

Evaluation of Rapid Response Mentoring

Report to Be the Business



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Executive Summary

1. The Covid-19 pandemic and the corresponding restrictions put in place across the world created unprecedented disruptions for businesses and led to significant changes in demand patterns. Many businesses found themselves in a difficult position because they lacked the ability to adjust to new market conditions quickly enough, with the OECD (2021) stating that SMEs have been more impacted by the pandemic than large firms.
2. In response to the challenges associated with Covid-19, Be the Business (BtB) – a business-led initiative that aims to help business leaders improve the performance of their businesses – launched a 12-week Rapid Response Mentoring (RRM) programme that seeks to improve SME's ability to deal with the effects of the pandemic and help them to be better prepared for the future by raising their management and leadership (M&L) capabilities. To achieve this, SME leaders (mentees) are matched with business leaders from top-tier firms (mentors) who provide guidance and support through virtual webinars on specific needs of the SMEs on a pro-bono basis.
3. SQW, supported by Belmana, were commissioned by BtB to undertake an evaluation of RRM. The evaluation adopted a theory-based approach, grounded in contribution analysis, testing the programme's performance against its objective to improve SMEs resilience and flexibility through M&L practices – in line with the logic model and theory of change – and the extent to which the outcomes and impacts achieved were attributable to RRM. The main research methods included: review of monitoring data, mentee (42) and mentor (14) interviews, case studies of 'paired' mentoring relationships, and data-linking. In addition, there was interest in comparing RRM and Mentoring for Growth – a longer, productivity focused mentoring programme run by BtB – to draw out any key learning to inform future policy.

Key findings

4. We conclude that **the programme was successful in enabling SMEs to achieve greater resilience and flexibility, to innovate and pivot (when needed), and to improve their preparedness for the future.** It is important to note that less than half (43%) of surveyed mentees identified Covid-19 as the main factor that made them seek mentoring support. 'Other' reasons, including managing business growth and personal development, were commonly given as the primary motivation for joining the programme. Therefore, in many cases the support was focused on helping SMEs with issues that became more apparent and/or important during the pandemic, rather than on the mechanics of navigating through this particular crisis.
5. At the individual level, **almost all survey respondents have experienced, or expect to experience, personal benefits through their engagement with RRM.** Often these improvements included: a) improved knowledge and skills (60%); b) increasing awareness/knowledge of different M&L practices (achieved by 43% of respondents); and c)

a greater confidence in implementing these M&L practices and skills (achieved by 57% of mentees).

6. These translated into organisational level-benefits: 46% of respondents indicated that their participation in RRM had led to adoption of new M&L practices in their business, almost always in multiple areas. These new M&L practices were most commonly related to leadership (33%) and target setting (24%), with just under one fifth of respondents adopting practices in operations management, talent management and performance monitoring.
7. As a result, **over 60% of surveyed mentees reported their organisation was better prepared for the future** after RRM support, with over a third of them indicating increased levels of their organisation's financial resilience. Half of respondents indicated that their involvement in RRM had made handling the Covid-19 crisis easier.
8. Nearly 30% of mentees reflected that their organisation's flexibility has increased and around a third reported an increase in their organisation's ability to 'pivot'. To put this into perspective, only 10% of surveyed mentees identified this as a priority area in terms of the issues they were seeking to address through the programme. Direct benefits to business performance were less commonly reported, as expected given the nature of the programme and the evaluation's timescales.
9. The RRM programme generated a range of benefits for the participating mentors. On a personal level, this often took the form of improved communication skills and understanding of SMEs (achieved by approximately two thirds of mentors). In a small number of cases, the personal benefits experienced by mentors translated into organisational benefits for their companies such as adopting a practice that was 'tested' with their mentee.
10. We also found evidence of the programme contributing to a growing pool of high-quality mentors, with more than 60% of interviewed mentors indicating improved skills and understanding of SME's needs.
11. We conclude that additionality of the programme is fairly strong considering the unique nature of each mentoring relationship, varied ways in which mentoring contributes to measurable benefits over time, and the relatively short duration of support. The evaluation found that for over half of surveyed mentees RRM accelerated the benefits, in most cases by up to two years. Other factors such as market demand, pre-existing business plan or strategy, and new senior management in the business were found to be contributing to the outcomes alongside RRM. The 'deadweight' of the programme was found to be low – only 5% of mentees reported that all benefits would have occurred without RRM.

Key lessons

12. Overall, mentors and mentees had an overwhelmingly positive opinion of the programme with respective Net Promoter Scores of 69 and 78. **The quality of the match between mentees and mentors**, equally in terms of the skill sets and compatible personalities, that

allows a professional but open and trusting relationship to form was commonly seen as **critical in enabling benefits**. A small minority of mentees highlighted the 'online only' format as a slight hindrance to the achievement of outcomes as it changes the dynamics of the relationships.

- 13.** The evaluation found that compared to Mentoring for Growth – a 12-month mentoring programme delivered face-to-face (prior to the pandemic) – RRM provides more focused and intensive support. It appears to be more suitable for mentees that have well defined issues as in certain cases the 12-week period may be too short to identify solutions and implement actions.
- 14.** In terms of future development, mentoring programmes should continue to **prioritise the quality of the match** between mentees and mentors. Consideration should also be given to developing a **'hybrid' model** in which: a) mentees would be first enrolled on a shorter programme with an option to move onto a longer programme if they felt they would benefit from more support, and b) a mix of face-to-face and online meetings would be used to facilitate development of stronger relationships, leveraging the time efficiency of online meetings once the foundations have been laid.

1. Introduction

Background and context

- 1.1** The Covid-19 pandemic and the corresponding restrictions put in place across the world created unprecedented disruptions in supply chains and led to significant changes in demand patterns. As a result of markets effectively shutting down overnight, many businesses found themselves on the brink of collapse because they lacked the ability to adjust to new market conditions quickly enough. In less severe cases, the pandemic highlighted specific weaknesses in the businesses which could leave them vulnerable in the future.
- 1.2** The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; 2021)¹ states that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been more impacted by the pandemic than large firms due to a number of factors, including: overrepresentation in the most affected sectors, smaller cash buffers, weaker supply chain capabilities, low uptake of digital tools and technologies, and poorer operational skills and managerial capability:

“These vulnerabilities of smaller enterprises translated into a sharp drop in revenues from the outset of the crisis at a faster rate than they were able to cut operating costs, threatening a potential liquidity crisis among SMEs on a massive scale.” [OECD]

Rapid Response Mentoring programme

- 1.3** In response to the challenges associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, Be the Business (BtB) launched the 12-week Rapid Response Mentoring (RRM) scheme.² The programme seeks to raise the management and leadership capabilities of SMEs – improving their ability to deal with uncertainty while navigating through unpredictable environments. In turn, this is intended to increase firm-level resilience to adverse shocks, helping SMEs both to deal with the effects of Covid-19 and to be better prepared for the future.
- 1.4** In introducing the programme, BtB was able to draw on the experiences and lessons from its longer mentoring scheme, the Mentoring for Growth programme (MfG), which was launched in 2018. Whilst both programmes aim to improve management and leadership (M&L) practices, MfG is focused on increasing productivity whereas RRM seeks to raise the levels of flexibility and resilience within firms. The delivery model for RRM is based on that of MfG: SME leaders (mentees) are matched with business leaders from top-tier firms (mentors) who provide guidance and support through virtual webinars on specific needs of the SMEs on a pro-bono basis. The programme was targeted at SMEs with a minimum of six employees and an annual turnover of at least £1m. To date, more than 100 relationships have been formed. For future cohorts the target population has changed: the programme is now recommended

¹ OECD (2021) [One year of SME and entrepreneurship policy responses to COVID-19: Lessons learned to “build back better”](#)

² Also known as the Rapid Response Cohort (RRC).

for business leaders of UK businesses with at least one year of trading and three full time employees, including the owner.

Evaluation purpose and scope

- 1.5** SQW, supported by Belmana, were commissioned by Be the Business to undertake an evaluation of RRM. The evaluation assessed the performance of the programme, testing how the programme has delivered against its objectives in line with its logic model and theory of change. This involved addressing three main research questions (RQ) which are set out in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1: Evaluation research questions

#	Research question
RQ1	Are SMEs demonstrating greater resilience and flexibility as result of RRM?
RQ2	Where applicable, to what extent have SMEs innovated and pivoted as a result of RRM?
RQ3	How well equipped are SMEs for the future as a result of RRM?

Source: BtB

- 1.6** In addition, there was interest in comparing the performance of RRM and MfG programmes (where possible and appropriate) and draw out any key learning to inform future policy. Specifically, this analysis was intended to consider: (i) the timescales of both programmes – MfG mentoring relationships last up to 12 months, whereas RRM relationships last up to three months; (ii) the mode of delivery – MfG offers face-to-face and virtual mentoring³ while RRM is virtual only.
- 1.7** The focus of the evaluation was on individual- and organisational-level benefits to mentees. We also captured individual-level benefits of mentors, where appropriate.
- 1.8** It is important to note that the performance of RRM was only assessed against the programme’s stated aims as set out above. This is fair and also allows expectations to be managed of what the programme can and cannot achieve.

Methodology

- 1.9** We adopted a theory-based approach, grounded in contribution analysis, to assess whether the underlying theory of change played out as expected, and the extent to which the outcomes and impacts achieved were attributable to RRM. Other factors which may have contributed to the identified outcomes were also considered. In combination with the theory-based approach, we explored quasi-experimental methods. The main data collection methods included: monitoring data, data-linking, econometric analysis, telephone interviews with mentors and mentees and ‘paired’ case studies of mentoring relationships.

³ Due to Covid-19, since March 2020 MfG relationships have also been predominantly virtual.

