that follow provide further detail on the primary and secondary data collection and subsequent analysis and synthesis that was undertaken. This report also draws on evidence collected through two supplementary pieces of research into HtGM mentoring and the wider SME population delivered by Ipsos and IES in Autumn 2023 and Winter 2025.

Figure 2: Overview of impact methodology for HtGM (2021-2025)



Source: Ipsos

## 3.1 Primary data collection – quantitative

Quantitative data collection for the HtGM evaluation comprised five separate surveys, as detailed below. The evaluation drew on analyses and synthesised 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](#)<sup>15</sup>. An overview of the evaluation surveys and questionnaires are provided in the Annex E as a separate supplementary document.

### Post completion survey

<sup>15</sup> [Help to Grow: Management – evaluation reports - GOV.UK](#)

The post-completion survey was issued monthly to all SME leaders who had completed at least 75% of the HtGM modules. It was sent to all participants within six weeks of their programme completion date. The survey was administered online and designed to gather feedback on participants' experiences of the programme as well as early self-reported progress towards individual-level outcomes. Programme completers were sent an email invitation that contained information about the survey and a link to an online questionnaire. This was followed by up to two reminder emails to those who had not taken part.

### Six month follow up survey

The follow up survey was administered quarterly to all those who enrolled on HtGM and went on to complete at least 75% of the programme modules. It was conducted approximately six months after completion of the programme. The survey was administered by telephone and focused on gathering evidence on progress towards business-level outcomes and participants' engagement in the alumni network.

### Non-completion survey

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

### Mentor survey

The mentor survey was issued quarterly to all voluntary mentors who had completed their first mentoring relationship in the previous quarter. It was launched in December 2022 to gather feedback on the new voluntary mentoring model. It asked 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 were sent an initial email invite to the survey, which was followed up with two reminders to those who have not taken part.

### Counterfactual survey

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

Table 3: *Help to Grow: Management – overview of survey programme*

Survey	Mode	Frequency	Launch date	Number of waves	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
Post-completion survey	Online	Monthly	September 2021	42	2,050	16% <sup>16</sup>
Six month follow up survey	Tel	Quarterly	June 2022	14	1,955	39%
Non-completion survey	Tel	Quarterly	June 2022	14	107	28%

<sup>16</sup> An adjusted response rate is not provided for the post completion survey because there were very low instances of ineligible contacts in the sample.

Survey	Mode	Frequency	Launch date	Number of waves	Number of responses	Response rate (%)
<b>Mentor survey</b>	Online	Quarterly	December 2022	9 <sup>17</sup>	558	15%
<b>Counterfactual survey (baseline)</b>	Tel	Ad-hoc	October 2022	1	1,004	.18
<b>Counterfactual survey (endline)</b>	Tel	Ad-hoc	October 2023	1	222	36% <sup>19</sup>

Source: Ipsos

### 3.2 Secondary data collection

The evaluation drew on a range of secondary data sources (Table 4). The secondary data provided by DBT, CABS and delivery partners was used as the sample frame for the primary research surveys with programme completers, non-completers and mentors; and to supplement analysis in the primary research findings. The evaluation also drew on secondary data sources provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to inform the final impact analysis.

Table 4: Secondary sources of data

Secondary source	Data description
<b>Monitoring data</b>	CABs provided data on registrations, enrolments, business school delivery (at the cohort and participant level) and participant demographics (such as name, gender, age). This data served as the sampling frame for the post-completion and follow-up surveys. Key demographic data was merged with survey results for demographic analysis.
<b>Baseline Diagnostic data</b>	SME leaders were asked to complete a baseline diagnostic assessment at registration to the programme. The diagnostic data was used to provide a baseline measure for key outcomes of interest.
<b>Mentoring Consortium data</b>	The mentoring consortium provided contact details and demographic data on mentors. This was used as the sample for the mentor survey and provided descriptive statistics on mentoring (incl. number of mentors enrolled, mentoring relationships formed).
<b>Business Structure Database (BSD)</b>	The Business Structure Database provides a longitudinal version of the Inter Departmental Business Register (IDBR). It records an annual statistical snapshot of the UK business population, offering yearly data on employment and turnover. Its coverage is extensive, including all firms registered for VAT or operating a PAYE scheme, which accounts for the vast majority of UK economic activity. A key exclusion, however, is very

17 9 waves includes 11 quarters.

18 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.

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

Secondary source	Data description
	<p>small businesses. Specifically, enterprises that fall below the mandatory VAT registration threshold and are not registered for PAYE will not appear in the dataset.</p> <p>BSD is the source of turnover, employment, sector region for the econometric impact analysis. It also is used to determine whether a business is active or has ceased trading.</p>
<b>Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)</b>	The UK's official, comprehensive annual survey providing data on the levels, distribution, and make-up of earnings and hours worked for employees. Conducted by the ONS every April, it samples 1% of employee jobs from PAYE records. ASHE was used for details on hourly wages.

Source: Ipsos

### 3.3 Primary data collection – qualitative

The evaluation comprised four years of primary data collection with programme participants, mentors, stakeholders and business schools. The report draws on all qualitative evidence to date. A summary of the qualitative data is set out in Table 5.

Table 5: Secondary sources of data for HtGM evaluation

	Date and # interviews	Method	Data collected
<b>SME leaders</b>	Year 1: 30 participants Year 2: 40 participants <sup>20</sup> Year 3: 17 participants <sup>21</sup> Year 4: 20 participants	In-depth interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Profile of consultee (role, motivations to participate in HtGM and engagement in the scheme)</li> <li>Feedback on the programme</li> <li>Perceived benefits (individual and business)</li> <li>Progress made in implementing Growth Action Plans and the tangible impacts of any changes already made or planned for the future.</li> <li>Anticipated future outcomes</li> <li>Enablers and barriers to achieved outcomes</li> </ul>
<b>SME leaders</b>	11 focus groups with 42 participants (Year 3)	Focus groups	<p>Evidence on the extent to which the programme's intended outcomes and impacts occurred and, if not, why not, and the role of the programme (and its composite parts) relative to other factors.</p> <p>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.</p>
<b>Business schools</b>	Year 1: 10 participants	In-depth interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Profile of consultee (role in the business school, involvement in HtGM delivery)</li> <li>Marketing, promotion and recruitment</li> </ul>

20 comprising 30 interviews with participants who had not previously been interviewed and 10 follow-up interviews with programme completers who were interviewed in Y1 of the evaluation.

21 both those completing the programme in Year 3 and longitudinal interviews with participants interviewed in the first two years of the evaluation.

	Date and # interviews	Method	Data collected
	Year 2: 10 participants Year 3: 15 participants Year 4: 10 participants		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme design, delivery and implementation</li> <li>• Governance and monitoring processes</li> <li>• Reflections on delivery</li> <li>• Anticipated benefits to participating businesses</li> </ul>
<b>Mentors</b>	Year 1: 10 participants Year 2: 10 participants Year 3: 10 participants Year 4: 10 participants	In-depth interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profile of consultee (professional background, motivation for participating)</li> <li>• Feedback on the recruitment and onboarding processes</li> <li>• Effectiveness of training materials and digital platform</li> <li>• Insights into the content / frequency of mentoring sessions</li> <li>• Awareness of GAP / support of GAP implementation</li> <li>• Perceived benefits of HtGM on SME leaders</li> </ul>
<b>Stakeholders</b>	Year 1: 10 participants Year 2: 8 participants Year 3: 9 participants Year 4: 9 stakeholders	In-depth interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder role and responsibilities in relation to HtGM</li> <li>• Strategic fit of HtGM to wider business support landscape</li> <li>• Feedback on design, delivery and implementation of the programme and key changes</li> <li>• Performance against objectives</li> <li>• Effectiveness of delivery model and ways of working with delivery partners</li> <li>• Governance and monitoring processes</li> <li>• Priorities for the evaluation</li> </ul>

Source: Ipsos

### 3.4 Analysis and synthesis

#### Quantitative analysis

The quantitative data collected through the surveys was analysed quarterly across all four years of the evaluation. This analysis was predominantly descriptive, noting any statistically significant changes between survey waves and years of delivery. Tables used for analysis included cross-breaks by wave, year and region, as well as demographic information such as gender, ethnicity and disability status. Where appropriate, the survey data was linked with other secondary sources (diagnostic data, ONS secondary datasets) to enable more detailed analysis.

For all results, differences in survey data have only been highlighted where they are statistically significant (at the 95% level of confidence). Percentage results are subject to margins of error, which vary with the size of the sample and the percentage figure concerned.

A description of the analysis of secondary data sources is presented in section 3.6.

#### Qualitative analysis

A thematic approach was utilised to analyse the data collected from the in-depth interviews across stakeholder groups and with beneficiaries of the Help to Grow: Management course. This methodological approach involved identifying key themes of interest for the evaluation, developing a framework containing these themes and summarising qualitative data against them. The method was chosen for its flexibility and its capacity to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within the data.

An analysis session was held the interviewers involved in fieldwork to discuss the key findings of the research. This was repeated on an annual basis for each consultee group. Following this, a coding framework were developed containing evaluation themes to be explored and a systematic coding process was undertaken. This involved identifying and labelling interesting features of the

data that were relevant to the evaluation questions/themes. These codes captured the essence of participants' perceptions of the course, including its impact on their leadership capabilities, business growth, and operational efficiency. The final stage involved an iterative process of reviewing the coded data extracts to ensure that the themes were coherent and represented the data accurately.

### 3.5 Impact evaluation approach

#### Individual outcomes

Our evaluation uses contribution analysis to assess the extent to which HtGM was 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 (Table 6).

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 D.

Table 6: Hypotheses for individual 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

#### Business level outcomes and impacts

- 1) Econometric analysis of evaluation survey data on business practices

At the interim impact evaluation stage, we 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>22</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.

The two groups of SMEs were matched 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>23</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 7 using the same judgement criteria for the individual outcomes in Annex D

Table 7: 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.

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22 The counterfactual group was interviewed at after 12 months from the baseline, while the treatment group 9 months after.

23 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.

Source: Ipsos

## 2) Econometric analysis of administrative data to assess impacts on business performance

At the final evaluation stage, we conducted two rounds of econometric analysis of administrative data to assess HtGM's impact on business performance – specifically turnover, employment, productivity (using turnover by worker as a proxy measure) and business survival. The preliminary econometric analysis (July-September 2025) revealed that variables from six-months post-completion survey were affected by non-response bias, requiring correction through non-response weights. New control groups became available during this period and were incorporated alongside the early versus late approach. These findings informed the final analysis, conducted between November 2025 and February 2026.

The analysis compared businesses that completed HtGM with two equivalent groups of non-completing firms considered broadly similar in other characteristics (e.g., motivations to apply):

- **Early versus later programme completers:** The staggered programme delivery enabled a pipeline approach, comparing earlier cohorts with later participants. As comparisons were only made between firms that participated in the programme, they can be assumed to share similar characteristics (e.g., growth ambitions).
- **Programme completers versus SME leaders who dropped out or withdrew** from the programme using Propensity Score Matching (PSM).

The final econometric analysis explored HtGM's impact on four key outcomes of interest: turnover, employment, turnover per worker and business survival. The analysis controlled for SME leader characteristics (gender and ethnicity), firm level characteristics (sector, size, age) and programme engagement factors (e.g., bursary receipt, mentoring engagement, GAP completion).

A detailed summary of the final econometric analysis is provided in Annex F.

## 3.6 Strengths and limitations

This report draws on a breadth and depth of perspectives: **5,896 survey responses** to five separate surveys and qualitative research with over 200 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.

Analysis found no statistically significant differences in average turnover and employment between HtGM completers who participated in evaluation surveys and the wider population of HtGM programme completers. This indicates the survey results can be generalised to all programme completers.

Despite this evidence base, there are a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings in this report that are based on **primary data collection** (particularly chapters 4-6):

- **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 was 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.

There are additional limitations to consider when interpreting findings from the econometric analysis of administrative datasets (Chapter 7):

- Whilst the analysis uses credible counterfactual groups (e.g. comparing completers with those who did not complete the programme), these are subject to biases caused by unobservable differences between the two. For example, it is reasonable to assume that SME leaders who dropped out of HtGM differ systematically to SME leaders who completed the programme (either because their business was struggling or, conversely, because they did not need the course). However, in the absence of a group of eligible but declined applicants, where unobservable differences would be minimised, our approach remains the most robust option.
- The BSD data have **reporting lags** (BSD 2024 is based on data collected in financial year 2022/23) and therefore all findings on turnover, employment, productivity and business survival should be interpreted as short-term observations.
- **The analysis uses turnover per worker** as a proxy for productivity due to lags in the Annual Business Survey (which provides Gross Value Added (GVA) data). This is a crude measure of productivity as it does not account for intermediate costs involved in producing output (cost of labour and cost of capital).

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

## 4. Programme activities and outputs

### Introduction

This chapter outlines the core activities involved in delivering the Help to Grow: Management programme, from participant recruitment through to completion of the 12 modules and engagement with the alumni network. It includes an assessment of the quality of delivery, compares performance against anticipated outputs, and explains any differences, including contextual factors. The analysis draws on surveys of programme completers (conducted six weeks and six months after programme completion), non-completers and mentors, as well as interviews with stakeholders, business schools, programme completers, and mentors. It draws on some evidence reported in earlier evaluation reports.

### 4.1 Profile of demand

#### Business characteristics

Since its launch, HtGM stimulated demand from SMEs across the UK, operating in a range of sectors and of varying size. The profile of demand is compared below to the wider UK Business Population estimates in 2025<sup>24</sup>:

- **Location:** the programme 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, 32% enrolling). These figures broadly align with the wider UK SME population (of businesses with 5-249 employees), for which London and the South East account for the largest share (34%).
- **Sector:** businesses that registered for HtGM operated across a broad range of industry sectors.
  - The largest proportion of SMEs that registered / enrolled on the programme operated in '**Other services**'<sup>25</sup> (17% registered, 16% enrolled), higher than the share of businesses in the sector amongst the wider business population (7%). This was followed by the **manufacturing** sector (15% of registrations, 14% enrolments), which also represented a higher share than the wider business population (5%).
  - The **construction** sector was underrepresented compared to the wider business population (both 11%, 16% wider business population), as well as the **professional scientific and technical** sector (11% registrants, 10% enrolments, 14% wider business population). The remaining businesses registering and enrolling on the programme broadly reflected the wider business population.
- **Age:** around half of SMEs that registered (50%) / enrolled (47%) on HtGM had been in operation for between one and ten years, compared to around 71% of the wider business population. More than a third (38% registered, 36% enrolled) had been in operation for between 11 and 30 years, compared to approximately 28% of the wider business population.

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<sup>24</sup> Source: Business population estimates 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/business-population-estimates-2025>.

<sup>25</sup> It is a broad category that includes activities of member organisations, repair of computers and other personal / household goods and personal services, such as hairdressers, beauty salons and gyms.

- **Size (employee count):** firms registering and enrolling for HtGM were typically small SMEs, with a median of 12 employees amongst those registered and 13 amongst those enrolled and a mean of 27 employees amongst those registered and 28 for those enrolled. The wider SME business population in the UK has an average of three employees per SME.<sup>26</sup>
- **Size (turnover):** firms registering and enrolling for HtGM most generated annual turnover of less than £1 million, with a median turnover of £852k (for those registered) and £970k (for those enrolled).

Evidence collected through the evaluation indicated that the programme attracted interest from SMEs with diverse leadership (in terms of gender and ethnicity) when compared to SMEs in the wider SME population. The proportion of SMEs registering and enrolling on the programme with at least one senior leader in their business that was female (at least 31% across all years of delivery) or from an ethnic minority background (at least 11% across all years of delivery) was consistently above the averages of SME leaders across the UK population.<sup>27</sup>

A detailed breakdown of registrations and enrolments to HtGM by business characteristics and SME leader characteristics is provided in Annex C. This details descriptive analysis comparing SMEs that completed the programme with the wider population forms the first step in final impact evaluation. An overview of these results is presented the technical impact analysis annex (Annex F).

### **SME leaders' motivations and expectations**

**SME leaders reported a range of motivations for signing up to HtGM.** SME leaders applied to the programme because they wanted to develop their skills as a business leader, grow their personal networks and improve their ability to manage their business through periods of growth. In some cases, SME leaders were new to their role as senior decision maker in their business, or hoped to progress to a senior leadership position, and saw the programme as offering training to help prepare them for the transition. In other cases, SME leaders applied because their business had stagnated or because particular elements of the programme (e.g., course content, mentoring) appealed to them.

In cases where they were considering other programmes, HtGM was favoured because it was deemed to offer more well-rounded training (e.g., upskilling individual leaders and supporting business-level strategic thinking), affordability and the 'rubber stamp' of Government backing and business school involvement.

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#### ***Quotes from programme completers regarding their motivations for engaging with HtGM***

*"I was in a new role and I was kind of terrified. I felt like I wasn't well qualified enough to be doing all the things that were my responsibility at that time."*

*"I was especially drawn to the idea of having a mentor, someone who would look closely at the business and help us."*

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26 Note: SMEs were only eligible for HtGM if they had five or more employees.