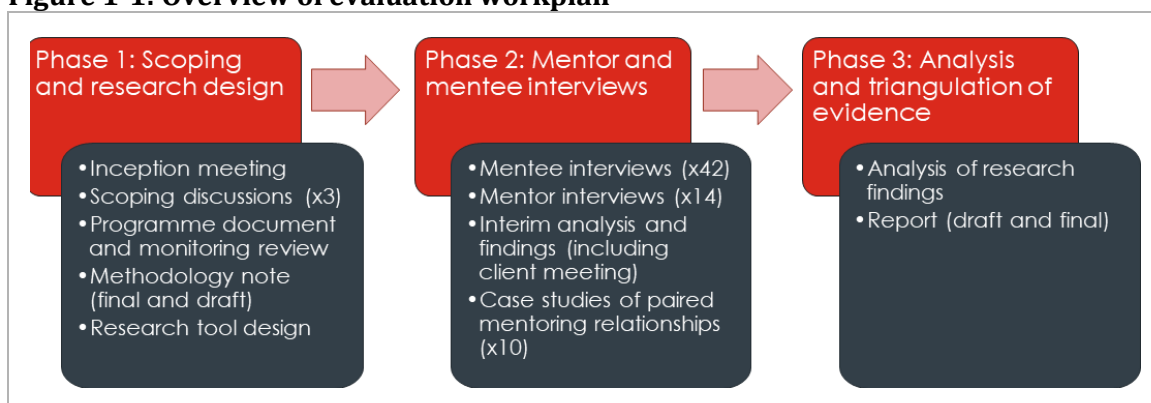
Contribution analysis

1.10 Contribution analysis is an iterative process that involves collecting and analysing relevant data to test whether an intervention's hypothesised theory of change happened in practice. This approach provides a framework for analysing: (i) if the programme has made a difference, (ii) if any particular element of the programme was critical to its success, and (iii) what, if any, contextual factors played a role in the achievement of outcomes. It aims to assess the contribution of RRM relative to other factors (internal to the business, and in the wider business environment) that have contributed to benefits observed.

Evaluation phases

1.11 The evaluation of RRM was undertaken across three phases of activity, as outlined below.

Figure 1-1: Overview of evaluation workplan



Source: SQW

1.12 The primary phase involved an inception meeting with Be the Business; three scoping consultations by telephone to form a better understanding of the measurable effects of the programme and so identify the key issues and priorities to test in the study; analysis of the monitoring data; the development of a methodology paper (draft and final); and design of evaluation research tools including the business survey questionnaire for mentees and the topic guide for mentors.

1.13 Data-linking on RRM beneficiaries to data available through ONS's Secure Research Service was also carried out with the purpose of establishing comparison groups for future analysis of the potential effects on turnover and employment, and profiling against the wider business population.⁴

1.14 The main period of data collection was undertaken in Phase 2. As outlined above, data was drawn from four main sources:

⁴ To date, the quasi-experimental technique outlined in the methodology note has not been possible as it relies on secondary data which is not yet available, however the preparation work for this analysis has been completed.

- **Monitoring data** was used to create a contact list for the mentee business survey, with the aim of capturing information from a spread of businesses (both in terms of geography and sector) representative of the wider beneficiary population.
- **A telephone survey of 42 mentee businesses**⁵ was completed to gather evidence on the activities delivered through RRM and any resulting benefits of the programme to participating mentees and their companies.
- **14 mentor interviews**⁶ were completed to provide further detail on the mentee outcomes, and the routes to achieving them, as well as any benefits experienced by mentors.
- **Case studies for 10 'paired' mentee-mentor relationships** were also developed to strengthen the qualitative evidence as to how the mentoring relationships are working, and how the activities undertaken led to outcomes and impacts.

1.15 Phase 3 of the programme evaluation involved analysis and triangulation of the evidence from the above sources, to test the underlying logic and theory of change and determine whether the RRM programme delivered against its' objectives. Evidence from the mentee business survey was collated using Smart Survey and analysed in Excel.⁷ The qualitative mentor interview evidence was analysed using specialised software, MaxQDA, to ensure a consistent, comprehensive and auditable approach.⁸ For the organisational outcomes related to business performance innovation and M&L practices we have linked data on RRM beneficiaries to ONS data to facilitate benchmarking (to contextualise findings) and future analysis of business performance outcomes against the wider business population.

Key issues and challenges

1.16 RRM is a complex, tailored programme which involves multiple organisations and individuals. The type and intensity of support as well as the dynamic of the relationship varies between mentor-mentee pairs. This means RRM is nuanced in bringing different parties together to induce changes in flexibility and resilience of businesses. In this context, and taking into account that evaluation was undertaken while many lockdown restrictions were still in place, we highlight the following key issues and challenges for the evaluation:

- the extent to which benefits can be attributed to the RRM programme will be important especially when it is a shorter 12-week programme
- there is variation in mentee firms participating in the programme (e.g. size, sector, age, stage of development) and some sectors will be more 'hit' by Covid-19 than others, which

⁵ A total of 141 mentees who were contacted with a request to complete the survey, of which 37 (26%) declined to participate and 44% did not respond. The survey response rate was 30%.

⁶ A total of 22 mentors were contacted to complete the survey.

⁷ Smart Survey is a digital survey tool. Available: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/>. In this evaluation it was used to collate information collected during telephone interviews with mentees.

⁸MaxQDA is a qualitative data analysis tool which allows text to be systematically tagged with agreed codes. Available: <https://www.maxqda.com/>

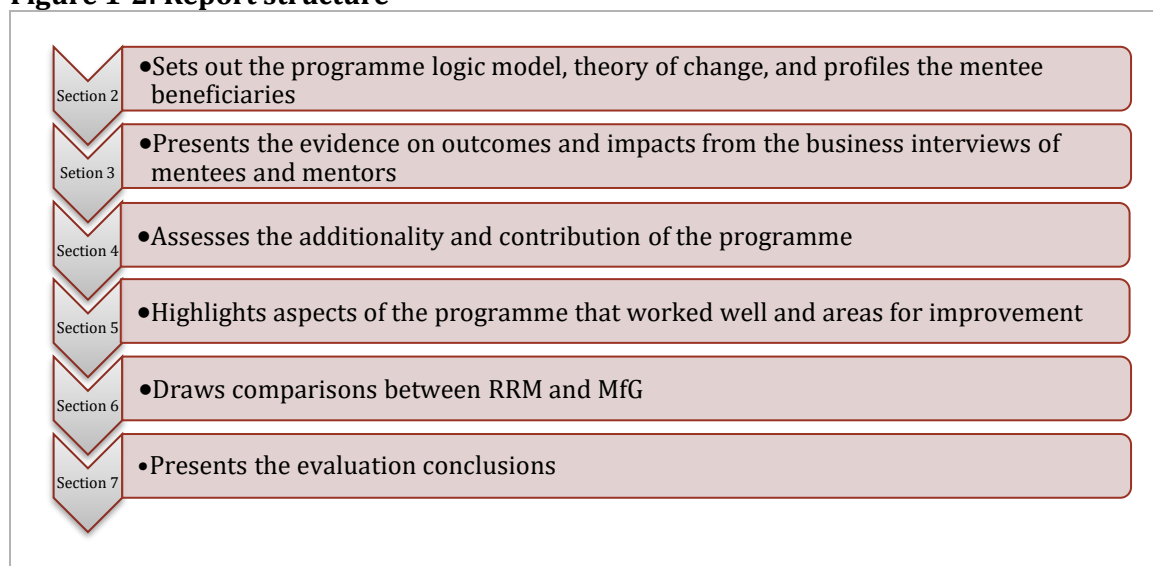
will also influence benefits – this may have implications for routes and timescales to outcomes and impacts

- the use of digital/virtual platform for providing the support is likely to influence the nature/ dynamic of the mentoring relationship and potential benefits
- related to this, our analysis of responses from mentees who declined the request to participate in the survey revealed that a number of mentoring relationships did not progress beyond the first meeting (challenges of Covid-19 were often given as a reason). This has two implications: a) estimating the level of precision of survey results is challenging because there is uncertainty around the true size of the programme population; b) an additional bias of unknown direction may have been introduced⁹
- the response rate to the mentee survey was lower than we would expect in normal conditions, and limited information on business performance was collected due to particular sensitivity of this topic during the pandemic
- Covid-19 pandemic may have been a catalyst for SMEs to seek mentoring support around issues not necessarily related to the pandemic (RRM, being a shorter programme than MfG, may seem as a more attractive option).

Structure of the report

1.17 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

Figure 1-2: Report structure



Source: SQW

⁹ A random attrition does not bias results i.e. if there are no common reasons for the relationships not to 'take off the ground' the results of our analysis are not affected. However, if those relationships share common characteristics we may under- or over-estimate the effect of support. Due to the low response rate to the survey we were unable to investigate this potential bias using statistical techniques.

1.18 The report also contains three annexes: case study write-ups of ‘paired’ mentoring relationships; a detailed description of the approach to using ONS data for benchmarking and establishing comparison groups from the wider business population for econometric analysis of impacts on business performance (when post-treatment data becomes available); and the list of consultees.

2. Programme profile

Key findings

- In total, 42 RRM mentees completed the survey. Businesses were from a range of sectors, notably: professional, scientific and technical sector (31%), and manufacturing (14%).
- Just under half of business employed between 10 and 50 staff, and around one-third employed less than 10 staff. Around three-quarter of businesses had a turnover of less than £2m.
- Mentee businesses were mainly located in the North West (36%), followed by the East Midlands (17%) and the South East (17%).
- 43% of respondents identified Covid-19 as their primary motivation for joining the RRM programme while 62% identified 'other' factors, including managing business growth, personal development and gaining a "new perspective".¹⁰
- 52% of mentees had accessed other external support programmes prior to their involvement with RRM.

2.1 This section outlines the RRM programme logic model and profiles RRM participants.

Logic model and theory of change

Context and rationale

2.2 RRM seeks to address key market failures and barriers to SMEs' adoption of management and leadership practices that impact on their ability to adapt to unexpected shocks. This is intended to improve firms' resilience (both financial and in terms of retaining key staff throughout a crisis), stabilising current business performance, and laying a foundation for strong future performance. The relevant market failures include:

- *Capability failures* – firms' lack of skills, resources, and absorptive capacity can hamper the potential for adopting/implementing management and leadership practices.

¹⁰ Figures do not sum up to 100% because some mentees identified several factors while a few did not provide an answer to this question.

- *Information failures* – where SMEs are not aware of the management and leadership expertise found in top-tier firms, and/or do not know where to go or how to access this expertise.
- *Co-ordination failures* – there is a fragmented landscape of business mentoring support in industry (i.e. not professional mentors) that prevents effective relationships between SMEs and top-tier firms, especially in times of economy-wide crises.
- *Positive externalities* – potential to generate positive spillover effects e.g. knowledge created by one firm that spills over into other firms, creating value for them and their customers; these spillovers are not factored into firms' decision making.

2.3 Given the above context and rationale, the key objective of the RRM programme is to improve flexibility within mentee businesses by developing their M&L practices and crisis management skills.

Logic model & theory of change

2.4 The logic model for the RRM programme is presented in Figure 2-1. This sets out the delivery (i.e. inputs and activities) and expected benefits (i.e. outputs, outcomes, and impacts) of the programme. As such, the logic model provides the structure for assessing the programme by establishing what progress has been made and how. It allows us to compare how the programme in theory was intended to be delivered, and the outcomes it was intended to generate, against how this has borne out in practice.

2.5 The inputs include: staff from BtB and delivery partners, financial input from BtB, and infrastructure/ facilities provided by BtB and delivery partners. The key activities include: marketing and promotion of the programme; recruitment and matching of mentees and mentors; management of paired mentoring relationship; and satisfaction surveys. These activities are expected to lead to outputs and outcomes for both mentees (primary beneficiaries) and mentors.

2.6 The outcomes for an individual mentee include: increased awareness of management and leadership practices (including financial planning and risk assessment); improved confidence in dealing with unpredictable environments and making difficult decisions; personal resilience; knowledge and skills (incl. problem solving and analysis of potential opportunities and soft skills, such as trust, empathy, communication); and expanded professional networks.

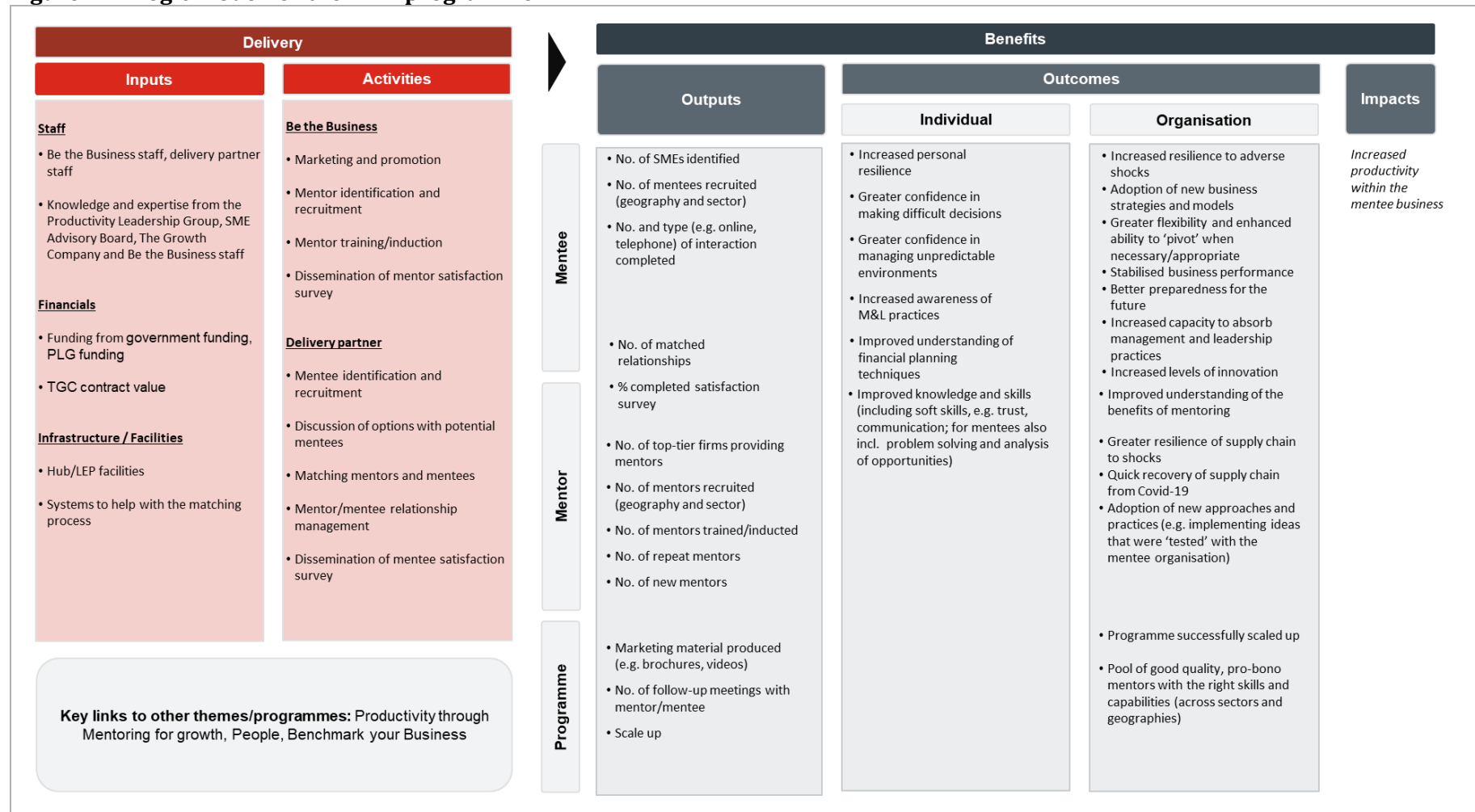
2.7 These individual effects are expected to translate into outcomes for their organisations, for example: adoption of management and leadership practices, introduction of new processes, improved understanding of the benefits of mentoring, and improved business performance.

2.8 In the short-term, organisations may increase their capability to adjust to shocks by managing their supply chain more effectively, adopting a new business model or strategy, doing better business planning and engaging in innovation activities. These 'softer' benefits may also translate into stronger financial performance throughout Covid-19 pandemic. In the longer

term, the range of outcomes, in particular adoption of risk management and M&L practices, are expected to increase SMEs hardiness and contribute to better preparedness for future crises.

- 2.9** For an individual mentor, the programme is expected to mainly lead to better understanding of challenges faced by SMEs, improved knowledge and skills, and enhanced understanding of the benefits of mentoring. It is not expected these will translate into tangible impacts for their organisation.
- 2.10** In addition, there are programme-level outcomes: a successful scaled up programme and a pool of good quality, pro-bono mentors with the right skills and capabilities (across sectors and geographies). In the longer term, all the outcomes and impacts described above are expected to make the programme sustainable.
- 2.11** The theory of change described above rests on several key assumptions about the programme's delivery and effects which are summarised in Table 2-1. These assumptions informed our design of research tools and conversations with programme beneficiaries.

Figure 2-1: Logic model for the RRM programme



Source: SQW, BtB

Table 2-1: Key assumptions behind theory of change

Strategy (Context/ Rationale)	Delivery	Effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SME wish to learn from the expertise and experience of top tier firms SMEs do not know where or how to access expertise from top tier firms SMEs find the cost of accessing the expertise prohibitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is sufficient supply of high-quality mentors and demand from mentees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The programme is able to attract and retain high quality mentors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SMEs lack skills, resources, and absorptive capacity in adopting risk management and M&L practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teams at BtB and delivery partners sufficient to manage the operational demand and scale up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentors from top-tier companies are high quality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no other tailored, pro-bono SME support schemes for improving SMEs' flexibility and resilience to shocks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is marketing, evaluation and central coordination support for the programme at BtB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is possible to transfer and apply learnings from large corporations to SMEs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships are effective and with the right organisations (including delivery providers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The programme is able to engage SMEs that are not aware of risk management and M&L expertise found in top-tier firms, and/or do not know where to go or how to access this expertise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The programme has a scalable operating model and infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The improved knowledge and skills translate into organisational level flexibility, better preparedness for the future and other benefits
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The programme has mechanisms in place to share knowledge and experience between mentors to maximise benefits 	

Alternative/complementary explanations:

(1) Mentor businesses access support from other sources including other programmes that improve productivity

(2) Existing internal business strategies and plans influence outcomes and impacts

(3) External economic conditions influence outcomes and impacts.

Source: SQW, BtB

Profile of the programme

- 2.12** According to monitoring data, as of September 2020, 179 businesses signed up for RRM and 141 of them had been matched with a mentor. To provide context for the evaluation findings (presented in subsequent sections) it is important to consider the profile of participants and degree to which they may have been affected by the pandemic.
- 2.13** The results of a descriptive analysis using information on business performance contained in the Business Structure Database (BSD) accessed through the ONS Secure Research Service (SRS) indicate that the programme **beneficiaries are fast growing companies** that recorded, on average, **10% turnover growth per year** over the three years prior to the pandemic, compared to the average growth of 0.6% per year observed in the wider business population.¹¹ This suggests that the programme beneficiaries are strong performing businesses that potentially were in a better position to handle the challenges of Covid-19 than the wider business population (e.g. by already having a certain set of M&L practices in place).
- 2.14** To evaluate the beneficiaries' level of exposure to negative effects of the pandemic prior to involvement with RRM we asked them whether their turnover was outside the normal range before they applied for support.¹² Out of 27 responses we collected, 63% stated that their turnover was below normal expectations with 15% indicating that it was more than 50% lower than normal. The corresponding figures for SME respondents to wave three of the Business Impact of Covid-19 Survey (BICS, April 2020) were 78% and 25% respectively. Our sample is too small to draw definitive conclusions, however it appears that the beneficiaries were somewhat less affected than the wider business population, potentially reflecting the sectoral composition of the sample (Figure 2-2).
- 2.15** Below we present the profile of businesses (mentees) that participated in the RRM mentee survey.¹³ The data suggests that the sample of businesses surveyed was not representative of the wider business population.¹⁴ This should be considered when generalising the findings of this evaluation to the rest of business population and might be a result of the Covid-19 pandemic affecting sectors differently, individual's capacity to engage in the mentoring programme throughout the crisis, and/or simply, a reflection of the way in which the programme was promoted.

¹¹ A more detailed comparison can be found in Annex B.

¹² This question mirrored a question asked in the Business Impact of Covid-19 survey.