27 Longitudinal Small Business Survey (2023) suggested that 24% of all SME leaders were female and 6% were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

*“I’ve always enjoyed being around other fellow business owners, learning and having that support, and I think it’s really important to have that network.”*

*“To rethink things differently [reason for joining the course]. When you’re a small business and you are in the thick of it, you don’t spend much time planning for the future.”*

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**The majority (80%) of SME leaders clearly understood the aims and objectives of the programme at the time of application.** The proportion reporting that the aims and objectives were ‘extremely clear’ increased year on year (18% in Year 1, 35% in Year 4), suggesting an improvement in the effectiveness of HtGM’s branding, marketing and promotion. While a small number of SME leaders had reservations about the time commitment involved in signing up for HtGM, the programme was attractive due to its perceived credibility and value for money.

**Most programme completers’ expectations of HtGM aligned to the programme’s overall objectives:** to boost firm-level productivity through improved management and leadership skills (Figure 3). There were some slight changes to SME leaders’ expectations of HtGM over time, which could reflect the changing economic context businesses were operating in. For example, applicants in Year 1 were applying in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and economic recovery, whilst applicants in Year 4 were responding to changes announced in the 2024 Autumn Budget (e.g., increased employer National Insurance Contributions).

- SME leaders in the early years of the programme were more likely to apply to HtGM with the expectation that they would increase their confidence to lead and manage their business (80% in Year 1, 73% in Year 4) and to increase their awareness of factors that drive business productivity and growth (78% in Year 1, 71% in Year 4). Despite this slight drop, interview feedback suggests this was still a motivation for many.
- SME leaders in later years were more likely to expect to develop a greater awareness of key elements and principles of financial management (34% in Year 1, 45% in Year 4).

Subgroup analysis of the survey data also highlighted differences in motivations by gender and ethnicity.

- Female SME leaders were more likely to have applied to the programme expecting to gain confidence in leading and managing their business (68% males, 78% females) or to expand their professional networks than their male counterparts (28% males, 34% females).
- SME leaders from an ethnic minority background more commonly applied to the programme to improve their skills in relation to employees (42% leaders from an ethnic minority background, 28% leaders not from an ethnic minority background)<sup>28</sup>, to understand how to embed better business practices (relating to equality, diversity and inclusion (29% compared with 15% of those from a non-ethnic minority background) and financial management) 54% compared with 40% of those from a non-ethnic minority

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<sup>28</sup> “Improved understanding of how to enhance employee wellbeing” (42% leaders from an ethnic minority background, 28% leaders not from an ethnic minority background) and “Improved understanding of how to improve employee engagement” (56% leaders from an ethnic minority background, 43% leaders not from an ethnic minority background).

background<sup>29</sup> and to better utilise data and data analytics (37% compared with 22% of those from a non-ethnic minority background).

Figure 3: What were your expectations of the HtGM programme? What were you hoping to get out of it?



Source: Ipsos 2025. Post completion survey. Base: All (n=2,050) Question type: Multicode.

## 4.2 Recruitment and enrolment

### Business schools and cohort formation

Up to the end of March 2025, a total of 66 business schools had delivered the HtGM programme across the UK. Participating schools delivered a total of **617 cohorts**, comprising **9,847 programme completers** (see Table 8 and Table 10).<sup>30</sup>

A total of 194 cohorts were cancelled over the course of the programme’s delivery, the majority of which were in the first two years when there was lower than anticipated demand for the programme (as reported in earlier evaluation reports) (Table 8). In Year 3, DBT reduced the number of cohorts to reflect actual levels of demand and to ensure a more even geographic spread. This adjustment substantially reduced the number of cancelled cohorts in Years 3 and 4.

29 “Greater understanding of how to embed equality, diversity and inclusion practices within your business” (29% compared with 15% of those from a non-ethnic minority background); “Greater awareness of the key elements and principles of financial management” (54% compared with 40% of those from a non-ethnic minority background)

30 The enrolment and completion figures may be different to official releases due to the differing times that data was collected. Official figures can be found here

Table 8: Overview of HtGM cohorts (2021-2025)

	No. of cohorts				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
<b>Completed</b>	133	187	149	148	<b>617</b>
<b>Cancelled</b>	116	67	3	8	<b>194</b>

Source: DBT monitoring data

**Interviews with business schools and wider stakeholders indicated that recruitment to the programme improved year on year.** However, there was variability amongst business schools. Some reportedly struggled to meet the minimum threshold of 15 participants for their cohorts, others consistently met the quotas and a small number reported higher demand than funded places. Interviews with business schools indicated that some of this variability was due to external factors (e.g., the pause in promotion during the pre-General Election period). In other cases, consultees cited reasons internal to the programme including competition between business schools, especially when providers in close proximity adopted different pricing strategies, and limited marketing budgets.

Business schools identified key lessons in stimulating demand for the programme, including:

- **Allowing sufficient lead in time to course start dates** (several chose to announce their cohorts 12 weeks ahead of time, rather than the eight week formal requirement), which enabled multiple touchpoints with potential participants, addressing concerns and building confidence in the programme's value.
- **Gaining trust and building credibility with the target population.** Business schools reported some scepticism about training programmes amongst SME leaders, which were compounded by their considerable time constraints. To combat this, business schools established or maintained a sustained presence in local business communities, regularly attended business events and ensured branding was consistent. This relationship-building approach, while resource-intensive, proved more effective than short-lived marketing campaigns.
- **Consistent delivery patterns:** Business schools that launched cohorts at the same time each year found recruitment easier than those attempting to fill cohorts opportunistically throughout the year. This allowed SMEs to plan participation around business cycles.

## 4.3 Participant engagement

### Enrolment

**Most (83%) SME leaders who registered an interest in the HtGM programme (2021-2024) went on to enrol in a cohort.** The rate of conversion from registrations to enrolments was relatively consistent over time (Table 9).

Table 9: Number and percentage of registrants enrolling on to HtGM

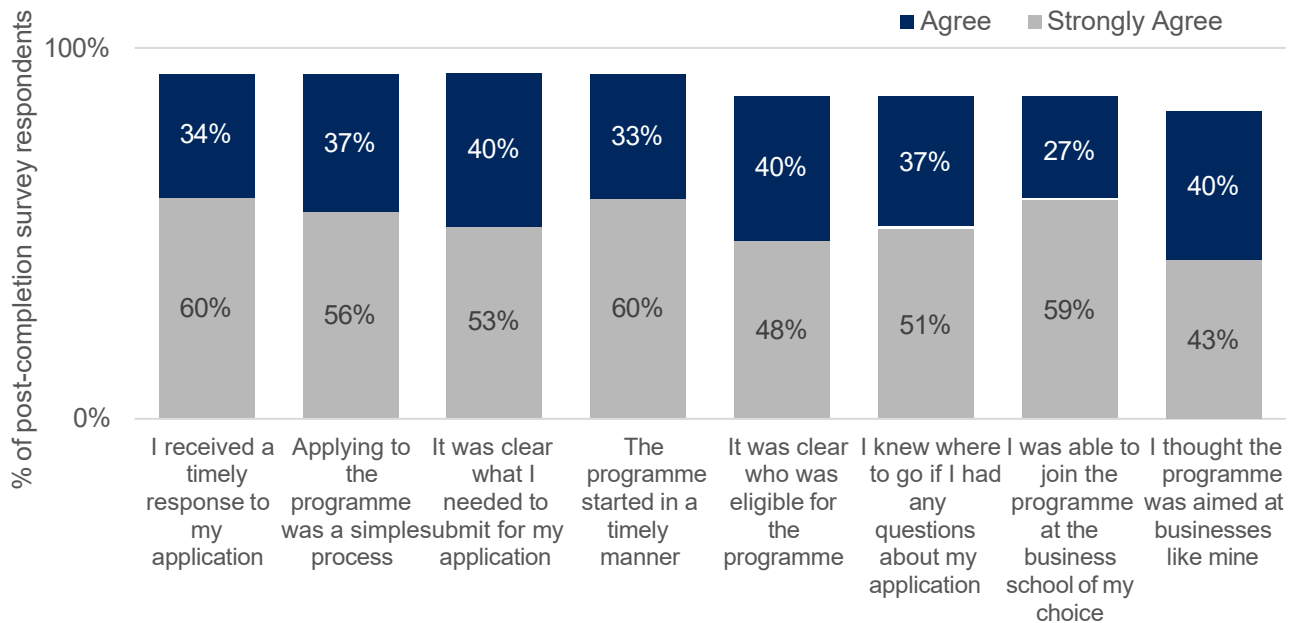
	No / % of SME leaders				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
<b>Registrations</b>	3,264	3,909	3,874	3,255	<b>14,302</b>
<b>Enrolments</b>	2,628	3,375	3,132	2,736	<b>11,871</b>

	No / % of SME leaders				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
% conversion	81%	86%	81%	84%	83%

Source: DBT monitoring data

**SME leaders who had completed HtGM reflected positively on their experiences of applying, enrolling and onboarding to the programme:** most survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with each of the statements presented in Figure 4. Almost all programme completers thought that the programme started in a timely manner and the requirements for submitting their application was clear (both 94%). In addition, 93% of participants found applying to the programme a simple process and 93% received a timely response to their application. There was scope for improvement in some elements of the programme, including issues around perception of the programme and its target audience; and where to go with questions about the application process.

Figure 4: Thinking about your experience of applying to HtGM programme, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Overall)



Source: Ipsos 2025. Post completion survey. Base: All (n=1,613). Question type: single code. Note: This question was removed from the survey in Y4Q3 so has a smaller base size.

## Participant engagement

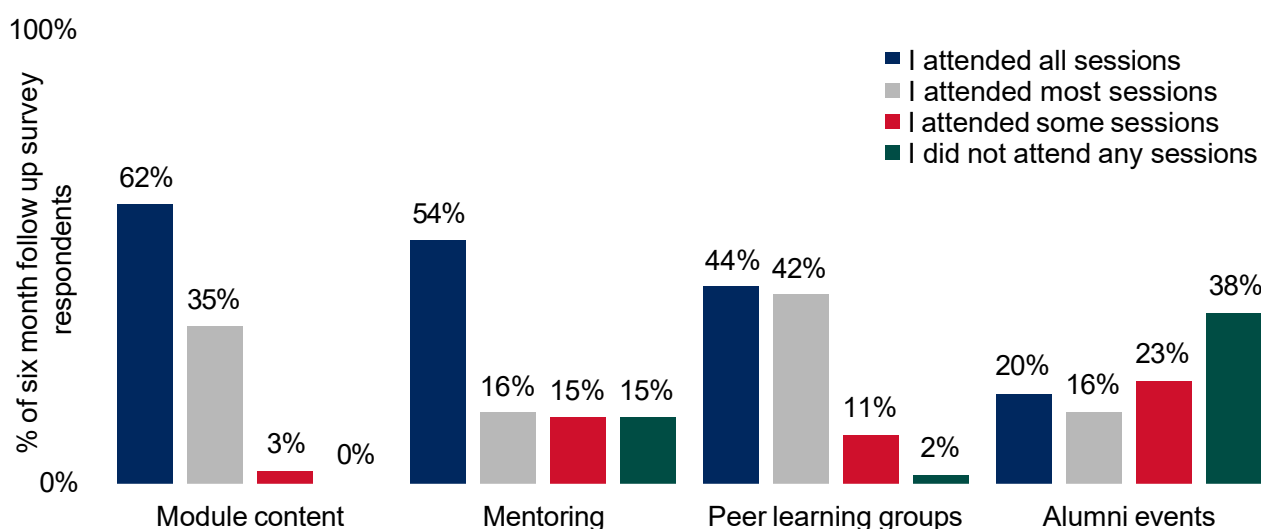
**More than four in every five SME leaders (84%) who enrolled on HtGM went on to complete the programme** and this was consistent across all four years of delivery (Table 10). Survey data indicate that levels of participant engagement varied between the different elements of the programme. The majority of programme completers were highly engaged with the module sessions and peer learning groups, attending most or all sessions (97% and 86% respectively) (Figure 5). Levels of engagement with the mentoring offer were a bit lower with around half (54%) attending in all ten sessions offered. Female SME leaders were more likely participate in the mentoring offer in full than their male counterparts (60% engaged in all ten mentoring sessions compared to 50% male SME leaders).

Table 10: Programme completion and engagement levels

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
No. of SME leaders enrolled on completed cohorts	2,439	3,221	3,115	2,969	11,744
No. of SME leaders who attended > 75% of modules (Programme completers)	2,040	2,703	2,620	2,484	9,847
Programme completion rate	84%	84%	84%	84%	84%

Source: DBT monitoring data (November 2025)

Figure 5: Which of these statements best describes your level of engagement with the following programme elements?



Source: Ipsos 2025. Six month follow up survey. Base: All completers (n=1,910). Question type: single code

**Around one in six (16%) SME leaders who enrolled on HtGM did not complete the programme**, either withdrawing or (6%), dropped out of the programme (6%), or completing fewer than nine out of the 12 modules (5%) (Table 11). Evidence from the survey of non-completers indicated that most (61%) would be interested in completing the programme at a later point in time. Reasons for non-completion tended to relate to personal circumstance rather than the programme design (e.g., time constraints, unforeseen challenges in businesses). A small proportion of non-completers cited issues with the relevance of the module content to their business.

Table 11: Programme completion and engagement levels

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total	% of enrolments (n= 11,744)
No. of participants who withdrew from HtGM	105	189	199	195	688	5.9%
No. of participants who dropped out of HtGM	123	163	200	184	670	5.7%
No. of participants who part-completed (50-74% of the programme)	171	166	96	106	539	4.6%

Source: DBT monitoring data

## 4.4 Programme management and delivery structures

DBT was responsible for the overall management of the HtGM programme, working closely with the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) and a consortium that delivered the mentoring model, comprising Enterprise Nation, Association of Business Mentors (ABM) and Newable. A detailed overview of the respective roles and responsibilities of the delivery partners is presented in Table 12.

Table 12: HtGM Roles and responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities	
<b>Department for Business and Trade</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall management of HtGM programme</li> <li>• Oversight of programme delivery</li> <li>• Oversight and management of programme evaluation</li> <li>• Chairing Operations and Delivery Board, responsible for monitoring progress on supply and demand, marketing, curriculum development, mentoring, business school engagement, participant engagement, registrations, data reporting, evaluation, and operating procedures.</li> <li>• Chairing Programme Board, which takes strategic decisions on the overall shape of the programme and has responsibility for ensuring it achieves the benefits identified in the business case.</li> </ul>
<b>CABS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of programme objectives, curriculum content, course materials and Virtual Learning Environment</li> <li>• Development and monitoring of delivery principles to ensure consistent delivery across business schools</li> <li>• Establishing, onboarding and managing the delivery network of business schools across the UK</li> <li>• National marketing and communications to promote the programme to SMEs</li> <li>• Running the alumni programme</li> <li>• Development and maintenance of the programme registration platform and oversight and management of all the programme data</li> </ul>
<b>Business schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing and promoting the programme within local business community</li> <li>• Recruiting participants to the scheme and onboarding</li> <li>• Delivery of the curriculum content and coordination of peer networks</li> <li>• Delivery of HtGM business school alumni events</li> <li>• Providing up to date monitoring information to CABS on programme delivery</li> </ul>
<b>Mentoring consortium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment, onboarding and training of mentors</li> <li>• Matching of mentors to SMEs</li> <li>• Creating and managing a dedicated mentoring platform</li> <li>• Delivering introductory seminars to programme participants outlining the mentoring platform and how to initiate a match.</li> <li>• Support business schools and programme participants when issues with mentoring arise.</li> </ul>

Source: Ipsos

The programme governance arrangements between 2021 and 2025 consisted of four ‘pillars’:

- **Grant Management meetings:** quarterly meetings to manage and monitor programme performance, KPIs, finance, programme risks and issues.
- **Programme Board:** monthly meetings, chaired by the Senior Research Officer (SRO), to discuss strategic priorities of the programme.

- **Operations and Delivery Board:** bi-monthly meetings to oversee programme implementation.
- **Expert Advisory Council (EAC):** bi-annual meetings, chaired by Goldman Sachs and attended by expert business stakeholders, to provide guidance on programme design and delivery.

Feedback from interviewees over the course of the evaluation indicated that the governance arrangements were fit for purpose, attended by the right people to provide effective programme oversight and that appropriate evidence was collected and reported on to monitor programme performance. These governance arrangements were streamlined in later years to reflect the shift from early implementation to business-as-usual delivery and will be streamlined further in the next phase of the programme. This change was perceived positively by stakeholders, who deemed it to be proportionate to the needs of the programme. However, some would have valued closer involvement of the Expert Advisory Council at key decision points including in relation to changes to programme design.

**There was broad consensus amongst stakeholders that the regional business school delivery model was an effective method of delivering the programme.** The reasons were threefold:

- Business schools have a deep understanding of their local economies and the barriers to productivity facing SMEs in their areas.
- Business schools have established local networks that they can draw on to recruit and promote the programme.
- Having a large number of business schools provides more choice to SME leaders on how they engage with the programme (in person, hybrid or online-only), removing some of the barriers to engagement (e.g., time constraints, long distances to nearest business school delivering HtGM or with open places in cohorts).