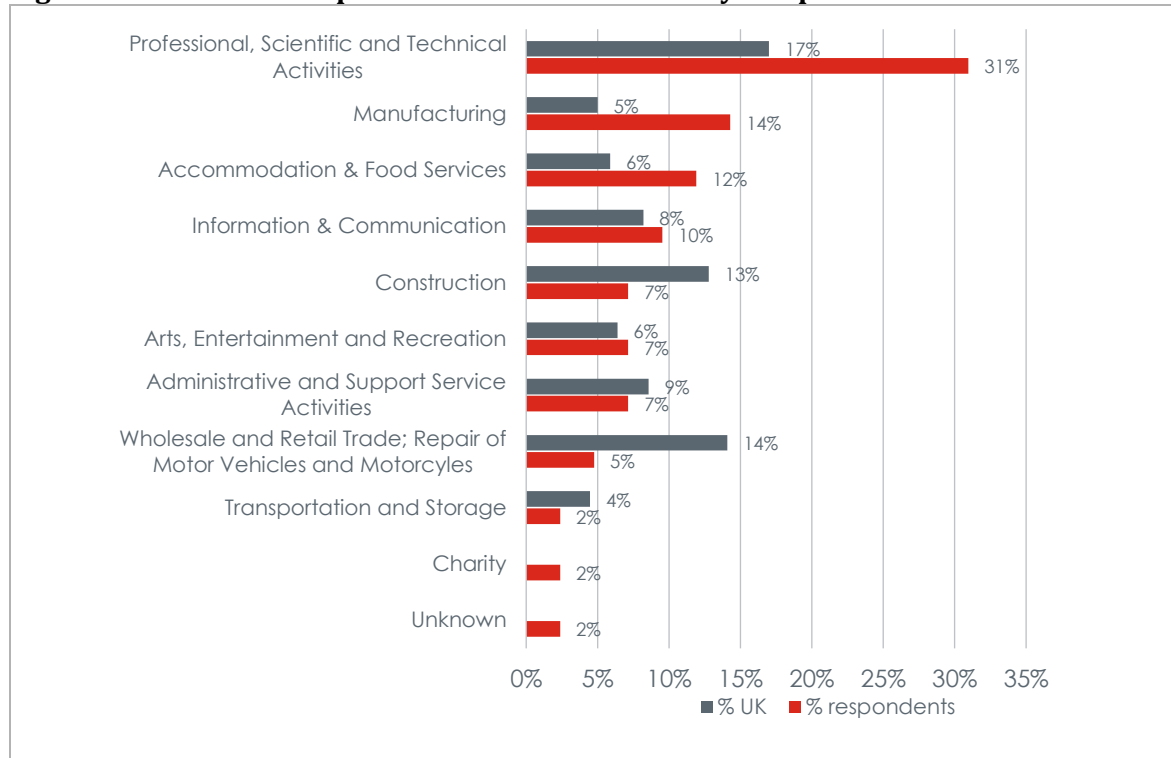
¹³ Only businesses that were recorded as being in an established mentoring relationships were contacted during the telephone survey.

¹⁴ When compared to ONS UK Business Counts 2020.

Mentees

- 2.16** In total, 42 RRM mentees completed the survey. 60% of mentee respondents have an ongoing mentoring relationship while 40% of businesses reported have completed their relationship.¹⁵
- 2.17** The businesses mainly operated in professional, scientific and technical sector; manufacturing; accommodation and food services; and information and communication (Figure 2-2).

Figure 2-2: Sectoral composition of the mentee survey sample



Source: Business survey; single response (n=42) and ONS UK Business Counts

- 2.18** In terms of number of employees: 36% employed less than 10 people and a further 45% employed between 10 and 50. The majority of surveyed businesses (76%) had a turnover of less than £2m. Initially, it was thought that the programme would be most suited for SMEs with at least £1m turnover and 6 FTEs, however Table 2-2 shows that the programme attracted a wider cohort. Our sample is representative of the wider mentee population in terms of business size, by number of employees.

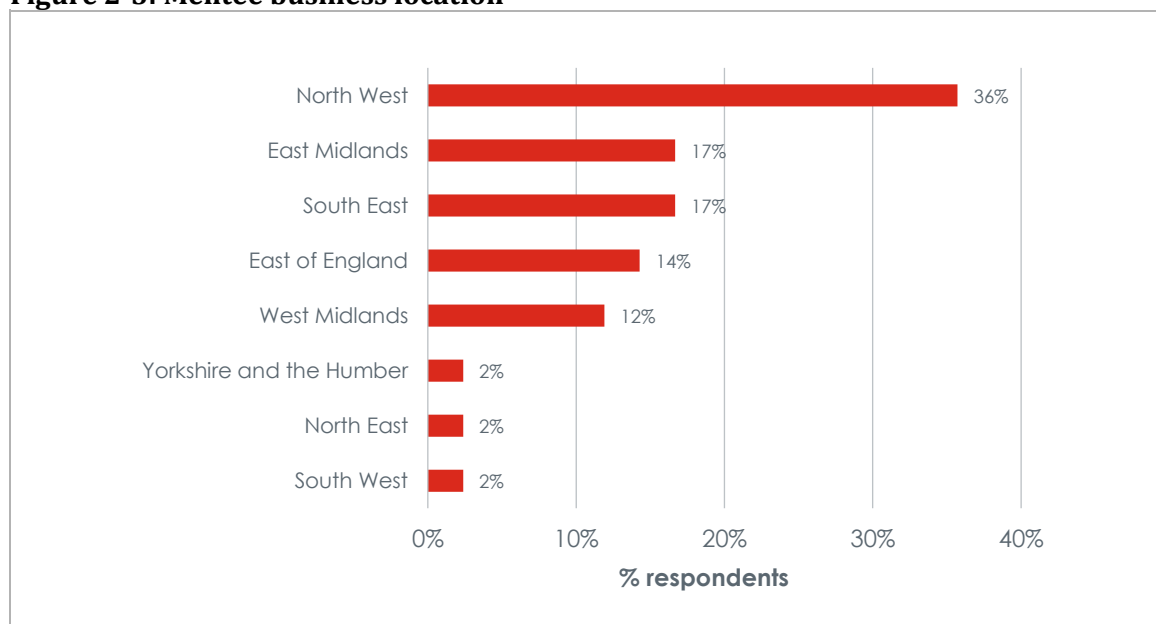
¹⁵ The sample is representative of the programme population subject to the uncertainty around the final size and composition of the programme mentioned earlier in the report.

Table 2-2: Business size by turnover and employment

Turnover	% respondents	Number of employees	% respondents	% total mentee population
Less than £2m	71%	Micro (1 to 9)	36%	38%
£2m to £5m	14%	Small (10 to 49)	45%	45%
£5m to £10m	12%	Medium (50 to 249)	17%	15%
>£10m	2%	Large (>249)	2%	2%

Source: Mentee survey; single response (n=42)

2.19 Over a third of businesses (mentees) in our sample were based in the North West. This was followed by the East Midlands and South East both accounting for 17% of respondents each (Figure 2-3).

Figure 2-3: Mentee business location

Source: Mentee survey; single response (n=42)

Motivation

2.20 Less than half (43%) of respondents identified Covid-19 as the main factor that made them seek mentoring support, while 62% identified 'other' factors as the primary or equally important reason for seeking mentoring support, including: managing business growth and personal development.¹⁶

2.21 Mentees were then asked to comment on specific issues they were seeking to address through the RRM programme. Common areas of focus included:

¹⁶ Percentages sum to more than 100% due to some mentees identifying other factors in addition to Covid-19 as their motivation for joining the programme.

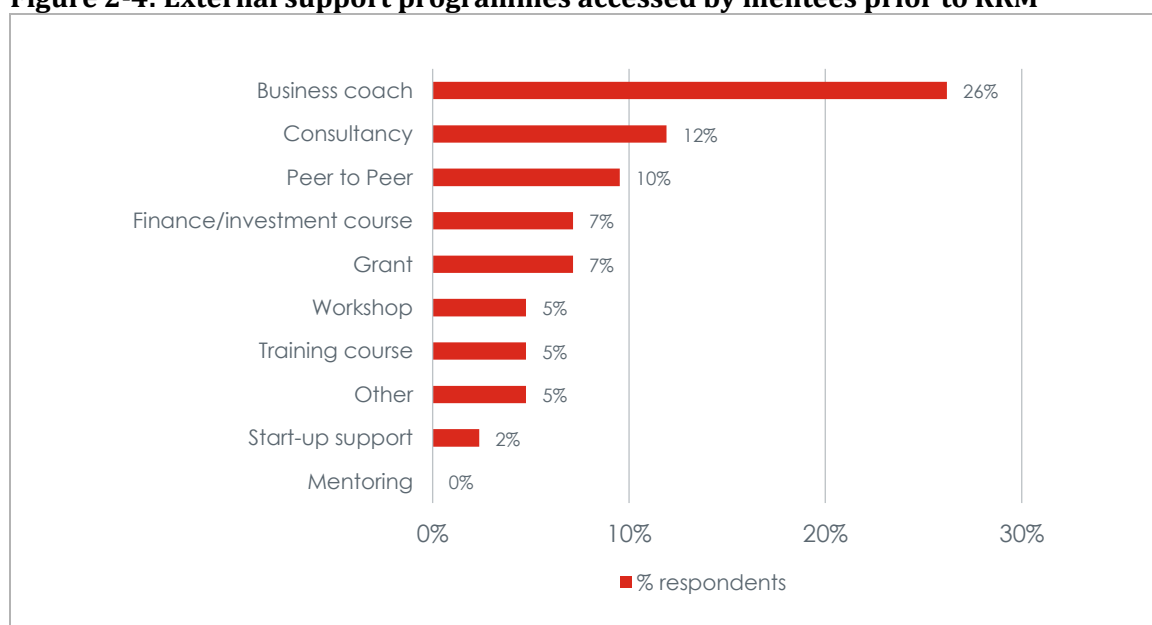
- **Business growth and strategy** (29%): how to expand the business, the necessary systems to put in place, strategy/business plan development
- **Personal development** (26%): improving management and leadership skills, gaining confidence
- **Diversification and flexibility** (26%): e-commerce; pivoting into new products/services/markets; income generation
- **HR issues** (17%): navigating the government furlough scheme, redundancies, adapting to new working practices
- **Sounding board** (21%): rather than seeking to address a specific issue through RRM, mentees joined the programme in order to gain an “*external perspective*” or “*sounding board*”.

2.22 Overall, the qualitative evidence indicates that, whilst Covid-19 was not necessarily the primary motivator for all mentees joining the programme, a clear majority discussed and addressed Covid-19 challenges in some form with their mentor.

Previous engagement

2.23 Just over half (52%) of mentees had accessed other external support programmes prior to their involvement with RRM. Mentees had most commonly accessed business coaching followed by external consultancy support and peer to peer support. Interestingly, **no surveyed mentees** stated that they **had accessed external mentoring prior to their involvement in RRM.**

Figure 2-4: External support programmes accessed by mentees prior to RRM



Source: Mentee survey; single response (n=42)

2.24 In summary, the programme beneficiaries are successful SMEs with highly motivated leaders. Towards the beginning of the pandemic the negative effect on beneficiaries (proxied with the decline in turnover) was somewhat lower than on the wider business population, and even though a significant minority of surveyed mentees identified Covid-19 as the primary reason for joining the programme, other motivating factors appear to have been at least as important. These factors limit our ability to detect the effects of support related to addressing issues specific to Covid-19. Therefore, it is important to take a wider view of achieved benefits.

3. Outcomes and Impacts

Key findings

- Almost all survey respondents have experienced, or expect to experience, personal benefits through their engagement with RRM. Often these improvements included improved knowledge and skills (60%), and/or increasing mentee's awareness/knowledge of different management and leadership practices (achieved by 43% of respondents).
- Over 60% of surveyed mentees reported their organisation was better prepared for the future after RRM support, with over a third of them indicating increased levels of their organisation's financial resilience.
- Half of respondents indicated that their involvement in RRM had made handling the crisis easier while 43% of respondents stated that RRM had no effect on their ability to handle the crisis, but the mixed reasons for starting the programme potentially affect this metric.
- Direct impacts on business performance such as increased turnover, employment, R&D investment, and reduced business costs and overheads were not expected in the timeframe of the support and were less common (at the time of interviews most of the mentoring relationships were ongoing or had wrapped up relatively recently). Encouragingly, many more businesses expected to achieve organisational outcomes within the next two years.
- The RRM programme also generated a range of benefits for the participating mentors. On a personal level, this often took the form of improved soft skills or an improved their understanding of SMEs (achieved by approximately two thirds of mentors). In a small number of cases, the personal benefits experienced by mentors translated into organisational benefits for their companies such as adopting a practice that was 'tested' with their mentee.

3.1 This section sets out the impact of the programmes on individual mentees and their organisations, as well as any wider outcomes that were reported. Specifically, it provides results on:

- individual-level outcomes, including increased awareness of M&L practices and improvements in skills and confidence to implement those M&L practices
- organisational-level outcomes including adoption of new to business M&L practices, improvements to business performance

- it also identifies benefits for mentors, although this was not the primary purpose of RRM.

3.2 We highlight the following four points important for interpreting the results:

- Unless otherwise stated all percentages are reported in relation to the full survey sample (n=42). The figures may not always sum up to 100% because mentees could refuse answering a question or provide multiple answers
- The margin of error in the survey is approximately 13 percentage points. In other words, if 50% of respondents report a benefit, we can be 95% certain that the proportion that would have been observed in the whole programme population is between 37% and 63%. The margin of error is the largest when reported proportions are close to 50%
- Pressures of Covid-19 were commonly given as reason not to participate in the survey and were also mentioned as a factor that negatively affected duration of several mentoring relationships. This may have introduced a response bias of uncertain direction and needs to be considered when generalising the results to the programme population
- The sectoral composition of the programme is not perfectly representative of the wider business population and the scale of observed effects may vary as the composition changes over time.

Mentees

Personal benefits

- 3.3 Almost all survey respondents have experienced, or expect to experience, personal benefits through their engagement with RRM (Table 3-1). The majority of mentee businesses had already improved their knowledge and skills, and had increased confidence in implementing M&L skills. Just under half had an increased awareness of new M&L practices. Interestingly, despite the programme being relatively short, the level of expected individual benefits is moderate. This is likely due to the nature of the benefits and may suggest that learning directly from a mentor is relatively more important for achieving the benefits than any further activities a mentee may undertake because of RRM support but after their time on programme has ended.

Table 3-1: In terms of your [mentee] personal development, which of the following benefits have you experienced?

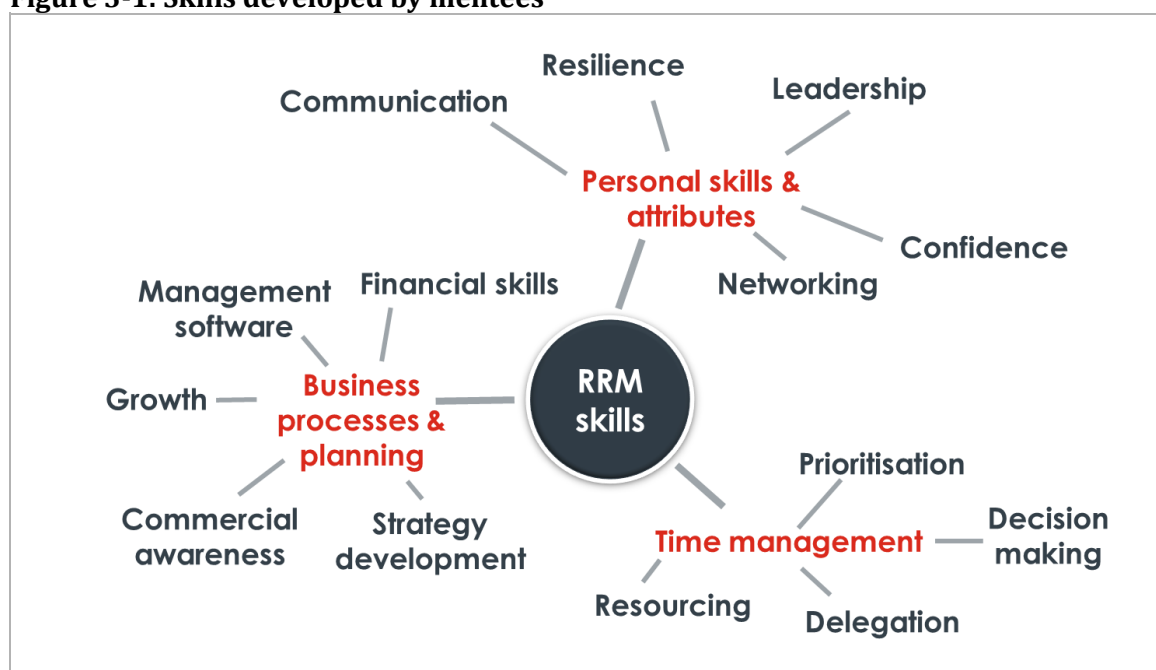
	Achieved	Expected over next 2 years	Not expected / not relevant	Refused / don't know
Increased awareness of new M&L practices	43%	14%	48%	0%
Improved knowledge and skills	60%	17%	31%	2%

	Achieved	Expected over next 2 years	Not expected / not relevant	Refused / don't know
Increased confidence in implementing M&L skills	57%	10%	36%	2%

Note: the numbers in rows do not sum up to 100% because some mentees reported that they had experienced the benefits but were also expecting further benefits over the next two years. Source: Mentee survey; n=42

3.4 For mentees that had improved their knowledge and skills (60%), this related broadly to business processes and planning (36%); personal skills and attributes (31%) and time management (19%). More detail on each of these is shown in Figure 3-1. According to the mentor interview responses, these skills were generally developed through a combination of explicit instruction (i.e., the mentor explaining how to carry out a specific task effectively) and calculated questioning (to encourage the mentee to develop their own solutions).

Figure 3-1: Skills developed by mentees



Source: Mentee survey; open response (n=42)

3.5 The mentoring also contributed to increasing mentee's awareness/knowledge of different M&L practices (43%). This related to a wide range of areas, notably: HR practices, adaptability (within teams and the business model), performance monitoring and business strategy. In terms of improved confidence of M&L practices:

- 57% of mentees reported an increase in their confidence implementing M&L practices
- 50% felt that they were more confident in handling unpredictable environments
- 45% of mentees reported an increase in their ability to make difficult but necessary decisions.

3.6 Upon further analysis, it is clear that those reporting either increased awareness of M&L practices or improved knowledge or skills are more likely to experience a boost in confidence.

Of the 24 mentees who reported increased confidence in implementing M&L practices, almost all (23/24), reported both an improvement in knowledge/skills *and* an increased awareness of M&L practices. This finding was backed up by qualitative feedback from mentees. For example, one mentee stated that RRM had supported their personal development in terms of people management and their ability to delegate, which has in turn led to greater self-confidence and inspired more confidence in them from other senior leaders in their business, creating a positive feedback loop.

- 3.7** On average, mentees felt that their confidence in implementing M&L practices had increased by 4.8 out of 10 as a result of the programme. Linked to increased confidence, several mentees reported that the **programme resulted in improved personal motivation to develop their business:**

“The mentoring reignited my motivation to engage with the process of building a business. I wanted the business to grow organically but lost motivation, it was the right time to engage with the programme... I now have the same excitement as I did ten years ago.” [Mentee]

- 3.8** This view was shared by another mentee who reported that the programme had “kick-started” their enthusiasm to re-develop their business model.

- 3.9** Over three quarters of mentees (76%) felt that RRM had improved their understanding of the benefits of mentoring as an approach to improving business’ flexibility and resilience. In particular, mentees cited value of being able to talk to someone outside of the business. In this sense, the mentors provided an impartial and external perspective as well as sounding board. Moreover, the positive experience had by the mentees led, in some cases, to their colleagues joining RRM as well, thus spreading the benefits from the programme more widely. One mentee reported that RRM had improved their understanding and awareness of the types of support available for SMEs:

“It was eye opening to see that there are highly skilled people who are willing to devote their time to helping other businesses to improve. It has increased my confidence to go out and seek advice”

- 3.10** The value of having “highly-skilled” mentors was a sentiment repeated by many of the mentees. Indeed, **the quality of the match was deemed the most important aspect of RRM’s design and delivery by over a quarter of respondents.** Mentees recognised the importance of having a mentor not only with the right experience and skillset, but also with a compatible personality to allow an open and trusting relationship to form. Mentees also recognised having regular but flexible sessions with their mentors as a valuable aspect of RRM.

Management and leadership practices

- 3.11** Following from the increased awareness of M&L practices, 46% of respondents went on to introduce *new* M&L practices. Evidence from the mentee survey suggests that the practices

introduced by mentees during RRM are likely to be sustained. Of the six individuals who had introduced new practices and have since ended their mentoring relationship, five said that they have been sustained since. One did not know as they had left the company.