Evidence from the interim impact evaluation report highlighted some concern amongst stakeholders that delivery of the programme may be spread across too many business schools. The high volume of business schools delivering the programme created challenges in ensuring quality and consistency of delivery of HtGM. One stakeholder reflected that it would be easier to identify examples of best practice and understand what worked well in regional delivery if the number of schools was reduced without reducing the number of cohorts. Interviews with business schools also highlighted challenges with the 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>31</sup>

## 4.5 Quality of programme delivery

### Overall satisfaction

SME leaders completing the programme reported **high levels of satisfaction** with HtGM delivery. Figure 6 shows that nine in ten respondents (92%) were either very or fairly satisfied with how the programme was delivered from the first module to the end of their mentoring relationship. The proportion of SME leaders reporting the highest levels of satisfaction increased by 17 percentage points between Year 1 and Year 4 of delivery (47% in Y1, 64% in Y4). Satisfaction was particularly

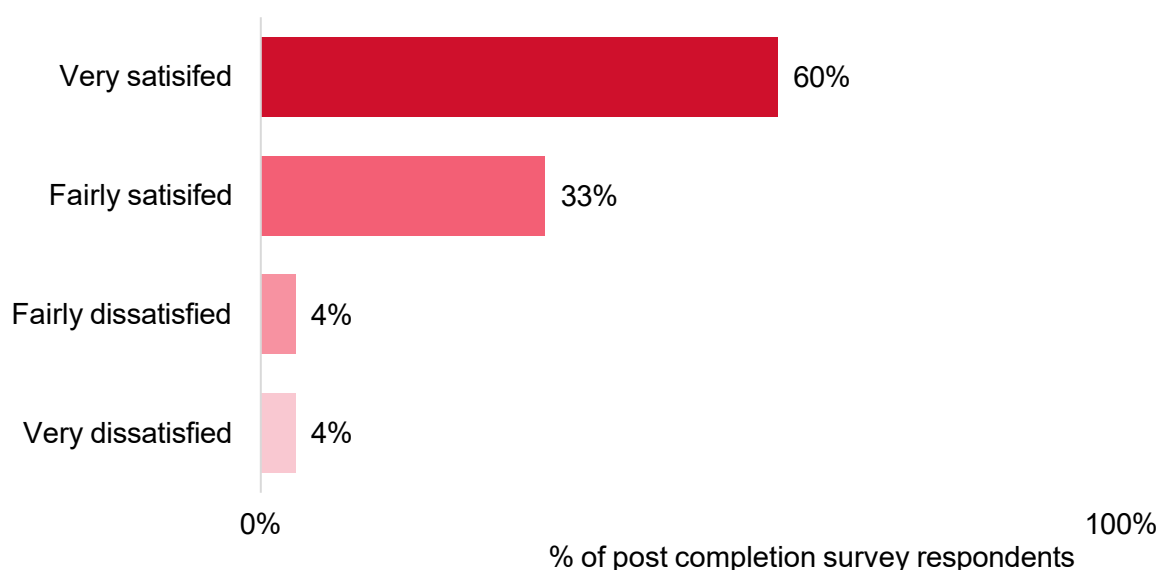
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<sup>31</sup> In these instances, business schools had campuses in more than one region of the UK and could only deliver the programme in one.

high amongst leaders of micro-SMEs (10 employees or less) and female SME leaders, who were more likely to be very satisfied (62% micro SMEs vs 52% of SME leaders with 11-50 employees; 63% female leaders vs 57% male leaders).

Most (92%) programme completers said they would be **likely to recommend the programme** to another business leader and this increased over time: the proportion who were "very likely" to recommend the programme increased by 11 percentage points between Year 1 and Year 4, from 66% to 77%. SME leaders expressed high levels of satisfaction with the composition of their HtGM cohorts, particularly their peers' willingness to share knowledge and experience (93%), the range of business sectors represented (87%) and the relevance of their peers' knowledge and experience (73%).

Figure 6: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with how the HtGM programme was delivered from start to end?



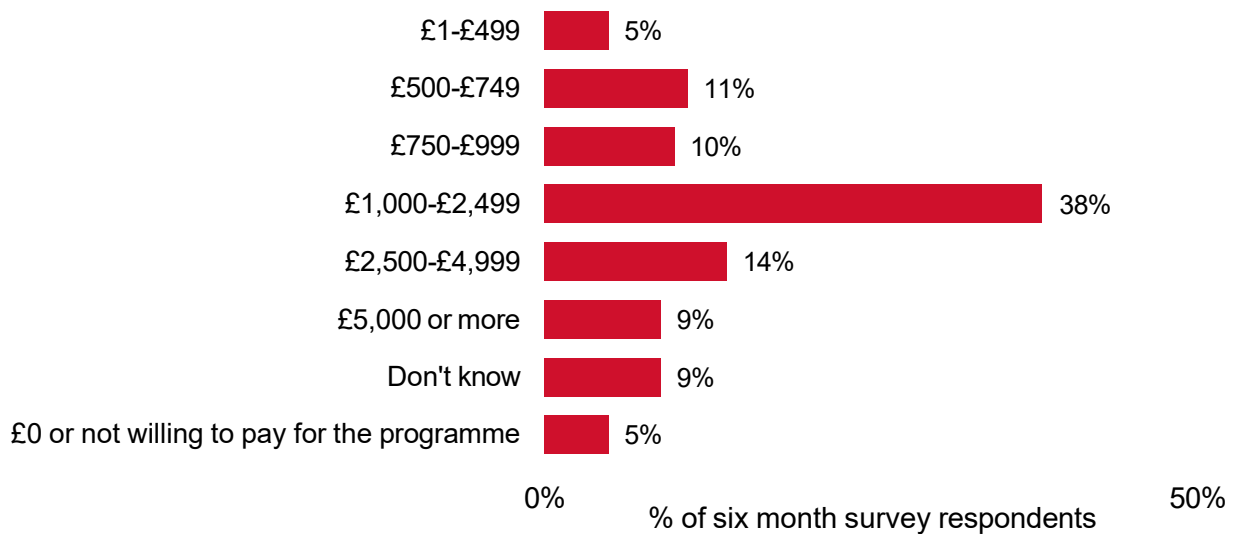
Source: Post completion survey (n=2,050); Note: 'don't know' responses are not shown in the Figure but are include in the base and figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Question type: Single code

### Willingness to pay<sup>32</sup>

**The majority (71%) of SME leaders completing HtGM valued the programme at or above the original £750 participation fee.** Most commonly, programme completers valued the programme at between £1,000 and £2,499 (see Figure 7 for full breakdown) and only a small minority (5%) said they would not be willing to pay for the programme. This suggests that there could be merit in revisiting the price charged to SME leaders for participating in the programme. There may be more willingness to pay now that the HtGM brand is established and there is more self-reported evidence on the benefits to individuals and their businesses (via the evaluation, outlined in sections 5-7, and through testimonials published by business schools).

32 In the programmes original design, the Government covered 90% of the costs of participation for SME leaders and participants were expected to pay £750. In later years, sponsored places were introduced to remove cost barriers to SMEs highlighted by business school staff involved in recruitment to the scheme. Consultation evidence with business schools indicated that, in addition to sponsored places, many had chosen to self-finance fully or partially funded cohorts.

Figure 7: Now that you have completed Help to Grow Management, how much would you be willing to pay for the programme?



Source: Ipsos Six month follow up survey. Base: 1,303 (All completers); Note: This questions was introduced during Y3 of the evaluaiton so sample sizes are smaller. Question type: single choice

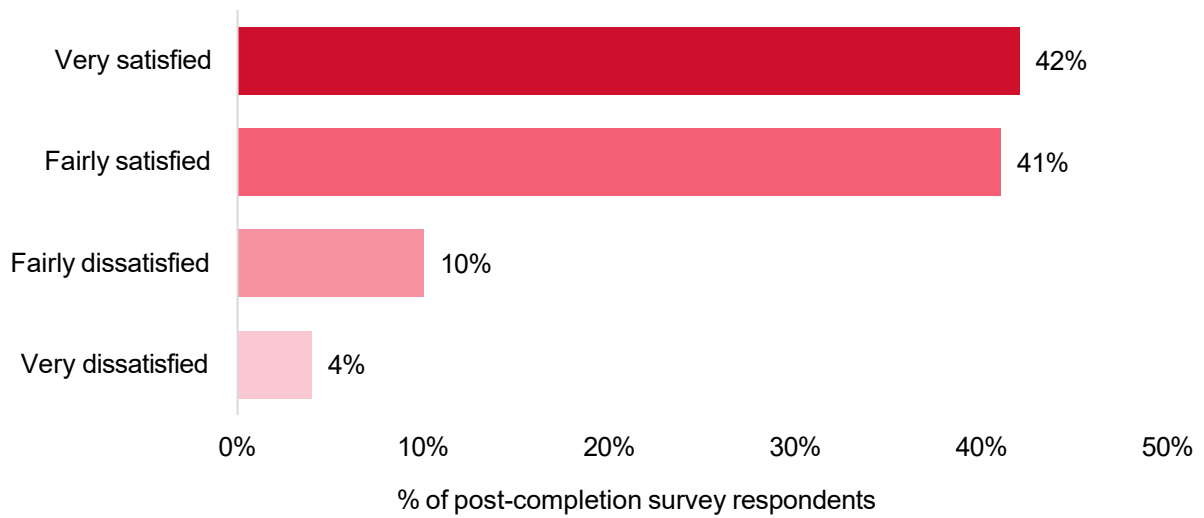
## Delivery mode

The majority (83%) of programme completers were satisfied with the amount of in-person delivery (Figure 8) and the proportion of those reporting the highest levels of satisfaction with the delivery mode nearly doubled over time (53% “very satisfied” in Year 4, 27% in Year 1). Interview and survey evidence suggested that this was likely a reflection of the **expansion of hybrid and online only cohorts**, which made the programme more accessible to SMEs leaders who faced time constraints and / or may not be based near a business school delivering HtGM. Typically, the core HtGM curriculum was delivered online (72%) and was supplemented with elements of face-to-face delivery. Business schools were found to have successfully identified which elements of the programme benefited most from in-person delivery and provided flexibility in the delivery mode of other elements.

- SME leaders expressed a clear preference for **case study modules** to be delivered in-person (72%). Business schools responded to this feedback, with most survey respondents reporting face-to-face delivery for the case study modules (ranging from 71% for Module 9: High Performance Workplace Case Study to 80% for Module 12: Implementing Growth Plans).
- The Year 3 evaluation report highlighted that some business schools focused on in-person delivery for the **Induction Workshop** and **first module** to help build rapport with the cohort. The final year of survey evidence suggests that this approach was adopted more widely across the business school network: the proportion of participants attending the Induction Workshop in person increased by 19 percentage points between Year 3 and Year 4 from 14% to 33%. There was also a similar 15 percentage point increase over the same time period in the proportion who attended Module 1: Strategy and Innovation in person (from 18% to 33%).

Most programme completers who attended online-only cohorts (69%) would still have participated in the programme if some face-to-face delivery was required. Interviews with SME leaders found that some chose to join an online-only course because it provided more flexibility around their existing commitments, rather than because in-person was either not preferable or not possible. However, around one quarter (28%) of online-only completers would not have participated in the programme if in-person attendance was a requirement.

Figure 8: Overall, how satisfied were you with the amount of face-to-face delivery in the HtGM programme?



Source: Post completion survey (n=2,050); Note: 'don't know' responses are not shown in the Figure but are include in the base. Question type: Single code

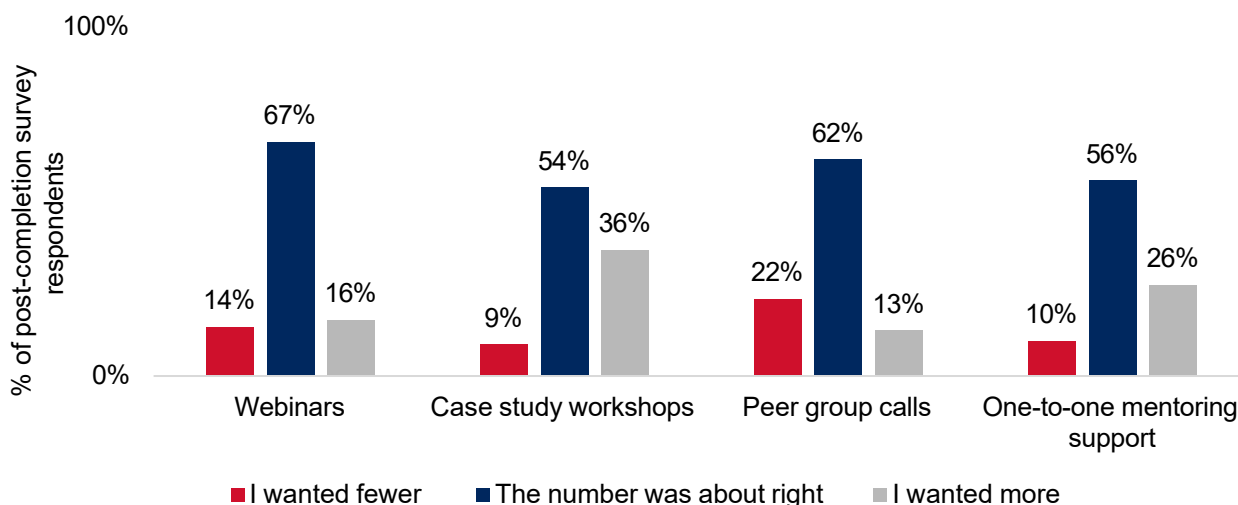
### Number, duration and frequency of sessions

**Most SME leaders completing HtGM were satisfied with delivery of the sessions that make up the programme**, reporting that the number, length and time between them was 'about right'.<sup>33</sup> These results improved over time, reflecting changes made to the programme in response to feedback from the evaluation and via business schools (e.g., fortnightly delivery of modules after SME leaders reported that they did not have enough time between webinars to make best use of their peer and mentoring sessions).<sup>34</sup> Despite these overall positive results, there is evidence to suggest that some programme completers would have valued more sessions, with around one third (36%) expressing an interest in more case study modules and one quarter (25%) wanting more mentoring sessions (Figure 9).

33 Percentage of programme completers who thought the number of sessions was 'about right': webinars (67%), case study modules (54%), peer learning sessions (62%), mentoring (56%). Percentage of programme completers who thought the duration of sessions was 'about right': webinars (70%), case study modules (73%), peer learning sessions (73%), mentoring (77%). Percentage of programme completers who thought the frequency of sessions was 'about right': webinars (72%), case study modules (76%), peer learning sessions (67%), mentoring (69%).

34 See Help to Grow: Management interim evaluation report (2024) for further detail.

Figure 9: What are your thoughts on the number of sessions involved in the HtGM programme?



Source: Post completion survey (n=1,613); Note: 'don't know' responses are not shown in the Figure but are include in the base. Question type: Single code

### Course content

**The programme curriculum was considered comprehensive and largely relevant, covering topics that almost all programme completers consider to be applicable to their business** (Figure 10). Interview evidence consistently indicated that SME leaders valued the breadth of content in the curriculum and most said they found something useful for their business within each module. Module content and case studies were considered by SME leaders to be applicable to their businesses and to have stimulated their thinking.

Programme completers were divided on the relevance of the Winning New Markets module, with around half (55%) reporting that it was relevant to their business. However, changes to the module content and work by business schools to more effectively communicate the applicability of the module to all types of businesses, not just those interested in trading internationally, appears to have led to improvements in the module’s perceived relevance over time (45% in Year 1, 58% in Year 4).

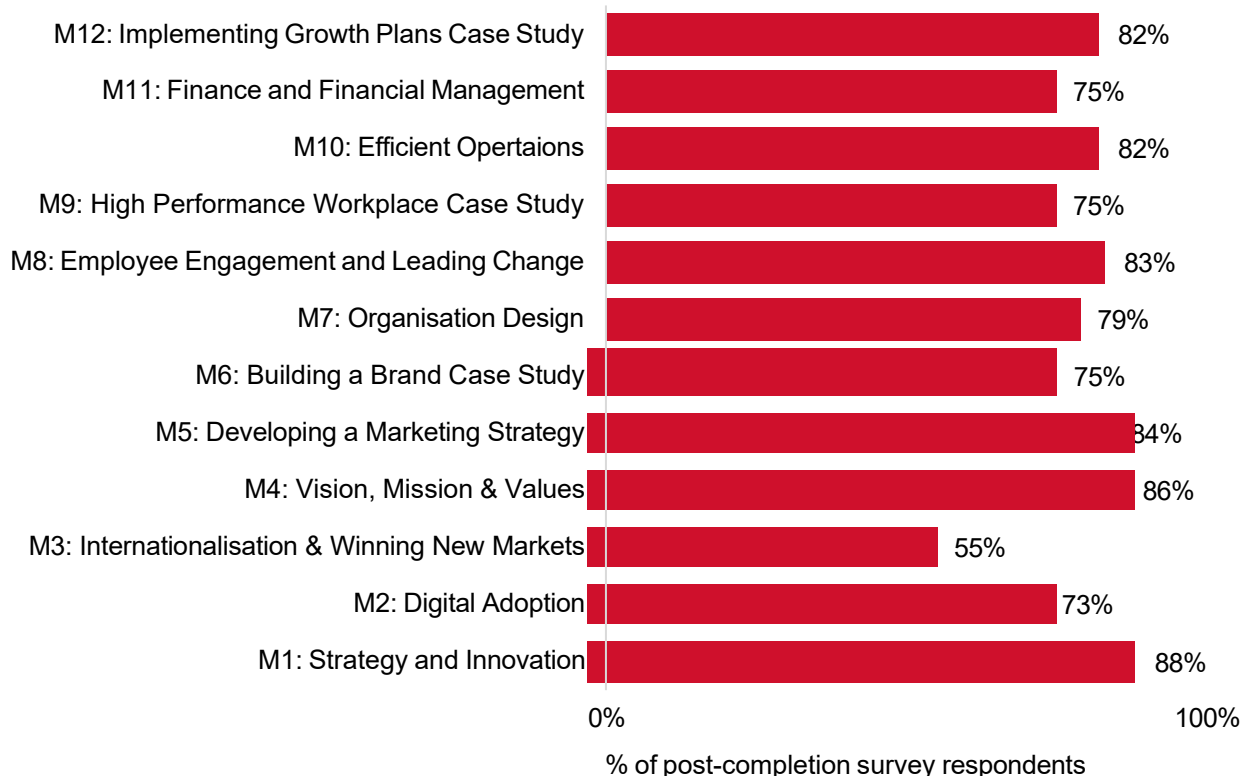
There were also marked improvements in the perceived relevance of other elements of the curriculum over time.<sup>35</sup> Notably, there was an increase in the proportion who viewed Implementing a Growth Action Plan (GAP) as relevant (76% considered it relevant in Year 1, rising to 85% in Year 4). This is an endorsement of the ToC, in which the GAP is identified as a key mechanism for translating learning from the programme into tangible business benefits.