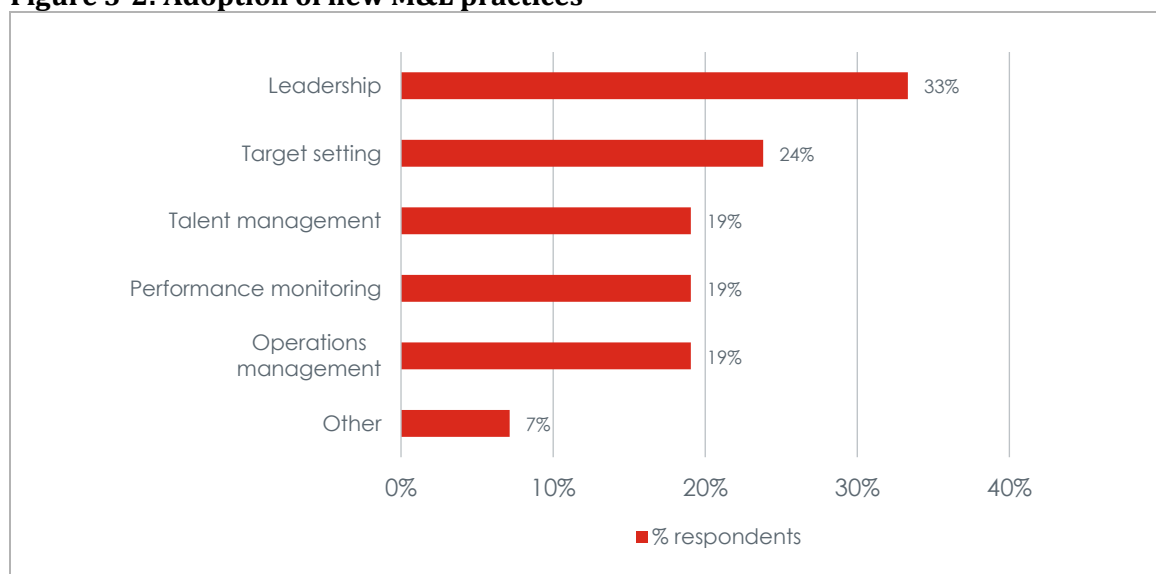
Table 3-2: Introduction of new M&L practices

Response	Has your participation in RRM led to adoption of new M&L practices in your organisation? (n=42)	If adopted new M&L practices and relationship ended: Have these changes been sustained since RRM support ended? (n=6)
Yes	46%	83%
No	51%	0%
Don't know	2%	17%

Source: SQW

3.12 As shown in Figure 3-2, one-third (33%) of interviewed business adopted new leadership practices, a further one-quarter (24%) introduced new target setting practices, and just under one fifth introduced new practices in each of the following areas: operations management, talent management and performance monitoring. It was rare (7%) for businesses to adopt new practices in just one area, more frequently mentees adopted new practices in multiple areas.

Figure 3-2: Adoption of new M&L practices



Source: Mentee survey; single response (n=42)

3.13 In terms of leadership practices, mentees reflected that it was useful to learn about the styles used in larger companies. Several of the mentees' businesses were undergoing or preparing to undergo a period of growth. In such cases, the mentoring relationship often focused on how to cope as the leader of an expanding organisation:

"We discussed leadership – how to compartmentalise and prioritise the important things. How to detach emotionally from the business and have difficult conversation".

3.14 An important aspect of adapting leadership styles to facilitate company growth is around delegation. With the guidance of their mentor, one mentee recognised that delegation was a necessary part of their business' growth pathway:

"I have always been a hands-on person but through the mentoring I have learned more about how to delegate and to trust others more – this is all about growth"

3.15 During the evaluation we sought to collect data on adoption of a selection of M&L practices measured in the wider SME population through the Longitudinal Small Business Survey (LSBS)¹⁷ and Management Practices Survey (2016)¹⁸ with a view of exploring the possibility of comparing the progress of beneficiaries against a comparison group drawn from those surveys. These practices covered: a) keeping an up-to-date business plan, b) business and employee performance monitoring, c) use of specialised software and web-based solutions in managing the business and keeping tax records and d) the time horizon for planning.

3.16 Only 27 of the 42 surveyed mentees provided answers to those questions. The small sample size limited our ability to undertake formal statistical analysis (with or without a comparison group).¹⁹ However, a descriptive analysis indicated a ten percentage points increase in: a) the number of beneficiaries reporting maintaining an up-to-date business plan (from approximately 50% to approximately 60%); and b) adoption across a range of M&L practices related to individual and business performance monitoring (from approximately 70% to approximately 80%), following RRM support.

Organisational benefits

3.17 The results in Table 3-3 indicate that the programme has affected a small minority of mentee businesses in terms of investment in R&D and innovation, employment, turnover, costs of doing business, spending on overheads. However, a larger proportion of business expected benefits to be realised over the next two years, especially in relation to employment and turnover. Overall, the evidence suggests that the influence of the programme on these 'harder' measures needs more time to come through.

3.18 We highlight two important factors to bear in mind when considering these results. First, the timing of evaluation: at the time of fieldwork, most (60%) of the mentoring relationships were ongoing and those that were completed had wrapped up relatively recently, suggesting that the full extent of benefits could not be captured. Second, interviews were being carried out from November 2020 to February 2021, during which time there were varying degrees of Covid-19 restrictions in place. In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that the survey captured only a modest impact of RRM on tangible business outcomes to date.

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/small-business-survey-reports>

¹⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforbusinesses/businesssurveys/managementandexpectationssurvey>

¹⁹ The estimated margin of error for results obtained from this sub-sample of surveyed mentees is 17 percentage points.

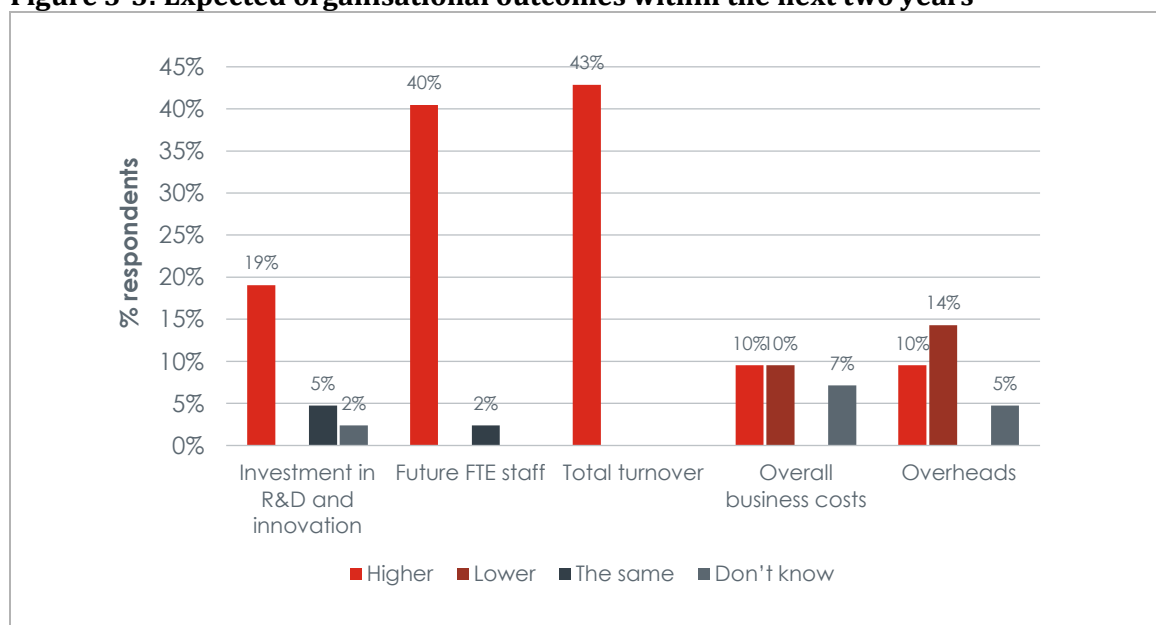
Table 3-3: In terms of the benefits to your organisation, which of the following have been affected or you expect to be affected in the next 2 years as a result of the RRM programme?

	Achieved	Expected over next 2 years	Not expected / not relevant	Refused / don't know
Investment in R&D and innovation	7%	19%	69%	5%
Employment	14%	33%	45%	7%
Turnover	7%	40%	43%	10%
Costs of doing business	7%	19%	64%	10%
Spending on overheads	14%	17%	64%	5%

Source: Mentee survey; single response (n=42)

3.19 Figure 3-3 describes the direction of the expected outcomes reported by mentees. The direction of change for investment in R&D and innovation, turnover and future FTE tended to be positive, with most respondents expecting an increase. The expected change in overall business costs and overheads is somewhat more difficult to interpret. Whilst on the surface, lower overall business costs and overheads might be viewed as a positive outcome, an increase in those outcome measures may be linked to business growth, increasing investment in R&D and innovation, or employing more people. For example, of those that expected employment to increase in the next two years as a result of the RRM programme, four also expected overheads to increase.

Figure 3-3: Expected organisational outcomes within the next two years



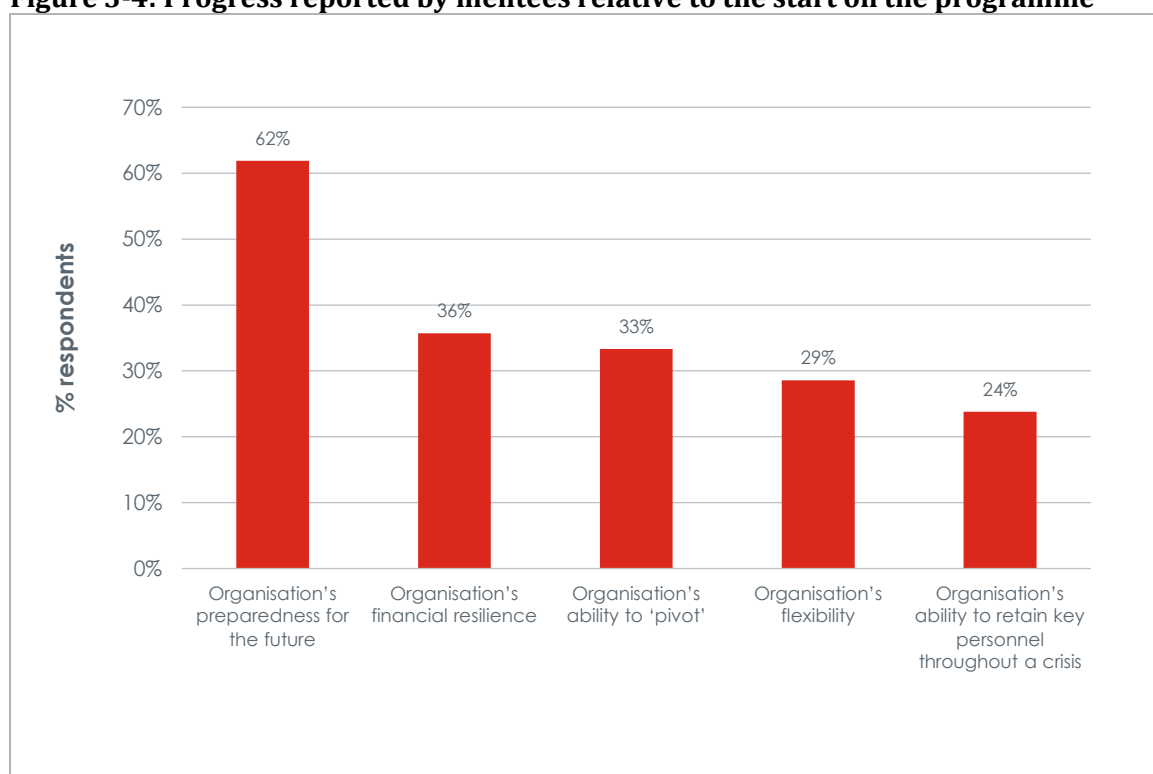
Source: Mentee survey; single response (n=42)