There were also some marginal differences in perceived relevance of the curriculum by SME size: Programme completers from microbusinesses (<10 FTEs) found Internationalisation and Winning New Markets more relevant than medium-sized SMEs (11-50 FTEs), and Implementing Growth Action Plans case study more relevant than large SMEs (FTE 51-99).<sup>36</sup>

35 Other improvements were observed for the Digital Transformation (69% in Year 3, 77% in Year 4) and Organisational Design modules (77% in Year 3, 82% in Year 4).

36 Over half of micro businesses (57%) found the Internationalisation and winning new markets module relevant, 11 percentage points higher than small SMEs (11-50 FTEs). Most micro businesses (83%) found the Implementing Growth Plans case study to be relevant to their business, 9 percentage points higher than medium SMEs (51-99 FTEs).

Figure 10: How relevant were each of the Help to Grow: Management modules to your business? (Combined 'extremely' and 'somewhat' relevant)



Source: Ipsos Post completion survey Base: All (n= 2,050); Question type: single choice

## 4.6 Mentoring

### Overall satisfaction

**The mentoring support provided through HtGM was consistently the highest rated element of the programme.** 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 and typically reported the highest level of satisfaction (64% were 'very satisfied').<sup>37</sup> This aligned with feedback on satisfaction with the quality of the mentoring match from both mentors and participating SME leaders:

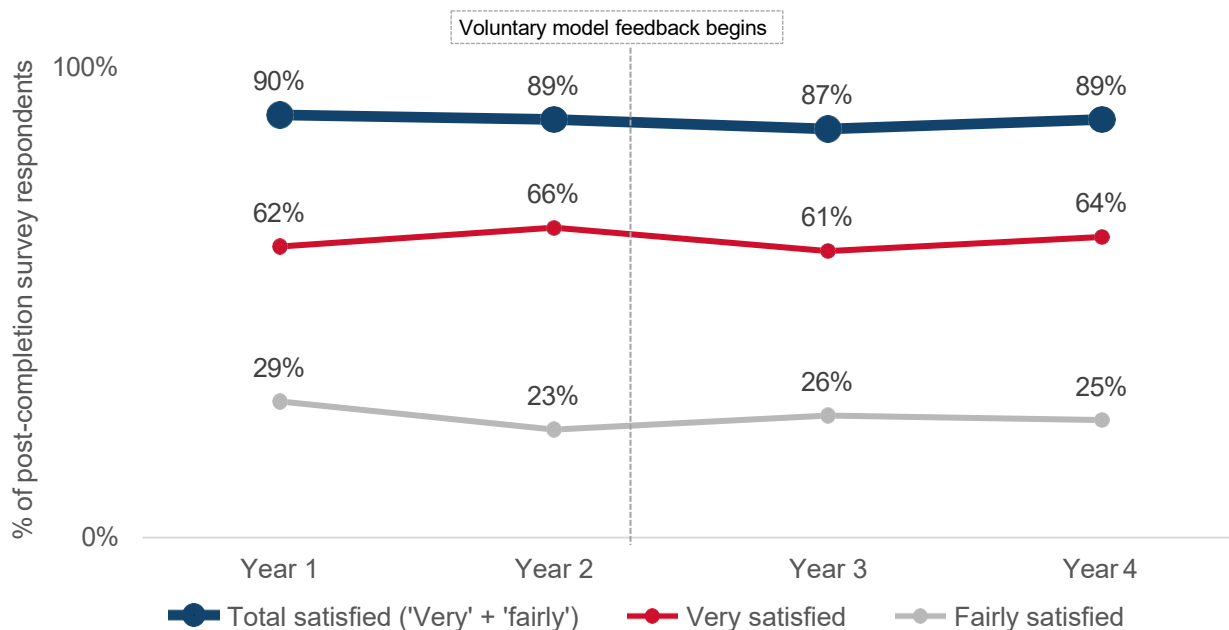
- Three quarters (78%) of programme completers who participated in a mentoring relationship agreed that their mentor's experience was **well matched with their needs**, of which nearly half (46%) strongly agreed.
- Almost all (95%) of mentors agreed that their knowledge, skills and expertise were **well matched to their mentee**.

While levels of satisfaction with the mentoring offer were high, there was a slight drop in satisfaction amongst SME leaders in Year 2. This coincided with the introduction of the new mentoring model. Under this model, participants could choose their own voluntary mentor, rather

<sup>37</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.

than be matched to a paid mentor by their business school. Satisfaction with the mentoring relationship and quality of the match soon returned to earlier levels and remained consistent as the new delivery model became embedded.

Figure 11: Overall, how satisfied are you with the one-to-one mentoring support you received through the HtGM programme? (Participant feedback)



Source: Ipsos Post completion survey, Base: All who were matched with a mentor and did all/some mentoring hours (n= 1,707);. Note: 'not stated' responses are excluded from the base; This question was only asked to respondents who were matched with a mentor and did all/some mentoring hours. \* Grey vertical line indicates the time point when the sample moved from programme completers with a paid mentor to a voluntary mentor

**Most mentors were satisfied with their experience of mentoring and planned to continue mentoring via the HtGM programme (87% and 78%, respectively).** Mentors reflected positively on the registration, onboarding and training processes. They reported that their experience of providing mentoring support was satisfying, they enjoyed sharing their knowledge and found supporting other business leaders fulfilling.

Although mentor satisfaction was relatively high, evidence from the mentor survey and depth interviews highlighted a few potential areas for improvement:

- Around one in four (23%) mentors reported that they did not feel supported by the mentoring consortium. Dissatisfaction tended to be linked to **a lack of communication and responsiveness from the consortium**. Some mentors would have liked more supportive and clear communication. Some were not aware of the support available from the mentoring consortium at all, highlighting a lack of engagement.
- **The mentor training offer could be better tailored to individual mentors:** more experienced mentors reported that some elements of the training were unnecessary and covered content they were already skilled to deliver. Conversely, some voluntary mentors, who were typically less confident and less experienced than paid mentors, would have valued supplementary training on how to apply their management experience to formal mentoring.
- **Improved communication:** both mentor groups (voluntary and paid) reported that the communications associated with their training, particularly with regards to scheduling, clarity of training content and sharing best practice could be made more consistent and

accessible. Some interviewees from the voluntary model cited disjointed communication with their mentees as a factor in them not completing a mentoring relationship.

## The mentoring relationship

**While the majority (87%) of HtGM programme completers were matched with a mentor, levels of engagement in the mentoring sessions were lower than expected.** Less than two thirds (61%) of those matched with a mentor completed all ten hours of mentoring, equating to around one third (32%) of all programme completers. Engagement in the mentoring element of HtGM was highest in the first year of delivery (95% reported being matched with a mentor) when business schools were responsible for the matching. It dropped in the subsequent years (15 percentage point drop to 80% in Year 3) when SME leaders were no longer automatically matched with a mentor but were supported to find their own mentor through a dedicated platform. This offers an explanation as to why leaders of micro-SMEs, who are particularly time constrained, were least likely to engage in a mentoring relationship.<sup>38</sup>

The mentoring consortium introduced additional processes to facilitate the matching process, monitor mentoring relationships and, in some cases, form matches. This appears to have improved overall engagement with the mentoring in the final year of delivery (87% of participants were matched with a mentor in Year 4).

### Mentoring activities

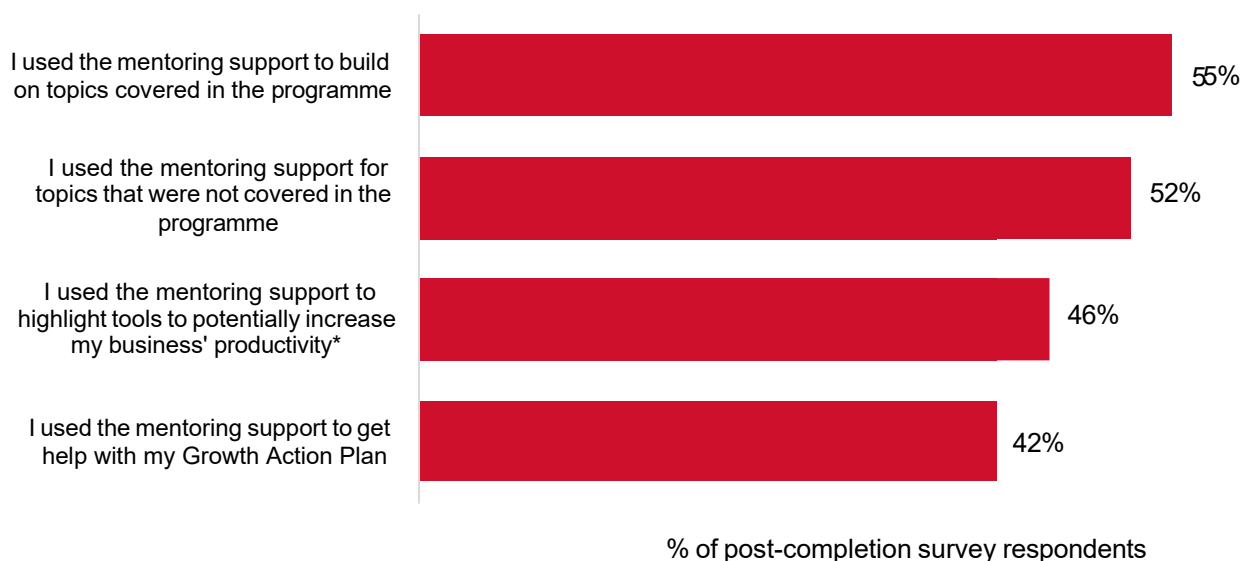
SME leaders completing HtGM used their mentoring relationships to build on **topics covered in the HtGM programme curriculum** and to seek advice, guidance and support on **ad hoc issues** they or their businesses were facing, including for signposting to tools that could improve productivity (Figure 12). This was reflected in the depth feedback from SME leaders and mentors, who reported that the sessions were often used (and most valued) by participants when they were tailored to their individual business needs.

Although less than half (42%) of HtGM participants reported using their one-to-one mentoring support to get help with their Growth Action Plan (GAP), the quality of support they did receive from their mentors was highly rated. Almost all (94%) reported that they were well supported by their mentor in planning for growth (either by developing their GAP or building on an existing growth plan).

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<sup>38</sup> 86% of micro-SME leaders engaged in a mentoring relationship compared to 92% of small SMEs and 95% of medium SMEs.

Figure 12: Which of the following describes how you used one-to-one mentoring support?



Source: Ipsos Post completion survey; Base: All those who engaged in at least some hours of mentoring (n=1,758). Question type: multiple choice \*This option was introduced in Y2Q4 so has a smaller base size

Comparisons between programme completers in the first year of delivery to those in later years provides insight into differences in how mentoring sessions were used by voluntary and paid-for mentors. Most notably, SME leaders with a paid-for mentor were more likely to have used the sessions to build on key elements of the programme:

- Used the mentoring support to cover **topics covered in the curriculum** (64% in Year 1, 49% in Year 4), most commonly how to implement their business plans (89%) and content relating to vision, mission and values (84%).
- Received support from their mentor to develop and implement their **Growth Action Plans** (58% in Year 1, 36% in Year 4).

Qualitative findings suggest that the move away from using mentoring to cover core programme content could be driven by mentees' personal preferences, it was often cited as the element of the programme that could be most easily tailored to individual participants' needs. In other instances, this could be a result of the new pay structure, whereby it is reasonable to assume that a voluntary mentor may be less inclined to dedicate as much time to understanding the full curriculum and scheme design than a mentor who was paid.

## 4.7 Alumni network

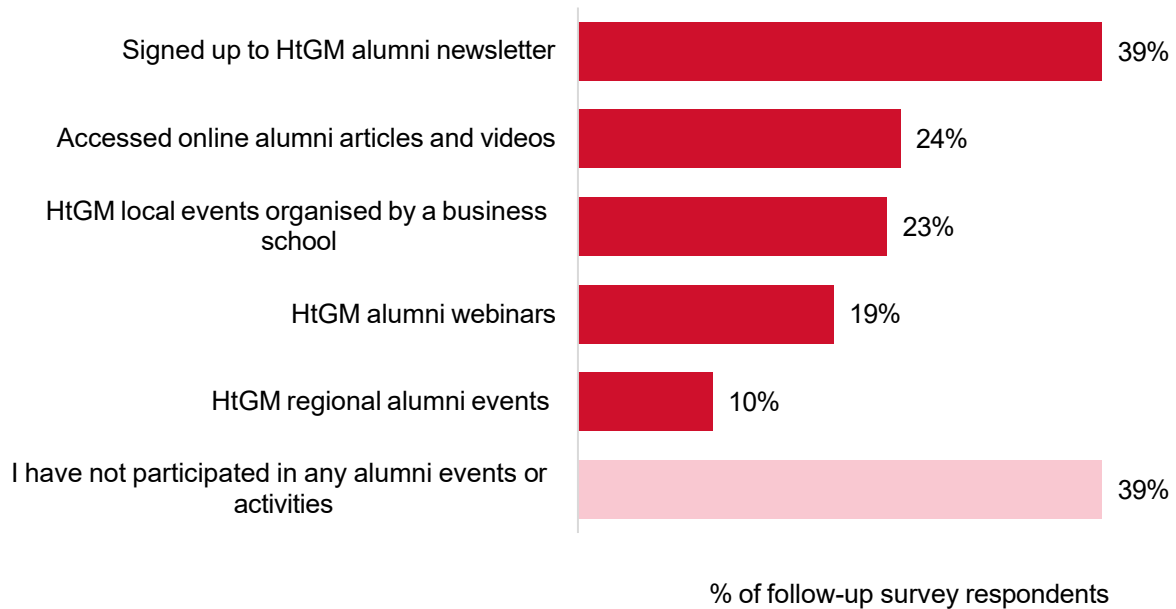
Since the alumni network launched in September 2022, **the majority (61%) of programme completers reported that they had attended at least some alumni events**. Of these, most (88%) were satisfied with the quality of the events they had attended. The nature of engagement in the alumni network varied but was typically via light-touch remote activities, including signing up for the HtGM alumni newsletter (39%) and accessing online articles and videos (24%).

Around one in four (23%) programme completers had attended local events organised by their business school. SME leaders who were interviewed reported attending alumni events and 'catch ups' organised by their business school. Those who attended alumni events generally found them useful. They found it valuable to hear about the experiences of others who had completed the programme; reported that it provided accountability to deliver on their GAP and provided them with

opportunities to make connections with others on the course that could benefit their businesses in the future.

Of those who had not engaged in any alumni network activities, time constraints were the main barrier to participation (47%) followed by a lack of awareness of the network itself (12%).

Figure 13: Have you participated in any HtGM alumni activities and, if so, which of the following have you taken part in?



Source: Ipsos Six month follow up survey. Base: 1,303. This question was added in wave 5 of the survey.

## 5. Programme effectiveness (self-reported individual outcomes)

### 5.1 Introduction

HtGM aims to improve the **confidence** and **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 met 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 D) is provided alongside a discussion of contributing factors.

Table 13: HtGM individual level outcome hypotheses

Hypothesis	Description
1	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
2	Leaders who complete the HtGM programme will have a better understanding of the importance of leadership and management practices and how they can contribute to increases in firm-level productivity.
3	SME leaders who complete HtGM will have a deeper understanding of their business needs and will produce a Growth Action Plan (GAP), detailing changes to drive productivity improvements in their business
4	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.

Source: Ipsos UK

### 5.2 Personal development

There is **good evidence** to suggest that HtGM contributed to improved confidence in SME leaders' ability to lead and manage their business. A summary of the evidence against the key outcome of interest is presented in Table 14.

Table 14: Evidence against individual level outcome hypothesis 1

Outcome of interest	Strength of evidence	Key metric
Improved confidence in leading and managing their business	Good evidence	92% more confident to lead and manage their business

Source: Ipsos

**Evidence from across 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>39</sup> Improved confidence was the most commonly reported outcome amongst programme completers (92%) and was most pronounced amongst leaders of micro SMEs (71% compared to 55% large SMEs) and female leaders (74% compared to 68% male leaders).

Interview evidence highlighted that these improvements to confidence took different forms:

- **Addressing skills gaps:** for those promoted into leadership based on specialist skills without formal management training, the HtGM course directly addressed and mitigated feelings of 'imposter syndrome'.
- **Rebuilding confidence:** for some experienced leaders, the programme was crucial in rebuilding confidence that had been "severely battered" by the economic and operational challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.
- **Validating existing ideas:** participating in HtGM was often described by programme completers as a process of validation, whereby their existing ideas, experience and instincts were corroborated by the curriculum.

Interview evidence with programme completers indicated that improvements in personal confidence often manifested in leaders feeling more self-assured in team discussions and having a new willingness to advocate for their ideas. Ultimately, this personal development culminated in what leaders described as "*more confident decision making and business planning.*"

#### *Pathways to impact*

The HtGM curriculum, peer learning groups and one-to-one mentoring sessions were identified as key mechanisms to increased confidence amongst programme participants.

- The **HtGM curriculum** content exposed participants to formal business knowledge, which often confirmed participants' existing ideas and experiences (as noted above). This validation gave them the conviction and self-efficacy to act on their plans. As one programme completer noted, "*[HtGM] gave me the confidence to be a leader and not just do the day job*" (Year 3 completer).
- The **peer learning groups** reduced feelings of professional isolation and SMEs reported feeling more comfortable and confident to tackle business issues as a result. The groups helped SME leaders to appreciate that they were not alone in the challenges they faced and participants often took inspiration from peers with regards to how to address a particular business. One programme completer described "*thinking it is just you and you*

<sup>39</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

are hopeless, but then you realise everyone is facing the same problems” (Year 2 completer).

- Linked to the above, **one-to-one mentoring sessions** offered an additional safe space to build confidence and often gave SME leaders the conviction to make changes in their business. This was particularly valuable to leaders who reported feeling lonely or overwhelmed in their senior leadership position.

As a direct result of improved confidence, programme completers reported taking on enhanced roles and responsibilities in their firms, adopting a more “self-assured” and “assertive” leadership style, and self-belief to make complex strategic decisions.

### 5.3 Skills, knowledge and understanding

The evaluation found **good evidence** that the HtGM programme had successfully improved the skills, knowledge, and understanding of its participants. A summary of the strength of evidence against the outcomes of interest is presented in Table 15.

Table 15: Evidence against individual level outcome hypothesis 2

Outcome of interest	Strength of evidence	Key metric
Improved management and leadership skills (e.g., strategic thinking, decision making)	Good	91% report improvement in management and leadership skills
Increased awareness of the relationship between leadership and management practices and improved productivity	Good	91% report increased awareness of factors that drive productivity
Improved understanding of best practice leadership and management approaches	Good	At least 75% report improvements in best management and leadership approaches

Source: Ipsos

Programme completers were significantly more confident that they had the **skills** they needed to lead their employees and business and more **knowledgeable** of the factors that drive growth compared to eligible SME leaders in the wider UK economy who did not participate in the programme.<sup>40</sup>

**HtGM was found to be generating improvements in skills, knowledge and understanding across a range of topics.** Almost all programme completers across all years of the six month follow-up survey said they had learned or gained something from their engagement in HtGM.<sup>41</sup> The most commonly cited related to improved leadership and management skills and increased awareness of the factors that drive productivity (both 91%) (Figure 14). Interview evidence highlighted that SME leaders commonly noted an improvement in listening actively and trusting staff enough to delegate tasks, with some also explaining how the course helped them to understand different leadership styles and adjust their approach depending on the context. These

40 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

41 15 out of 1955 respondents reported that they had not learned or gained any of the response options as a result of participating in the HtGM programme.

shifts were often attributed to the cumulative effect of structured learning, peer group discussions, and self-reflection.

While the most reported individual outcomes have remained consistent throughout the evaluation, there have been some notable differences in other expected outcomes. SME leaders in the most recent year of delivery were more likely to report:

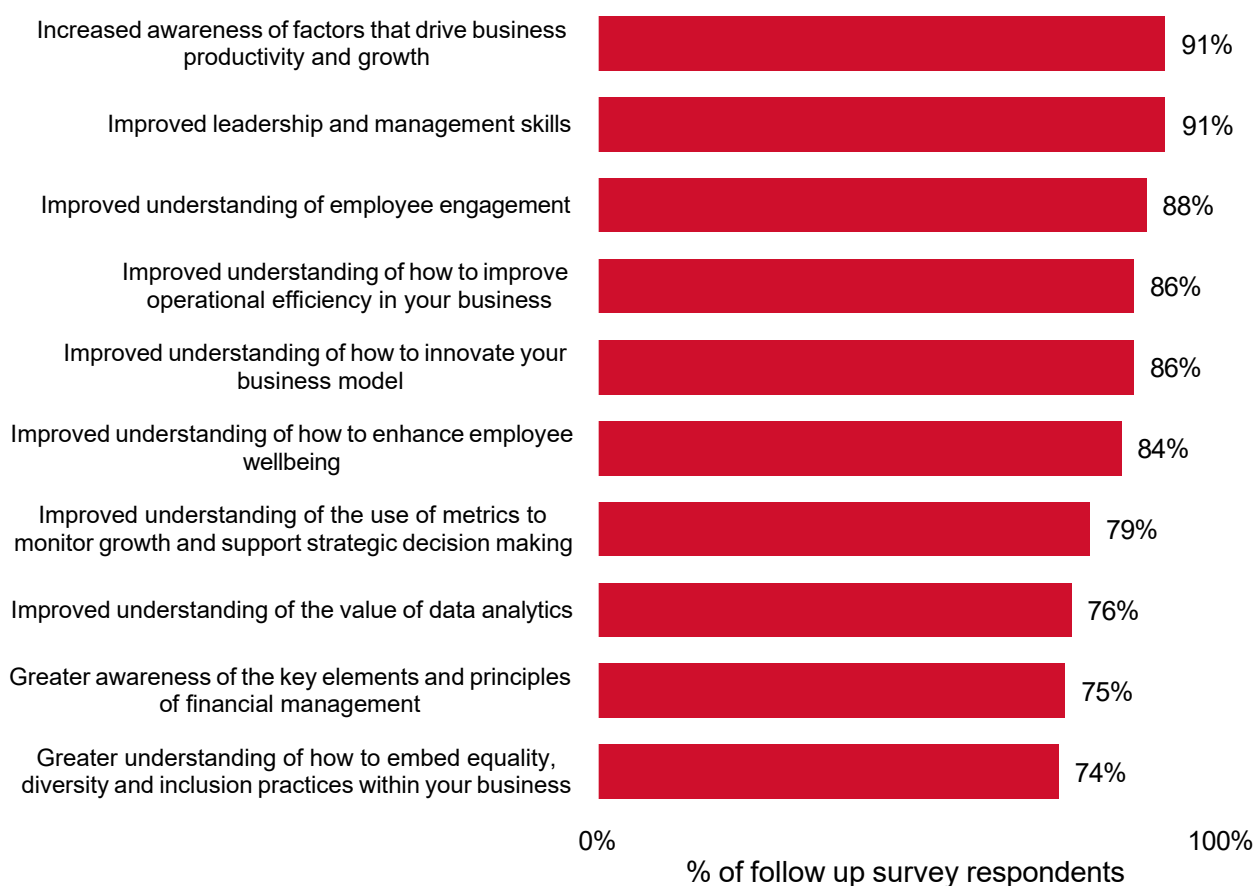
- improvements in their awareness of the key principles of **financial management** (69% in Year 2 versus 79% in Year 4) (this aligns to the change in SME leaders' expectations of HtGM at the time of applying reported in Chapter 4);
- increased understanding of how to embed **equality, diversity and inclusion** practices (70% in Year 2 versus 77% in Year 4); and
- understanding of **how to use metrics** to monitor growth and support strategic decision making (75% in Year 2 versus 80% in Year 4).

**Qualitative feedback from SME leaders consistently identified gains in business knowledge and leadership skills.** Several SME leaders reported that their understanding of financial management had improved. One SME leader, who was a Chief Operations Officer in charge of product development and team management, reported that they had previously avoided engaging with financial planning but now felt equipped to participate in budgetary decisions, describing how *"I'm happy to challenge things now that I wouldn't before"*,

Programme completers also reported improvements across a range of **best practice management and leadership approaches** (e.g., employee engagement (88%), business model innovation (86%)) and technical know-how (e.g., monitoring growth via metrics (79%)) that would make them better leaders. Interview evidence indicated that SME leaders were more effectively interrogating management information, particularly around managing financial risks, and had developed a stronger grasp of strategic frameworks, such as goal-setting tools and KPI tracking, which they had begun to apply in their organisations.

Survey data analysis reveals a statistically significant positive association between reporting at least one of the individual-level outcomes listed in Figure 14 and the following factors: completing a Growth Action Plan (discussed below); completing most or all of the ten mentoring sessions, or being female. No statistically significant associations were found between these outcomes and either engagement in the Alumni Network or being matched with a mentor. These findings indicate a relationship between these factors but cannot be assumed to be causal.

Figure 14: Which (if any) of the following have you learned or gained from participation in the Help to Grow Management Programme?



Source: Ipsos 2025. Base: all (1,955). Question type: multimode

As reported in the interim impact evaluation, 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<sup>42</sup>. 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>43</sup> Survey evidence suggests that awareness of these factors occurred 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.

**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

42 The effect of HtGM on improved awareness was measured using responses to the statement “I am aware of factors that drive growth in SMEs and have considered what this means for my business”. On a 5- point likert scale, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, businesses that enrolled in HtGM, responded 1.26 points higher than businesses in the wider SMEs population. This effect is statistically significant at the 1% confidence level.

43 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”.

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.

## 5.4 Business planning and strategy

The evaluation found emerging evidence to suggest the programme had contributed to SME leaders deepening their understanding of their business needs and producing a Growth Action Plan. Table 16 provides a summary of the strength of evidence against the two key outcomes.

Table 16: Evidence against individual level outcome hypothesis 3

Outcome of interest	Strength of evidence
Improved understanding of business needs	Emerging evidence
Development of bespoke Growth Action Plan to drive business growth	Emerging evidence

Source: Ipsos

There is qualitative evidence to suggest that the improvements in skills, knowledge and understanding led to **increased understanding of business needs** amongst programme completers. Participants reported that the programme helped them identify weaknesses or issues in their business. In some cases, this was a process of validating their existing knowledge (as reported above) but in other instances, the programme challenged their pre-existing ideas and helped them to reassess what their priorities were in reality, rather than what they had previously assumed. This was often a result of 'stepping back' from the business and having the opportunity to evaluate different parts of their business and strategy.

**Most (72%) programme completers had produced a GAP to support the implementation of their learning, although this is below the programme's target of 90% GAP completion.** The drop in GAP completion reported in the interim impact evaluation (66% in Year 3) had returned to Year 1 and 2 levels in the final year of the evaluation (72% in Year 4).

Where participants had developed a GAP, they tended to engage with the tools provided by businesses schools: almost all (87%) used the GAP workbook to support their GAP development, finding it a useful framework to structure their thinking. Others adapted the materials to update existing planning processes already in place within their businesses. The process of producing a GAP was considered most valuable for business leaders who were new to their role or had no prior experience of business planning, as it helped translate new knowledge into an implementable and achievable plan. The GAP was also seen as a powerful accountability tool. For others, it was a mechanism to formalise existing plans, ensuring they were founded on an established business vision, aligned to strategic priorities, and included SMART objectives.

As reported in the interim impact evaluation, there was a clear consensus among programme completers, mentors, and business schools that a key barrier to GAP completion was the template itself. It was widely deemed to be overly complex, although business schools made changes to simplify it at various points in delivery. Other reasons for not producing a GAP included, a lack of time (39%), difficulties understanding the value of producing a formal plan (9%) and lack of awareness that they were expected to produce a GAP at all (4%).

## 5.5 Networks and collaboration

The evaluation found some evidence to suggest that 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. A summary of the evidence against the outcomes of interest is provided in Table 17.

Table 17: Evidence against individual level outcome hypothesis #4

Outcome of interest	Strength of evidence	Key metric
Increased interaction with peers from other SMEs / sectors	Emerging evidence	68% meet with peers at least quarterly
Expanded peer support network	Emerging evidence	63% had expanded their peer network

Source: Ipsos

**The development of new professional networks was a key motivation for SME leaders to join the course and a key outcome of the programme.** In keeping with the interim impact evaluation, around two thirds (63%) of programme completers agreed that HtGM had enabled them to expand their peer network to "some extent" or "to a great extent". Furthermore, just over half (58%) reported that they had stayed in touch with at least some of the SME leaders from their programme cohort and the majority of respondents still appeared to favour informal networking beyond the course, with 68% having informal discussions with other businesses at least quarterly. Around four in ten (43%) of programme completers reported keeping in touch with their mentor after completing the programme.<sup>44</sup>

Qualitative evidence indicates that, in some cases, these new connections led to direct business collaborations: one interviewee had contracted a cohort peer for advice on business automation, while another had begun exploring a joint venture with a fellow programme completer. The value of these connections was also noted in the context of the alumni network, with one leader stating, "*I made some good contacts there that I will probably keep working with*".

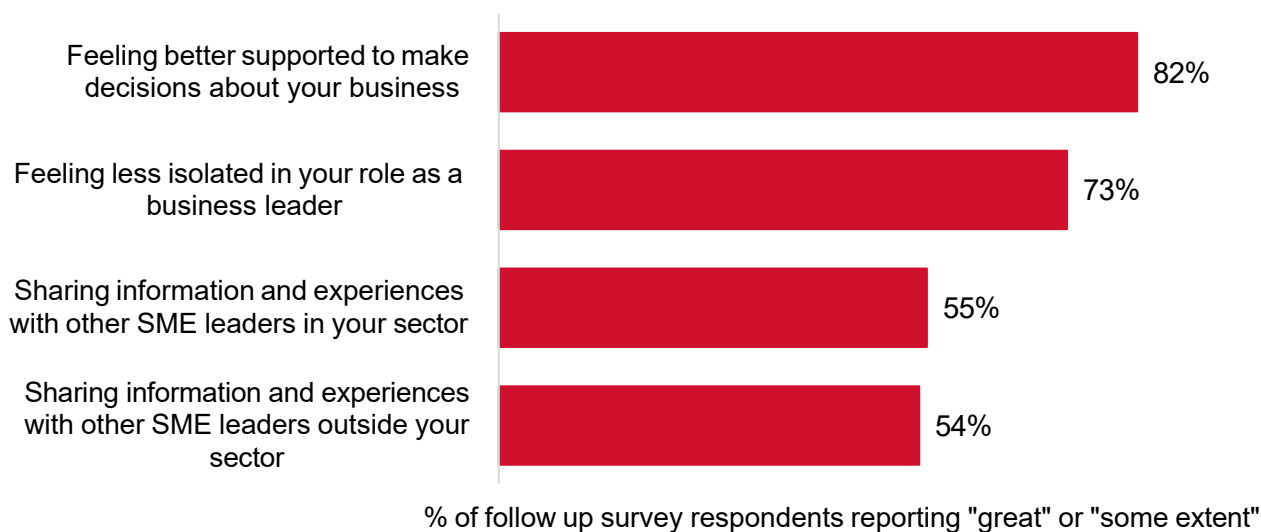
**Programme completers developed relationships through HtGM that were an additional source of support.** Most said that participation in HtGM had contributed to them feeling better supported to make decisions about their business<sup>45</sup> (82%) and less isolated in their role as a business leader (73%) (see Figure 15).

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44 This finding was more commonly reported by female SME leaders (47% had stayed in touch with a mentor, compared to 40% male SME leaders).

45 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 15: To what extent has participation in the Help to Grow Management Programme contributed to you ...?



Source: Ipsos 2025; Base: All (n=1,955); Question type: multicode

### Pathways to impact

The networks developed through HtGM served as a valuable forum for sharing best practice for programme completers. SME leaders valued the space to speak candidly with peers and highlighted the role of the peer groups and alumni networks.

- **Structured peer groups** were reported to be a central mechanism for building relationships between participants. SME leaders were generally positive about this element, with several stating that the peer group meetings were the sessions they "*got the most out of*" and were helpful for both "*ongoing support and for networking*". Business schools similarly recognised the strength of peer learning and noted that face-to-face workshops were particularly effective for creating collective accountability and embedding knowledge through shared stories.
- The **alumni network** was designed to provide a formal structure for continued networking post-programme. For those who engaged, the benefits cited include "*ongoing support, learning and accountability*". SME leaders reportedly received "*really useful*" practical advice from peers in the network that helped them make difficult business decisions.

### Unintended consequences

The evaluation identified limited self-reported evidence to suggest that the programme had contributed to unintended consequences amongst some participants.

- **Business changes not well received by staff:** one SME leader experienced pushback from employees when they introduced more formal management structures (e.g., annual reviews, specific employee targets, performance related targets). In this instance, the SME leader would have benefitted from guidance on how to roll out policies that may be negatively viewed by employees even if the potential benefits to the company were clear.
- **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.
- **Time away from the business:** two SME leaders completing the programme in Year 4 felt that their absence from their business due to the time commitments of the programme was a negative consequence in the short term, with both describing their experience as "intense". Nevertheless, both were positive about the programme overall and would recommend it.

## 6. Programme effectiveness (self-reported business outcomes)

### 6.1 Introduction

The individual outcomes reported in Chapter 5 are expected to lead to improvements in the business practices of participating SMEs, ultimately leading to improvements in firm-level productivity. This chapter presents available evidence against two key hypotheses informed by the Theory of Change (Table 18). It assesses the extent to which the programme has contributed towards intended business outcomes based on the analysis reported in the [interim impact evaluation](#) (including evidence from PSM analysis between programme completers and eligible SMEs in the wider business population<sup>46</sup>) and supplemented with the final results of surveys and interviews with programme completers.