3.20 Despite lack of tangible benefits to date, many mentees reported that their business was better placed at the time of the interview, than before the mentoring (Figure 3-4):

- Nearly two thirds of mentees reported an increase in their organisations' preparedness for the future. Over a third of mentees thought that their organisation's financial resilience has increased.
- Around a quarter of mentees consider that their organisation's ability to retain key personnel through a crisis has increased. Some mentees pointed out that their business has always been good at this and so it was not a priority area for improvement.
- Nearly 30% of mentees reflected that their organisation's flexibility has increased and around a third reported an increase in their organisation's ability to 'pivot'. To put this into perspective, only four surveyed mentees (10%) identified this as a priority area in terms of the issues they were seeking to address through the programme.

3.21 Given the aim of the RRM mentoring programme to support SMEs (mentees) in navigating the Covid-19 crisis, the above points are important as they demonstrate the programme's success in enabling SMEs to achieve greater resilience and flexibility, to innovate and pivot, and to improve their preparedness for the future.

Figure 3-4: Progress reported by mentees relative to the start on the programme



Source: Mentee survey; (n=42)

3.22 Some mentees also reported wider benefits as a result of their engagement with the programme. For example:

- 48% of mentees identified benefits for the customers, such as improved product/service offering, improved customer care, and better branding

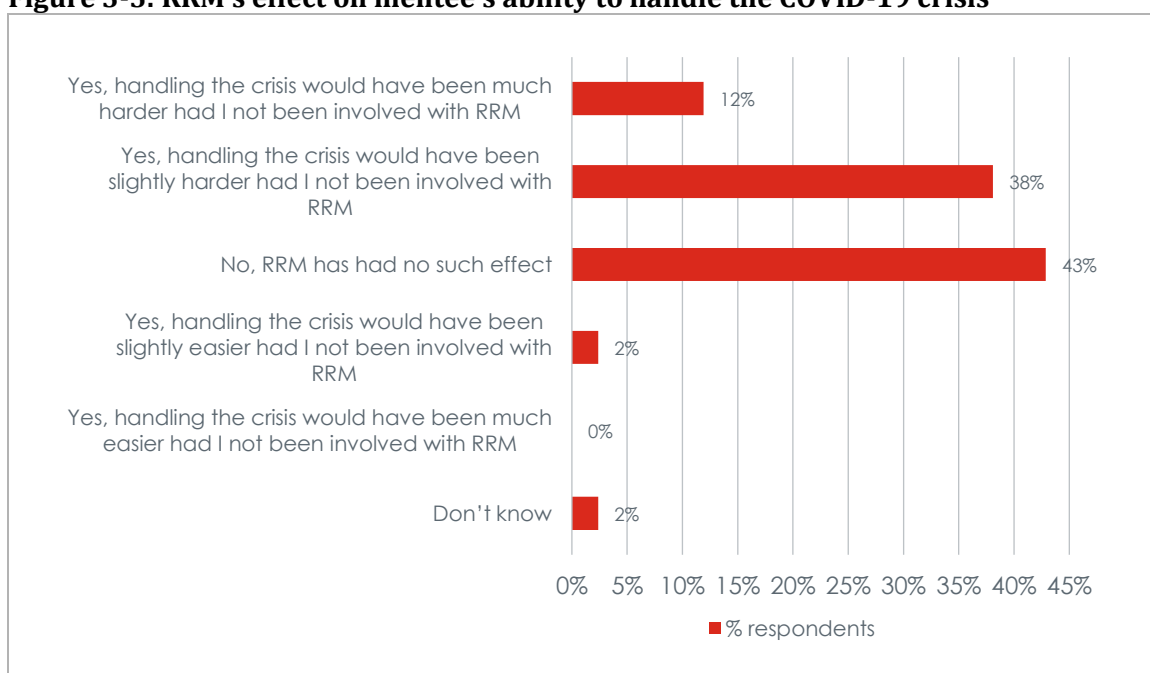
- 19% of mentees identified benefits for collaborators due to the growth/sustainment of the mentee company and accompanying collaborative opportunities
- 19% also identified indirect benefits for suppliers through the current/future growth of the mentee company and accompanying orders
- two mentees stated that their employees had benefitted, or will benefit, from greater job security.

Covid-19

3.23 Half of respondents felt that their involvement in RRM had made handling the Covid-19 crisis easier: 43% of respondents stated that RRM had no effect on their ability to handle the crisis. This finding is important given the initial aim of the RRM programme to support SMEs navigate the pandemic. However, it is likely that this reflects the earlier finding that mentees attributed a range of other factors outside of Covid-19 as their primary motivation for engaging with the RRM programme.

3.24 Those that felt that their involvement in RRM had made handling the crisis easier stated that their mentor helped by: acting as a ‘sounding board’ (21%), increasing their confidence (17%), and supporting with resource/employee management (10%).

Figure 3-5: RRM’s effect on mentee’s ability to handle the COVID-19 crisis



Source: Mentee survey; single response (n=42)

Overall reflections

3.25 For a clear majority of mentees, the programme has been beneficial, albeit to varying degrees. Mentees were asked to score, on a scale of 0 to 10, how likely they would be to

recommend it to other potential mentees. Their responses **generated a Net Promoter Score of 79, demonstrating the mentees' largely positive view of the programme and the outcomes they have achieved.**²⁰

3.26 Most of the mentors interviewed (9 out of 13) suggested that their mentees were successful in achieving their goals. A further three thought that they had been partially successful, and one did not know. Looking forward, of the four mentors who did not report that their mentee had achieved their goals to date, one thought that their mentee would achieve their goals within the next two years, two thought they would achieve them to some extent within that timescale and one did not know. For those who noted partial achievement, either realised or expected, the emphasis was on continuous improvement (i.e. their mentees did not just have a specific target to get to and so their progress would effectively always be a partial state of completion).

Benefits to mentors

3.27 The programme also generated a range of benefits for the 13 mentors interviewed. **On a personal level, this often took the form of improved soft skills – an outcome achieved by 69% of the interviewed mentors.** These tended to be communication focused, with a particular emphasis on listening and questioning skills. Two mentors also suggested the mentoring relationship had an impact on their leadership style: RRM encouraged the mentors' to *“move away from telling mode and pause, suggest and advise”*. In other words, since the mentors were working *with* mentees rather than in any kind of management role, it forced them to take a step back and facilitate mentees with the process of coming to their own solutions, rather than telling them the answers:

“Mentoring encourages you to take the approach of providing someone with the means to get their own answer, rather than just giving them your answer.” [Mentor]

3.28 **A total of 62% of mentors felt that RRM had improved their understanding of SMEs.** Some mentors had only worked in large companies for the entirety of their career, meaning that RRM provided a completely new insight into the challenges faced by SMEs, as well as their agility which large companies so often lack. For others, their understanding of SMEs, had been developed through previous experience, and was simply strengthened by their participation in the programme:

“Prior to working at [mentor company], I was at an SME, it was useful to have this knowledge and understand the challenges. [RRM] has been a useful refresher and has made me more mindful of the challenges that SMEs that we have to face.” [Mentor]

²⁰ The Net Promoter Score is a widely used market research metric. It is based on responses to a question asking consumers how likely they are to recommend a certain product or service. It is calculated by subtracting the proportion of individuals who scored 0-6 from the proportion of those who scored nine or ten. Values above 50 are often considered to be 'excellent'.

3.29 In a small number of cases, **the personal benefits experienced by mentors translated into organisational benefits for their companies.** Some mentors who achieved an improvement in their soft skills utilised these at their place of work, to the benefit of their team. Moreover, one mentor reported that they had adopted new practices which had been “tested” through their engagement with their mentee:

“I have changed the way that I engage with my team – I have been pushing down more on accountability and responsibility based on the conversations I had with my mentee on how to create high-performing teams.” [Mentor]

3.30 **Almost a third of mentors reported some benefits to their organisation (31%).** It is important to bear in mind that the size of the mentoring organisations means any company-level effects are likely to be very minor. That said, it was mentioned by one mentor that their company was benefitting by way of credibility from its very participation in RRM.

3.31 The fact that all of the mentors reported some kind of benefit from the programme is a clear success, especially given the relatively low expectations of mentor benefits at the outset: six of the mentors interviewed either did not expect any benefits from the programme, or their perceived benefits were generally selfless (i.e. to “give something back”). Overall, the mentors’ Net Promoter Score for the programme was 69.

Summary

3.32 The results shown in this section allows us to assess the programme against the three key research questions:

- Are SMEs demonstrating greater resilience and flexibility as result of RRM?
 - Just under one third of mentees reported an increase in the flexibility of their organisation
 - Around a quarter are more likely to be able to retain key personnel through a crisis.
- Where applicable, to what extent have SMEs innovated and pivoted a result of RRM?
 - The survey results demonstrate that only a small minority of RRM mentees sought to pivot their business in response to the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Less than half of the survey respondents indicated that any aspect of COVID-19 was central to their motivation for joining the programme
 - It is therefore unsurprising that only a third of mentees reported an increase in their organisation’s ability to pivot.
- How well equipped are SMEs for the future as a result of RRM?
 - Overall, most mentees consider their businesses to be better placed now, than before the mentoring programme: 62% of mentee businesses are now more prepared for the future as a result of their engagement with the programme

- Whilst limited impact was reported in terms of business costs, turnover and other tangible business outcomes, over a third of the respondents consider their business to be more financially resilient as a result of RRM.