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

All evidence reported in this chapter is self-reported and will therefore be subject to a degree of self-selection bias. A detailed overview of the methodological limitations is provided in Chapter 3.

Table 18: HtGM business level outcome hypotheses

Hypothesis	Description
1	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.
2	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).

Source: Ipsos UK

### 6.2 Leadership and management

The evaluation found **good evidence** to suggest that HtGM contributed to improved leadership and management of SMEs. A high-level summary of the evidence against the relevant outcomes is presented in Table 19 and discussed in the sections that follow.

Table 19: Evidence scorecard hypothesis 1

Outcome	Strength of evidence	Key metric
Diffusion of knowledge	Good	90% of leaders shared knowledge from HtGM within six weeks

46 Note: the PSM analysis has not been updated in the final year because of the focus on the final impact analysis using secondary data sources.

Outcome	Strength of evidence	Key metric
<b>More effective leadership</b>	Good	92% reported improved leadership and management
<b>Improved employee engagement</b>	Good	83% reported improved team relationships
<b>Improved employee retention</b>	Emerging	50% reported HtGM participation contributed to improved employee retention

Source: Ipsos

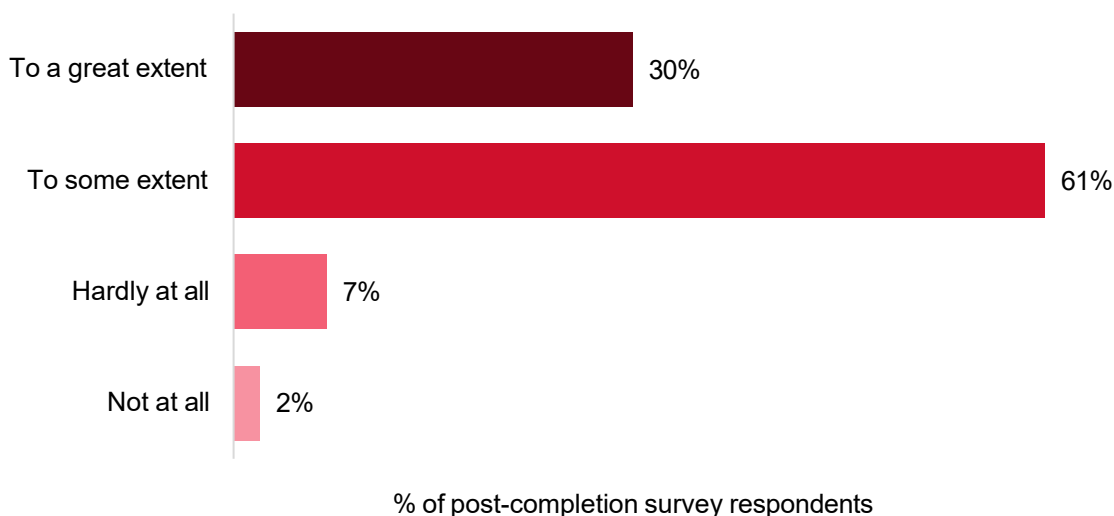
### Diffusion of knowledge

**There is good evidence to suggest that SME leaders completing HtGM diffuse the knowledge gained from the programme within their business.** The majority (90%) of SME leaders completing the programme had shared what they had learned or gained with others in their business within six weeks of completion (Figure 16). This figure was unchanged amongst those surveyed six months post-completion, suggesting that most knowledge diffusion happens in the very short term. This was corroborated by depth interviews with SME leaders, many of whom reported sharing knowledge ‘in real time’ while participating in the programme rather than waiting until the course finished to disseminate their knowledge.

**The proportion of HtGM programme completers diffusing knowledge within their business increased over time.** The highest levels of knowledge sharing were reported by programme completers in Year 4 (93%, up from 89% in Years 1 and 2). Subgroup analysis of the data identified some notable variations:

- Leaders of micro-SMEs were more likely to have shared their new skills, knowledge and understanding extensively than leaders of larger SMEs (31% had shared to a ‘great extent’ compared to 19%).
- SME leaders from an ethnic minority background were slightly more likely to have extensively shared their skills, knowledge and understanding than SME leaders from a non-ethnic minority background (36% had shared to a ‘great extent’ compared to 30%).
- Female SME leaders were more likely to have shared skills, knowledge and understanding to some or a great extent than male SME leaders (93% compared to 89%).

Figure 16: To what extent have you shared what you have learned or gained from participation in the programme with others within your businesses?



Source: Ipsos 2025 Post Completion survey. Base: All (n=2,050) Question type: single choice

### Pathway to impact

Evidence from focus groups and depth interviews provided insight into the processes by which HtGM completers shared their new skills, knowledge and understanding within their firms.

- 1) **Identify elements of the HtGM curriculum most relevant to their business:** programme completers benefited from identifying modules or foundational principles that were priority areas for improvement in their firm. This was said to have helped target efforts and made the process of sharing their new skills, knowledge and understanding less daunting. Most commonly, SME leaders reported focusing on sharing modular content relating to marketing and brand vision, mission and values (Modules 4 and 5).
- 2) **Work with a mentor to translate abstract knowledge into tangible actions:** some programme completers used their mentoring sessions to focus on *how* they could apply knowledge and approaches from the HtGM curriculum to their business. In practice, this sometimes took the form of SME leaders brainstorming approaches to disseminate knowledge with their staff. In some cases, SME leaders used tools and techniques signposted by business schools or mentors to develop a plan.
- 3) **Direct engagement with their workforce:** there was evidence to suggest that diffusion was most effective when programme completers explicitly shared their new skills, knowledge and understanding with their staff (e.g., at an Away Day using principles from HtGM to collaboratively develop and define organisational values).

### More effective leadership

**There is evidence to suggest that HtGM contributed to more effective leadership within participating SMEs.** Almost all (92%) reported an improvement in the leadership and management of their business within six months of completing the programme (Figure 17) As reported in the interim impact evaluation, the strongest evidence relates to the resilience of firm-level leadership. Programme completers had significantly greater confidence in their firm's resilience and their ability to lead through change and uncertainty than similar SMEs leaders in the wider UK economy.

The new leadership and management approaches adopted by programme completers appear to have contributed to **more effective employee engagement:** most SME leaders cited improved relationships between leadership and the wider team (83%) and improved employee engagement

(79%). Around seven in ten (71%) reported changes to their investment in staff development, either funding training or forming tailored employee development plans.

Figure 17: To what extent has participating in HtGM contributed to...? (Management and leadership approaches)



Source: Six month follow-up survey. Base (n=1955). Question type: Multi code. Note: some bars do not sum to 100% because of rounding.

## Implementing growth plans

There is good evidence to suggest that HtGM contributed to SMEs implementing plans for growth, most commonly GAPs but sometimes other existing business plans that were enhanced through participation in the programme. Table 20 provides a summary of the strength of evidence against the three key outcomes.

Table 20: Evidence scorecard hypothesis 2

Outcome of interest	Strength of evidence	Key metric
<b>GAPs are implemented</b>	Good evidence	81% had made changes to the way they manage, organise or operate their business or intended to within six months
<b>Improved efficiency and effectiveness of key business processes</b>	Good evidence	75% reported improved efficiency and effectiveness of processes relating to staff and business operations
<b>Increased innovation and / or adoption of best practice approaches</b>	Good evidence	79% reported adoption of best practice approaches and 67% reported increased innovation within their business

Source: Ipsos UK

## Implementing GAPs

Whilst the proportion of programme completers who developed a Growth Action Plan fell short of HtGM targets (Chapter 5), **evidence suggests that the programme 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 the programme.<sup>47</sup> Around two thirds (68%) of programme completers had made changes to the way they manage, organise or operate their business, regardless of whether they had completed a GAP. A further quarter (25%) intended to so in the future.

Analysis of the self-reported survey data indicates a positive, statistically significant **correlation between completing a GAP and reporting business level outcomes.**<sup>48</sup> Despite positive feedback on the role mentors played in supporting programme participants to develop a GAP, there was no evidence to indicate that mentoring contributed to the implementation of growth plans. This was also true of the alumni network, where feedback on how helpful the network was with regards to implementation of GAPs was mixed (53% reported the network was "very" or "fairly" useful, 45% reported "not very" or "not at all" useful).

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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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### Pathways to impact

Qualitative feedback on GAP implementation varied across the four years of the evaluation. Programme completers who were interviewed in the first few years of HtGM delivery more frequently discussed progress implementing GAPs, perhaps mirroring the slightly higher GAP completion rates in those years. Programme completers across the board were confident to implement changes intended to drive growth regardless of whether they had produced a GAP, amended an existing plan or not developed a plan for growth at all. However, it is worth noting that confidence to make changes does not provide insights into the quality or appropriateness decisions in driving forward business growth. It is reasonable to assume that GAPs (or augmented business plans) that were informed by the HtGM curriculum may be more effective in driving business level improvements that were not.

SMEs who took part in focus groups and interviews found value in the development and implementation of a GAP in different ways. This can be broadly grouped into 'levels' of engagement (see Table 21), some programme participants engaged in all three levels, others only engaged in one.

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47 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.

48 This relationship cannot be assumed to be causal, rather an indication of a positive relation.

Table 21: Levels of GAP engagement

Level of engagement	Description
1	GAP is a comprehensive document, compiling all relevant lessons from HtGM but without clear strategy, plan for growth or priorities. The GAP is frequently used by the SME leader and treated as a 'personal guide' to inform their day-to-day role rather than overall business direction.
2	GAP is a targeted business plan focused on a defined period (e.g., 12 months) and/or topic (e.g., introducing a new product, adoption of AI, employee retention). GAP is used intensively for its original purpose but not always revisited or revisited for future growth / priorities.
3	GAP includes strategic priorities, actions and targets for the next 5-10 years. It is treated as a guide for annual business decisions and informs all decision making to ensure alignment to long-term plan.

Source: Ipsos UK

### Business outcomes commonly associated with GAP implementation

Participating in HtGM (and in most cases completing a GAP) was found to be associated with a significant positive effect on self-reported firm-level capabilities 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.<sup>49</sup>

- **Efficiency:** Within six months, programme completers reported 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.
- **Effectiveness:** SME leaders completing HtGM rated their firm's **understanding of operational effectiveness and how it can be improved** significantly higher than SME leaders who had not completed the programme.<sup>50</sup> Within six months, three quarters of programme completers attributed improvements in the effectiveness of internal staff processes (77%) (e.g., annual review process, line management arrangements, performance reviews)<sup>51</sup> and the effectiveness of their business operations (75%) (e.g., stock management, resource planning) to HtGM to a 'great' or 'some' extent.
- **Adoption of best practice and innovation:** 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

49 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.

50 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.

51 SME leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to have increased the effectiveness of processes relating to staff than SME leaders from non-ethnic minority backgrounds (84% versus 76%).

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.

Figure 18 provides an overview of the reported improvements to business capabilities by HtGM programme completers.

Figure 18: To what extent has participating in HtGM contributed to...? (Outcomes relating to GAP implementation)



Source: Six month follow-up survey. Base (n=1,955). Question type: Multi code. Note: some bars do not sum to 100% because of rounding.

## 7. Programme impact

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents evidence for the business impact hypothesis outlined in the Theory of Change (Table 22). It explores whether improvements in management and leadership and GAP implementation have delivered improvements in business growth, productivity and resilience. The analysis draws on evidence from the econometric analyses of administrative datasets, supplemented by PSM analysis from the [interim impact evaluation](#) and self-reported evidence from surveys and interviews with programme completers. These sources illustrate *how* and *why* outcomes and impacts may or may not have materialised. Chapter 8 on conclusions will include any recommendations for future evaluation.

The econometric analysis of administrative datasets included tests on demographic characteristics and different levels of programme engagement, using MIS data and self-reported survey feedback. This chapter only reports on statistically significant findings. A detailed summary of the econometric analysis underpinning these findings, along with full results, is set out in Annex F.

Table 22: HtGM business level impact hypotheses

Hypothesis	Description
1	SME with leaders who completed HtGM will have improved management and leadership skills and will be delivering tailored Growth Action Plans that will improve business resilience and stimulate business growth and productivity.

Source: Ipsos UK

For each outcome, we provide a summary of the evidence, it's strength (assessed using criteria in Annex D), and discussion of contributing factors.

### 7.2 Overview of impact evidence

Econometric analysis of administrative data indicates that HtGM participation increased business resilience but did not generate statistically significant business growth or productivity improvements within two years of completion. This is not an unusual finding within this timeframe (see section 7.3).

Table 23: Evidence scorecard hypothesis 1

Outcome of interest	Strength of evidence	Evidence sources	Key metric	Latest available data
<b>Business resilience</b>	Strong evidence	Econometric analyses of administrative data sources and qualitative interviews with programme completers	Statistically significant evidence from econometric analysis from a robust counterfactual that participating in HtGM increased SMEs likelihood of survival.	BSD 2024 (FY 2022/23)

Outcome of interest	Strength of evidence	Evidence sources	Key metric	Latest available data
<b>Business growth (employment and turnover)</b>	Limited evidence	Econometric analyses of administrative data sources and self-reported survey feedback (six month follow up)	Participation in HtGM variable in the econometric analysis is not currently significant, so we are unable to say at this stage whether or not participating in HtGM increased firm-level employment and turnover.  37% of programme completers reported that they had increased employee headcount as a result of participating in the programme.	BSD 2024 (FY 2022/23)
<b>Increased productivity (Turnover / employment)</b>	No evidence	Econometric analyses of administrative data sources	Participation in HtGM variable in the econometric analysis is not currently significant, so we are unable to say at this stage whether or not participating in HtGM increased productivity (measured by turnover / employment).	BSD 2024 (FY 2022/23)
<b>Accessing follow-on business support</b>	Limited evidence	Self-reported survey feedback (six month follow up)	49% of programme completers reported that HtGM had contributed to their business accessing additional business support	June 2025

Source: Ipsos

### 7.3 Business survival

**The impact analysis found that completing HtGM had a positive effect on business survival.**

Firms that completed HtGM were more likely to be operating one year post-COVID-19 than firms that did not complete the programme. This supports the programme Theory of Change and indicates HtGM successfully increased the resilience of participating firms following an unprecedented global pandemic.

The analysis estimated the probability of business survival for SMEs whose leaders completed the programme, partially completed, or withdrew or dropped out. A business was considered “active” if it appeared in the BSD annually from 2021 (FY 2019/20) through to 2024 (FY 2022/23). Businesses absent from the BSD during this time were considered inactive.

Table 24 presents the estimated impact of HtGM participation on business survival (the likelihood of a business remaining active after programme completion). Firms whose leaders dropped out or withdrew were 1.3% less likely to remain operational in BSD 2024 than those whose leaders completed the whole programme.

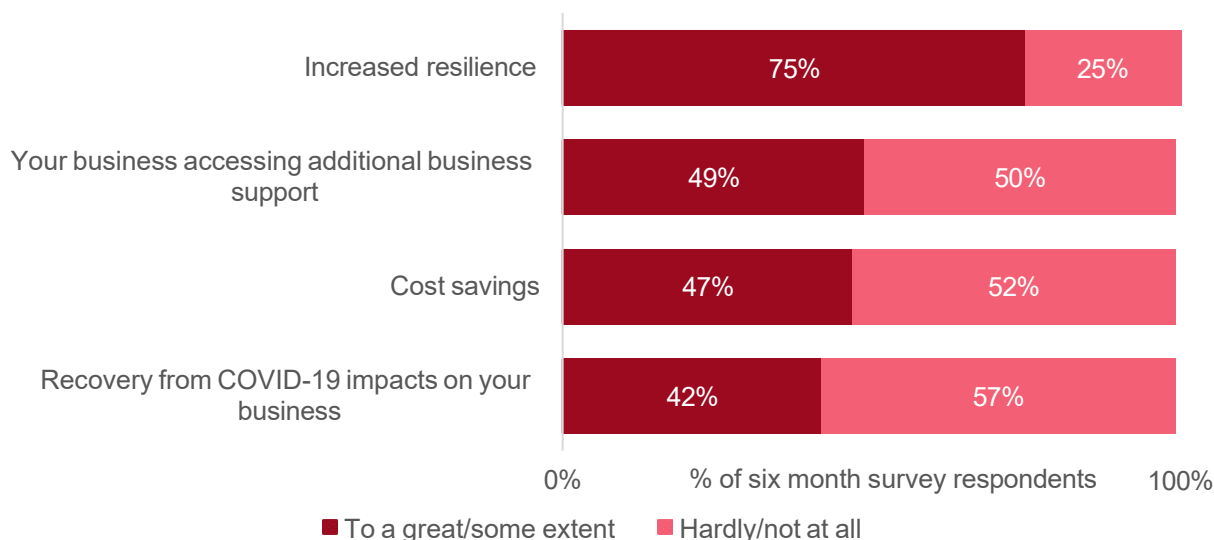
Table 24: Estimated impact of HtGM participation on business survival (2021-2024)

	N	Covariates used in the model	Marginal effect	Standard Error	p-value
<b>HtGM partial completers</b>	4,201	Turnover in 2020, employment in 2020, sector, region	0.007	0.005	0.200
<b>HtGM dropped or withdrawn</b>	4,201	Turnover in 2020, employment in 2020, sector, region	-0.013**	0.007	0.052

Source: Business Structure Database, logistic regression on the likelihood of survival. The use of (\*) in the table represents whether a coefficient is statistically significant. The number of stars represent the significance level with (\*) indicating the coefficient is significant at the 10% level, (\*\*) at the 5% level and (\*\*\*) at the 1% level.

Self-reported survey feedback from programme completers also provided evidence that HtGM increased participating firms' survival. Most programme completers (75%) reported that the programme had increased their business's **resilience to external economic factors**, whilst two in five (42%) indicated it helped their business **recover from the pandemic** and associated economic challenges (Figure 19). Qualitative research confirmed these findings, with programme completers reporting that their businesses became better able to withstand economic uncertainty through HtGM-driven improvements: changes to their business models, more confident leadership, improved strategic decision-making, enhanced financial resilience and greater operational stability.

Figure 19: To what extent has participating in HtGM contributed to...? (Outcomes relating to other business outcomes)



Source: Six month follow-up survey. Base (n=1955). Question type: Multi code. Note: some bars do not sum to 100% because of rounding.

There is also evidence to suggest that the programme enabled businesses to survive challenging economic times through:

- **Improved cashflow management**, which was almost twice as likely amongst micro-SMEs as larger firms (38% reported HtGM had contributed 'to some extent', compared to 20% of larger SMEs) and more pronounced amongst leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds (58% compared to 46% of non-ethnic minority leaders).
- **Cost savings**, which were more common amongst leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds (61% compared to 46% non-ethnic minority leaders).

- **Access to follow-on business support**, which was particularly prevalent amongst larger SMEs (65% reported HtGM contributed 'to some extent', compared to 54% of micro-SMEs) and leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds (58% compared to 47% of non-ethnic minority leaders). Whilst business support was typically accessed post-programme, one Year 4 completer enrolled in HtGM alongside receiving a Government grant. The grant addressed immediate financial issues, whilst HtGM built longer-term resilience and growth prospects. They specifically credited skills, knowledge and support gained through HtGM with helping them identify barriers to growth and reshape their business accordingly.

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*"The programme also opened the doors to the government grant, because if it wasn't for the programme, I wouldn't have known...having the support from the university, from [the business school], from the programme, from the business group, is really helping us to stay afloat." – Year 3 programme completer*

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## 7.4 Business growth and productivity

### Turnover and employment growth

The econometric impact analysis found **no statistically significant programme evidence of impacts of the programme on employment levels or turnover** within two years, consistent across all econometric models and specifications. These findings should be interpreted within the following context:

- The data is subject to reporting lags, with measures of turnover and employment potentially two years out of date<sup>52</sup>. For example, data for the first year of the programme covering 2021/2022 became available in 2023. Participating businesses also need time to complete the programme and make changes to their businesses, with the first cohort of participants completing in late 2021. Whilst growth might reasonably be expected within the first few years of a business support intervention, outcomes may emerge later given the economic context (discussed in the next bullet).
- The programme launched during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 to support SMEs to recover and grow. Since launch, the UK economy has faced additional economic shocks (war in Ukraine, energy crisis, rising interest rates), creating further challenges for UK businesses.
- Process evaluation and self-reported evidence suggest the programme is well designed, relevant and drives improvements in management and leadership practices. However, the intervention's effect on business performance (e.g. turnover and employment) may be impacted by the business' absorptive capacity during a period of consecutive economic shocks
- Furthermore, HtGM's impact on turnover and employment would need to be considerable to be detectable amongst these economic shocks.

As set out in the previous section, self-reported feedback from programme completers suggested that HtGM commonly supported SMEs resilience to economic shocks, and that while business

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<sup>52</sup> An example of data lags includes the Business Structural Database data used to conduct the econometric analysis. The BSD is an annual snapshot of the Interdepartmental Business Register (IDBR) taken at the end of March each year. For example, BSD 2024 covers financial year 2022/2023. More detail can be found in Annex F Technical Annex

leaders had ambitions to grow their business, survival was more of a priority. Half of HtGM programme completers (50%) fed back that participating in HtGM had improved **employee retention** within their firm. This effect was particularly pronounced amongst leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds (65% reported improved employee retention vs 48% of non-ethnic minority background SME leaders) and leaders of micro-SMEs (who were twice as likely to attribute employee retention to their participation in HtGM (Micro SME leaders (14%) ‘to a great extent’ compared to 6% of larger SMEs)).<sup>53</sup> Interview evidence highlighted that this often was achieved through the introduction of new processes (e.g., a more structured management framework, annual review processes) that had led to employees feeling more invested in by their employer.

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**A Year 2 programme completer** (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%.

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### **Increased productivity**

The econometric impact analysis did not find statistically significant evidence that the programme affects productivity within two years of completion. This was consistent across all econometric models and specifications. As the programme only began in 2021 and the available data only extends to March 2023, this finding is not unexpected – productivity impacts typically emerge at least five years post-intervention, so detected effects at this stage would be premature. This analysis should be continued in consequent years to assess the economic performance of participating firms, identify ways to better support business growth, and repeat econometric analysis as data become available to detect medium-term business growth and productivity improvements.

## 8. Conclusions

This report presented the final evaluation findings in relation to the process and impact evaluation questions for the HtGM programme (2021-2025). This final chapter provides a high-level overview of the evidence against the evaluation questions and provides recommendations for consideration in future evaluations.

### 8.1 Process evaluation

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

HtGM demonstrated strong effectiveness in both recruitment and completion. The programme attracted diverse SME leaders from sectors across the UK, delivering 617 cohorts through 66 business schools and reaching **9,847 SME leaders** between 2021 and 2025.<sup>54</sup> Demand for the programme was lower than anticipated in the first year of delivery, resulting in a considerable number of cohort cancellations. However, there was a notable improvement in recruitment in following years after targets were revised, eligibility criteria were broadened and business school marketing budgets were introduced.

The programme achieved high conversion rates on both measures: 83% of SME leaders who registered an interest in the HtGM programme subsequently enrolled, with this conversion rate remaining consistent over time. Similarly, 84% of enrolled participants completed the programme. Participants reflected positively on their application, enrolment and onboarding experiences, though some areas for improvement emerged, particularly regarding programme positioning and understanding of the target audience.

Engagement levels varied across programme elements, with module sessions and peer learning groups achieving highest participation. Non-completion primarily stemmed from individual circumstances (particularly competing time commitments) rather than programme design issues. Notably, nearly two thirds (61%) of non-completers expressed an interest in resuming the course at a later date.

These conversion and completion rates, combined with strong participant satisfaction, indicate the programme was highly effective in both recruiting and retaining SME leaders.

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

HtGM successfully delivered high quality business support, with 92% participant satisfaction. This satisfaction increased over time and was highest amongst micro-SME and female leaders. Programme completers endorsed both the quality and value: 92% would recommend HtGM to other business leaders, and 71% valued the programme above its £750 fee.

The curriculum was considered comprehensive and relevant, covering topics that nearly all programme completers found applicable to their business. SME leaders valued the breadth of content, with most finding something useful in each module. Micro-SMEs found modules on internationalisation and growth plan implementation particularly relevant compared to larger firms.

Mentoring emerged as the programme's highest rated element, with 89% satisfaction amongst participants who engaged. These participants reported their mentors' experience matched their needs well. However, engagement fell below expectations – only 32% of all HtGM participants completed the full ten hours of mentoring. Participants primarily used mentoring to expand on

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<sup>54</sup> The enrolment and completion figures presented here may be different to official releases due to the differing times that data was collected.

curriculum topics and address ad hoc business challenges, including accessing productivity tools. Whilst only 42% used mentoring for GAP development (the intended purpose), those who did rated the quality of support they received highly.

Engagement in the HtGM Alumni Network (launched in 2022) and business schools' tailored alumni activities remained modest but highly valued by those who had participated.

These consistently high satisfaction ratings across all programme elements demonstrate that HtGM successfully delivered high-quality business support, though mentoring engagement could be improved.

## 8.2 Impact evaluation

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

HtGM proved effective at teaching new skills and building confidence, though adoption of new practices was mixed. There is good evidence to suggest that HtGM improved participants' confidence, skills, knowledge and understanding of key management and leadership practices that are associated with firm-level productivity improvements:

- SME leaders who completed HtGM were significantly more **confident** in their management and leadership skills and ability to achieve their business goals despite obstacles than eligible SME leaders in the wider UK economy who did not participate in the programme.
- HtGM generated **improvements in skills, knowledge and understanding** across a range of topics, most commonly management and leadership skills and awareness of the factors that drive productivity. In later years of delivery, programme completers were more likely to report improvements in their awareness of financial management; equality, diversity and inclusion practices; and using metrics to monitor growth and support strategic decision making.
- Whilst there is self-reported evidence that the programme deepened SME leaders' **understanding of their business needs**, the proportion of SME leaders who created Growth Action Plans (GAPs) detailing changes to drive productivity improvements in their business was lower than anticipated.
- Evidence suggests that HtGM enabled 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.
- There is a positive relationship between SME leaders reporting at least one individual-level outcome and **completing a Growth Action Plan or being female**. There was also a positive correlation between completing most or all of the mentoring sessions and reporting individual outcomes.
- The **package of support** offered through the programme 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) made a distinct contribution.
- Participation in HtGM appears to have **generated some unintended consequences**. The programme inspired a small number of participants to leave their original employer for new jobs, and some participants sought additional development opportunities to build on their learning from HtGM.

*EQ4 & 5: What early changes are businesses making as a result of participating in the programme? What other factors influence how and what changes businesses are making after they complete the programme?*

Evidence suggests 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 sharing HtGM knowledge within their business within six weeks of completion. This typically happened through sharing learning with colleagues, improved workforce engagement and using tools from the HtGM curriculum. Leaders of microbusinesses, female leaders and SME leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to have shared knowledge extensively within their firm.
- There is good evidence to suggest that HtGM led to **more effective leadership and management practices**, particularly regarding **firm-level leadership resilience**: SME leaders completing HtGM had significantly greater confidence in their firm's ability to lead through change and uncertainty than leaders of similar SMEs in the wider UK economy.
- Although the proportion of completers who developed Growth Action Plans fell short of HtGM targets, programme completers had 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 associated with a significant positive correlation between completing a GAP and self-reported firm-level capabilities and experiences that often **precede longer-term improvements in firm-level productivity**: effectiveness of internal staff process (e.g. introduction of formal line management arrangements, performance reviews); effectiveness of business operations (e.g., new systems to support stock management and resource planning); and operational efficiency (e.g., via digitising systems and digital adoption).
- The **broader economic context** substantially influenced how and what changes business made after completing the programme. New activities were typically intended to support business survival, for example, through changes to business operations to improve cashflow management and generate cost savings and accessing follow-on business support.

*To what extent has the programme impacted productivity and recovery of participating SMEs?*

Econometric analysis of administrative data indicated that HtGM participation increased business resilience to COVID-19 and subsequent economic shocks. This validates the programme's original objectives and the programme-level Theory of Change. After two years, there was no statistically significant evidence that HtGM supported business growth. While this is not expected within the evaluation timeframe, primary evaluation data indicated that participation helped some firms retain staff, improve cashflow management, generate cost savings and access follow-on business support.

The evaluation found no evidence of improved firm-level productivity, but this is also not expected until at least five years post-intervention.

### 8.3 Summary

The evaluation demonstrates that HtGM successfully achieved its core objectives during a challenging economic period. The programme effectively recruited and retained SME leaders, delivered high-quality business support, and built participants' leadership and management capabilities and confidence. Whilst the programme strengthened business resilience during a period of economic shocks, evidence of productivity and growth impacts has not yet emerged, though these are not expected within the evaluation timeframe. The strong foundations of improved leadership skills, enhanced business confidence, and knowledge sharing within firms

suggest that longer-term business performance improvements may materialise as the economy stabilises.

## 8.4 Recommendations for future programme delivery

The evaluation highlighted potential areas for improvement to improve the effectiveness of the HtGM:

- **Target specific demographics** of SME leaders who appear to be benefiting most from the programme (e.g., leaders of micro-SMEs, female leaders and leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds).
- **Broaden the branding for the programme** to better emphasise the role HtGM can play in supporting business survival and resilience. Feedback from SME leaders suggested that the emphasis on growth sometimes led to some confusion as to whether the programme was targeted at businesses like theirs.
- **Reconsider the cost charged to SME leaders** to participate in the programme to ensure it is priced appropriately. Evidence suggests participants would be willing to pay more for the scheme.
- **Utilise evaluation evidence to support promotion of the programme** (e.g., HtGM completers willingness to pay for the scheme and recommend the programme to peers in their network, impact on business survival rates).
- **Introduce measures to increase engagement** with the mentoring offer and completing and implementing GAPS (via mentoring and the alumni network).

## 8.5 Considerations for the Phase 2 evaluation

Future evaluations of HtGM should seek to:

- Determine the minimum detectable effect size (MDES) of skills training programmes on firm level performance (employment, turnover, productivity and survival) and the timelines to impact.
- Explore why the programme has been particularly effective in supporting certain groups (e.g., micro-SMEs, female SME leaders and leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds).
- Explore how HtGM has improved firm level resilience and why it has not yet had impacts on business growth in the short term (e.g., including questions on staff retention and barriers to growth in surveys and qualitative interview guides). This would support understanding until more rounds of econometric analysis can be conducted.
- Analyse the profile of firms supported by HtGM to continue operating to identify any trends (e.g., are these high or low productivity firms? Are they concentrated sectors / regions / SMEs of a particular size?)
- Change the productivity measure in the impact analyses from the current proxy to a more robust measure of GVA per worker when the data are available.
- Future evaluation should assess the economic performance of participating firms, identify ways to better support business growth, and repeat econometric analysis as data become available to detect medium-term business growth and productivity improvements.

## Annex A – Overview of programme changes

Table A1: Overview of changes to HtGM (2021-2025)

Programme element	Description of programme change	Date of introduction
<b>Mentoring</b>	The mentoring consortium increased the number of Mentoring Relationship Advisors (MRAs). 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
<b>Mentoring</b>	Development of an interactive mentoring planner to support shared understanding of aims and mentoring and how best to use the time.	April 2024
<b>Marketing / demand generation</b>	HtGM LinkedIn social media and podcast launched	December 2023
<b>Supply</b>	New criteria introduced on filling and distributing cohorts, to improve cohort utilisation and prevent cancellations	2024
<b>Curriculum</b>	V3 of the curriculum rolled out.	February 2023

Source: DBT

## Annex B – HtGM Theory of Change

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

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

### Rationale

Table C1: Market failure arguments for Help to Grow: Management

Market failure	Description
<b>Information asymmetries</b>	<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> <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>55</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.

<sup>55</sup> Be the Business (2018), “How good is your business really? Raising our ambitions for business performance”

Market failure	Description
<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>56</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)

## Inputs

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

## Activities

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

BEIS are responsible for:

- **Programme management**, supported by subcontracted Project Management support (from MH+A), and oversight of programme delivery.
- **Leading the Project Board**, which monitors progress on curriculum development, mentoring, the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) through which the programme is delivered, business school engagement, participant engagement, registrations, data reporting, evaluation, and operating procedures.<sup>57</sup>
- **Leading composite workstreams** to the main Project Board, covering for example data monitoring, reporting and evaluation.
- **Promotion and marketing** of the programme and recruitment of eligible SMEs.

CABS/business schools are responsible for:

- **Development of the programme** learning objectives, curriculum content, course materials and delivery principles to ensure it is delivered cohesively and consistently across the UK.
- **Establishing a delivery network of business schools** across the UK to provide access to the programme to SMEs across the country.

<sup>56</sup> Valero, A (2021), Oxford Review of Economic Policy, “Education and management practices”, Vol. 37, Issue 2, pg 302-322

<sup>57</sup> Help to Grow: Management, Project Board reports 2021

- **Programme delivery**, including providing targeted leadership and management training alongside wraparound support (case study workshops, mentoring, peer learning groups and alumni network).
- **Recruitment of mentors** to the programme and matching them with SME leaders.

SME leaders are responsible for:

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

## Outputs and individual outcomes

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

- **Personal development:** after completing the twelve modules, peer-learning and mentoring, SME leaders are expected to be more confident in their ability to lead and manage their business, and more aware of their areas for improvement.
- **Skills, knowledge and understanding:** participation in the programme is expected to result in SME leaders developing a better understanding of the importance of leadership and management practices and greater awareness of the relationship between them and improved firm-level productivity. Completion of specific modules is expected to result in improved individual leadership and management skills (e.g. strategic thinking, decision making), facilitating better understanding of their business' needs.
- **Business planning and strategy:** drawing on improved leadership and management skills, knowledge and understanding, as well as support from a business mentor, SME leaders are expected to produce a Growth Action Plan. This will detail changes to drive productivity improvements within their business.<sup>58</sup>
- **Networks and collaboration:** the peer-learning groups and subsequent alumni networks will result in increased interactions between SME leaders within and between sectors. These newly formed networks are expected to provide a source of additional support to SME leaders to make decisions in their business, share best practice and build personal networks. The alumni network is expected to be a key source of support for participants as they move forward with implementation of the Growth Action Plans developed through the programme.

## Business outcomes

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<sup>58</sup> Growth Action Plans are recorded in an excel spreadsheet and detail specific business issues/opportunities, strategies to address the issue, how these strategies will be applied, resource requirements, barriers, KPIs, monitoring and responsibilities.

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

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

## Impacts

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

- **Business resilience and survival:** the training and support provided through Help to Grow: Management are likely to help businesses address issues triggered by the pandemic (e.g. cashflow), strengthening their balance sheets and ensuring the business can continue operating.
- **Firm expansion (turnover, GVA and employment) business performance:** successful implementation of Growth Action Plans should contribute to expansion of participating firms in terms of turnover, output (GVA) and employment. These types of effects are expected to be particularly significant amongst those implementing more than one change and where learning has been effectively diffused within the business.
  - within 2-3 years, turnover of participating firms is expected to be an average of 9.5% higher than similar sized firms.<sup>59</sup>
- **Improved firm-level productivity:** implementation of Growth Action Plans are expected to result in firms being better able to serve their customers at lower costs, attain higher prices for their products or services, or improved output per worker.
  - participating businesses are expected to experience an average 0.85% increase in productivity per worker.<sup>60</sup>

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

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<sup>59</sup> Help to Grow: Management BEIS target as set out in the ITT, informed by existing work delivered by BEIS/HMT

<sup>60</sup> Help to Grow: Management BEIS target as set out in the ITT.

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

## Underlying assumptions

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

### Assumptions underpinning the Help to Grow: Management Theory of Change

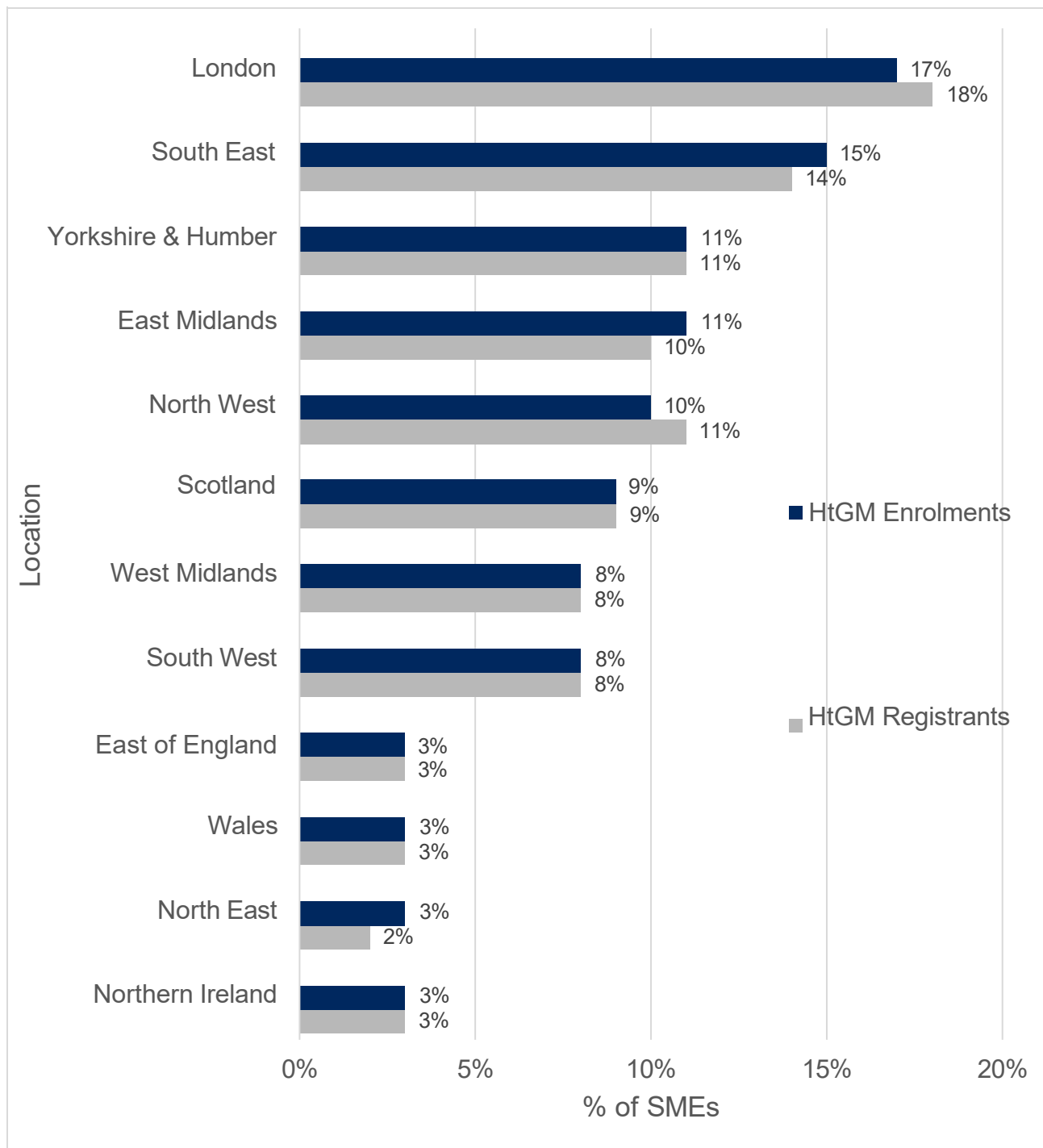
Design	Delivery	Impact
<p>Productivity can be improved by changes in leadership and management practices.</p> <p>The curriculum sufficiently covers the breadth of topics required to drive productivity in long-tail SMEs.</p> <p>The time inputs required by the programme are not too onerous for target SMEs to participate.</p> <p>SME leaders have sufficient information to assess the quality of the programme and are willing to pay £750 to participate.</p> <p>More intensive training programmes have greater impact than light-touch programmes.</p>	<p>Marketing and promotion materials are effective in reaching target SMEs.</p> <p>Sufficient numbers of business schools sign up to delivery to facilitate local provision to SMEs.</p> <p>SME leaders complete all elements of the programme.</p> <p>The programme is delivered consistently across business schools.</p> <p>COVID-19 conditions enable the programme to be delivered both in-person and online.</p> <p>SME leaders are matched to appropriate mentors who are able to provide high quality and relevant advice, guidance and support.</p>	<p>SME leaders develop Growth Action Plans that are SMART.</p> <p>Businesses have the required resources to implement the changes set out in their Growth Action Plans.</p> <p>Businesses have adequate skills in the wider workforce to implement change.</p> <p>Alumni networks work effectively to embed best practice and share learning, including supporting implementation of Action Plans (also applicable to delivery).</p> <p>Curriculum remains relevant to the social-economic context that SMEs operate in.</p>

Source: Ipsos

## Annex C – Profile of demand

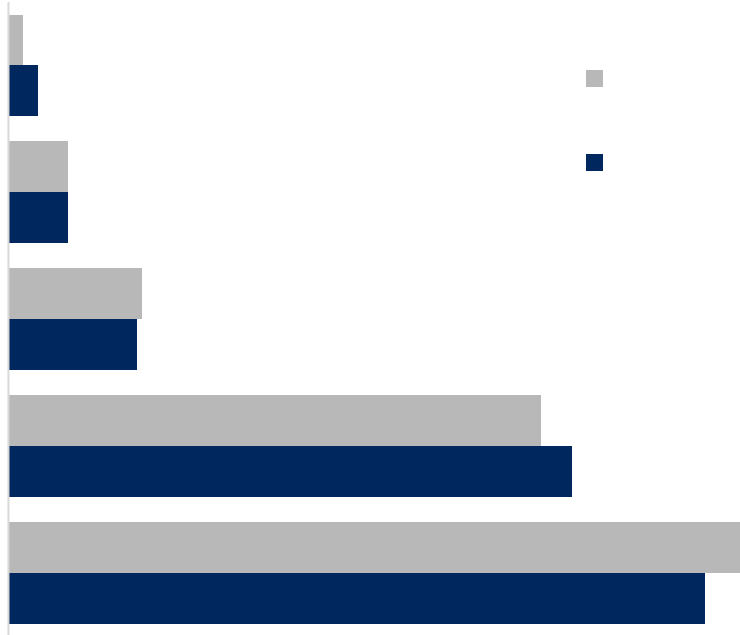
This annex provides an overview of the profile of demand for HtGM broken down by SME leaders enrolling and registering for cohorts. It aggregates data from the launch of the programme in 2021 until December 2025.

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



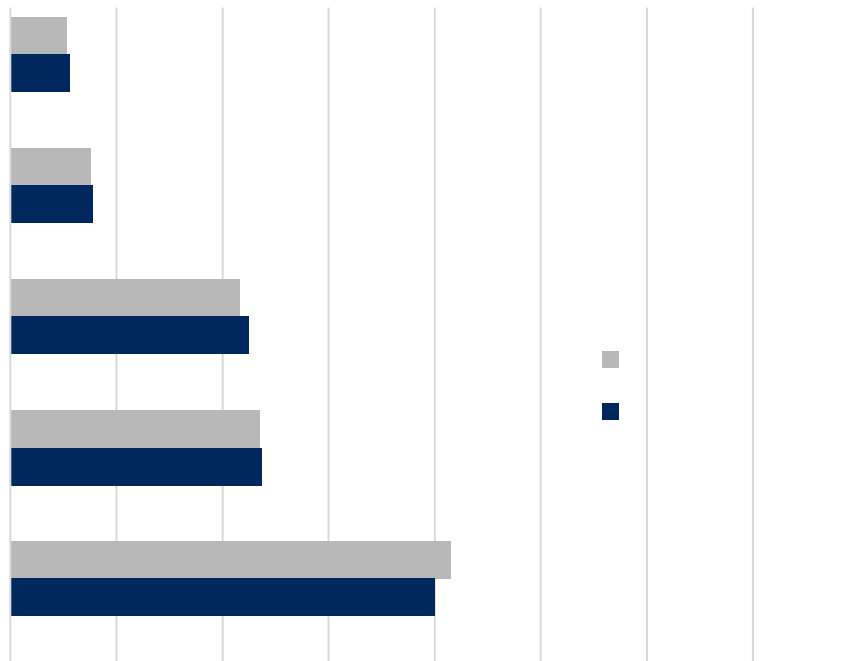
Source: DBT monitoring data,

Years in operation

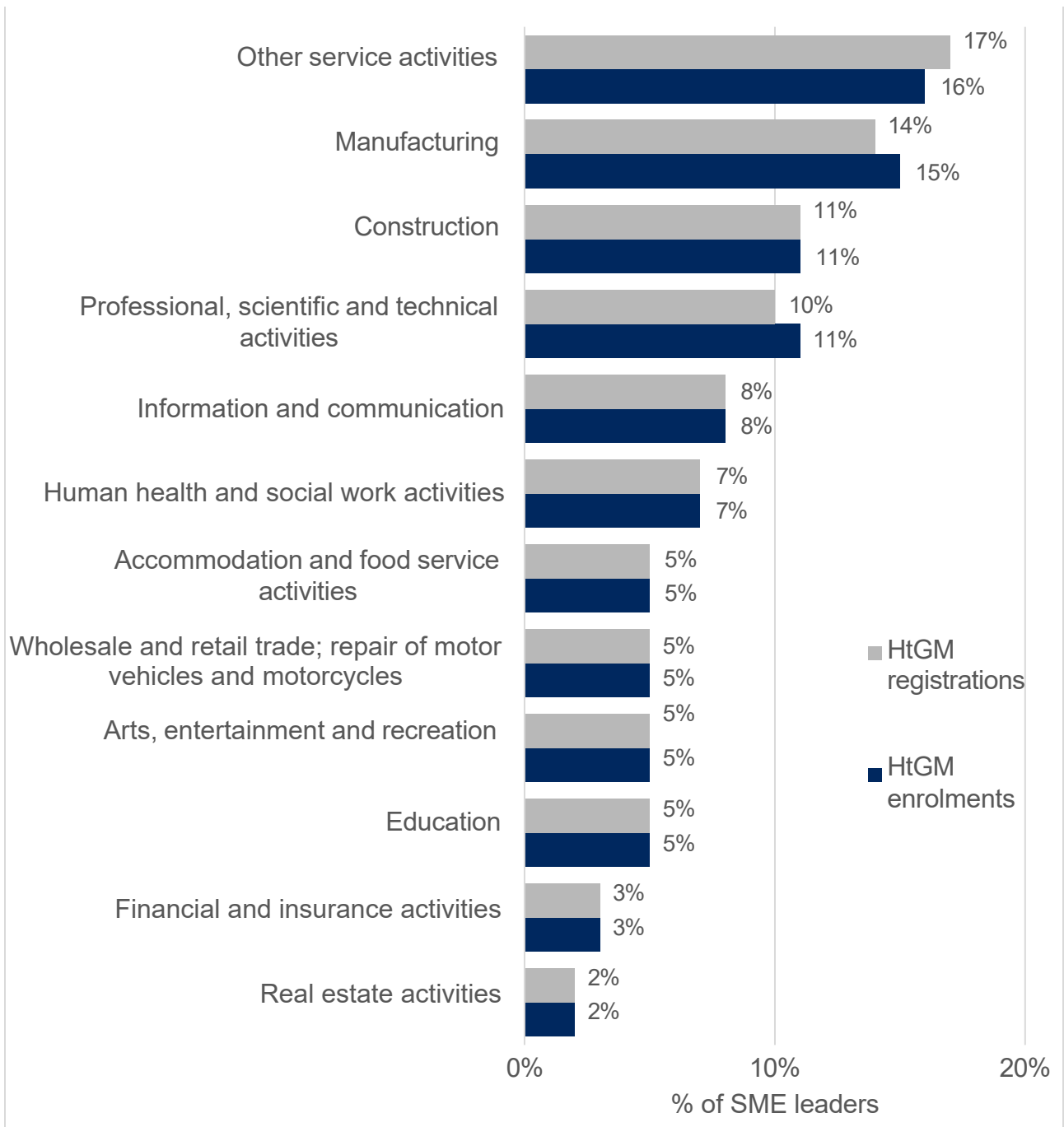


Source: DBT monitoring data,

No. of employees

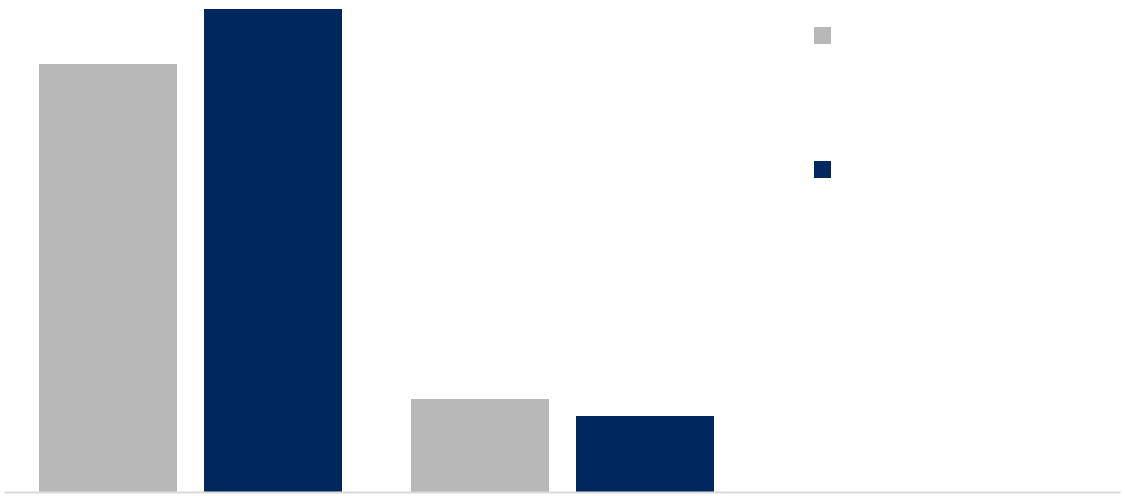


Source: DBT monitoring data,



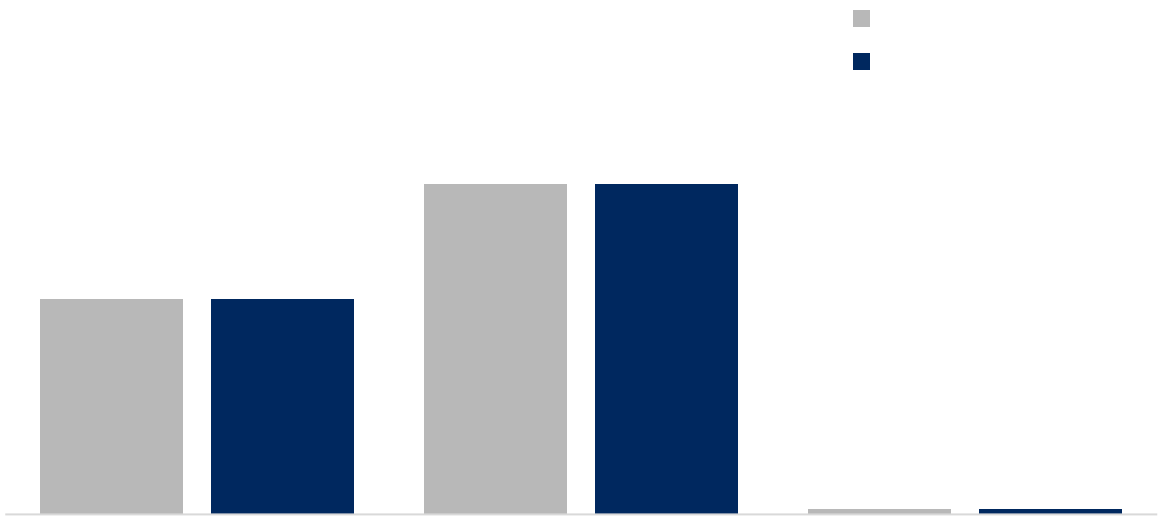
Source: DBT monitoring data,

% of SME leaders



Source: DBT monitoring data,

% of SME leaders



Source: DBT monitoring data,

## Annex D – 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

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