3.33 Although the above points are based on survey questions related to the research questions, and so provide a preliminary response to these questions, it is important to reflect on other reported outcomes and impacts and how these will also affect the resilience, flexibility, and future preparedness of mentee businesses. For example, around half of the survey respondents achieved benefits related to the introduction of new management and leadership practices. Improving management and leadership practices is central to improving employee engagement and increasing organisational performance in the long run, both of which will have implications for the overall resilience of a business.

4. Additionality and contribution

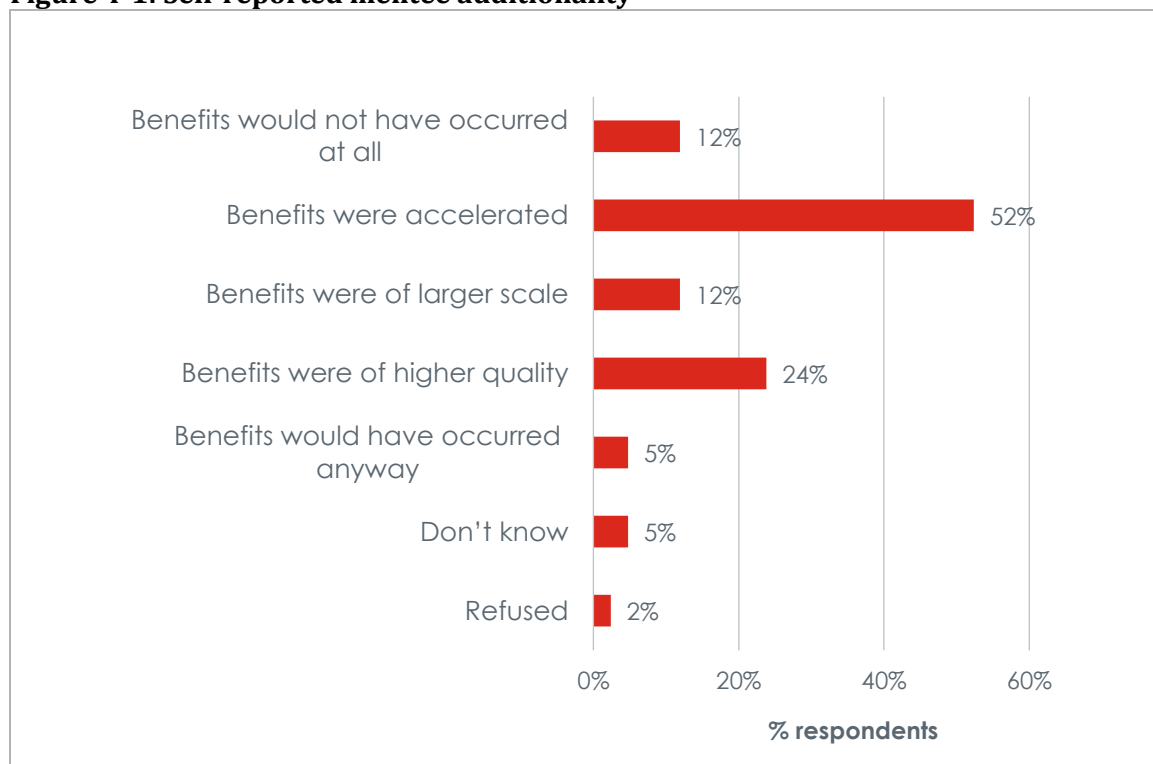
Key findings

- We conclude that RRM programme additionality is fairly strong considering the unique nature of each mentoring relationship, varied ways in which mentoring contributes to measurable benefits over time, and the relatively short duration of support. The programme's 'deadweight' is low.
- Over half of mentee respondents reported that the programme accelerated benefits – almost a third thought that it would have taken up to a year to achieve the benefits reported without the programme, and over 10% thought it would have taken up to two years. A minority of businesses experienced benefits that were of better quality and larger scale. Most (8 out of 13) mentors indicated full additionality for the programme.
- Other factors play an important role alongside RRM in contributing to benefits: market demand and sector/economic conditions, activities of other funders or organisations, pre-existing or new business plan or strategy, and new senior management/leadership.

Mentee outcomes

Additionality

- 4.1** It is important to assess whether the mentees' individual and organisational benefits would have occurred in the absence of RRM. This provides an indication of the overall additionality of the programme. Figure 4-1 presents the results on additionality for 42 respondents to the mentee survey. From this, **we conclude that the benefits as a result of the RRM programme are fairly good bearing in mind the length of the programme and the nature of support, with varied often intangible ways in which mentoring contributes to measurable benefits over time.** Over half of the mentee respondents achieved benefits faster, around one-quarter stated that the benefits were of a higher quality, and just over one-tenth suggest that benefits were of a larger scale as a result of the programme. The same proportion indicate the benefits would not have occurred at all in the absence of the programme (full additionality). The programme's 'deadweight' is low (5%).

Figure 4-1: Self-reported mentee additionality

Source: Mentee survey; multiple responses (n=42)

4.2 Table 4-1 provides further detail on timing additionality. Those mentees achieved benefits faster, almost a third (29%) thought that it would have taken up to a year to achieve the benefits reported without the programme and over 10% thought it would have taken up to two years.

Table 4-1: Self-reported mentee partial additionality

	Additionality	% respondents
Without engagement with RRM, approximately how much longer would it have taken for you to achieve these benefits?	Up to a year	29%
	Up to 2 years	12%
	Up to 3 years	2%
	Up to 4 years	0%
	Up to 5 years	0%
	More than five years	0%
	Don't know	7%

Source: Mentee survey; multiple responses (n=42)

4.3 The mentor interviews provided further insight into the additionality of RRM, for mentee benefits. The results are broadly in line with the mentees' self-assessment: almost half felt that their mentee would have taken longer to achieve the reported outcomes, 8% reflected that the benefits would have been achieved to a lower scale and 8% thought that the benefits would have occurred anyway. However, compared to the mentee self-assessment a larger proportion (31%) thought that the mentee benefits would not have been achieved at all. In

these cases, it often came down to the sense of accountability and the structure that the mentoring relationship brought:

“I don’t think [my mentee] would have achieved the same benefits – not necessarily due to the specific mentor, but because [the mentee] needs the rigour, routine and accountability put in place through the mentoring.” [Mentor]

- 4.4** The case studies provide further detail into how and why additionality was generated by RRM. For example, one mentee achieved benefits at a faster rate because their perspective had been “broadened” by the influence of their mentor; meaning they were able to adapt the businesses processes more swiftly in response to Covid-19 and in line with the ongoing growth of the company. In addition, one mentor reported that the additionality of RRM was generated through the sounding board role of the mentor:

“Each week the conversations would progress – [the mentee] would have lots of ideas but needed help working through them and having someone to discuss them with and provide feedback.” [Mentor]

Contribution

- 4.5** The above findings suggest that RRM delivered additional outcomes for engaged mentees. To strengthen this finding, mentees were asked to consider other factors which may have contributed to the reported outcomes, and the importance of RRM relative to these.
- 4.6** Table 4-2- details other factors reported by mentees to have contributed to achieved outcomes. The main factors included: market demand and sector/economic conditions,²¹ and other funders or organisations, pre-existing or new business plan/strategy implemented, new senior management team/business leadership in place. Overall, these other factors were generally considered to be important and contribute alongside the mentoring programme in achieving outcomes. However, RRM played a crucial role in enabling these benefits to be realised.

Table 4-2-: What other factors outside of RRM may have contributed to the outcomes you and your organisation have achieved?

	Influencing factor	Number of mentees	Percentage of mentees
External	Market demand and external sector and economic conditions	16	38%
	Other funders or organisations	6	14%
	Technology changes and developments	2	5%
	Regulatory or policy changes	1	2%

²¹ It should be noted that this was not always a positive influence – for example, in some situations Covid-19 had forced business leaders to make difficult but necessary decisions.

	Influencing factor	Number of mentees	Percentage of mentees
Internal	Pre-existing or new business plan/strategy implemented	9	21%
	New senior management team/business leadership in place	4	10%
	Other R&D activities in the business	2	5%
	New location	1	2%
	Existing internal training programmes	1	2%
	New equipment purchased	0	0%
	Existing customer relationships	0	0%
	Other (please specify)*	8	19%
	Don't know	5	12%
	Refused	1	2%

* 'other' contributing factors mainly included: ongoing business growth; marketing activities; and site refurbishment

Source: Mentee survey; multiple response (n=42)

Mentor outcomes

- 4.7** The additionality of RRM for mentor's outcomes was even more pronounced: eight of the 14 mentors interviewed reported that without the mentoring programme, their benefits would not have occurred at all. A further two (15%) reported timing additionality (up to one year) and one reported scale additionality. Only one mentor thought that the benefits would have occurred in the same way if they had not engaged with RRM.
- 4.8** For those reporting partial additionality, other mentoring relationships were key to realising the same benefits, albeit at a lower scale and/or more slowly. However, it was made clear that these mentoring relationships, which were internal to each mentor's respective company, would not have provided the interaction with SMEs and so benefits associated with this would have been lost. Moreover, one mentor pointed out that the focus of RRM on improvements at the business-level meant that the mentors could gain a different *type* of mentoring skills, compared to those developed through internal mentoring programmes, which tend to be career-oriented.

5. Key lessons

- 5.1** This section provides an overview of areas of RRM that have worked particularly well for mentees and elements of the programme that have worked less well.

Strengths

- 5.2** Overall, it is clear that most mentees are satisfied with the quality of delivery of the programme: the vast majority of survey respondents rated the programme's quality as four (50%) or five (36%) out of five.
- 5.3** **The quality of the match was seen as critical in enabling benefits to be achieved (26%).** A good quality match relies on compatibility at both a personal and professional level. Mentees were therefore asked to rate the quality of their match on a scale of one to five for various characteristics (personality, seniority, fit of requirements and expectations). For each of these elements, most mentees rated their mentees highly (five was the most common response), producing an average score of over four for each. The survey provided qualitative evidence to back up this finding: 29% of mentees reflected in an open response question that their mentor's experience, and the overall quality of the match, was the most useful aspect of the programme. Three mentees also mentioned that the quality of the match or the experience of their mentor was unique compared to other support that they had received.

Table 5-1: Which aspects of RRM's design and delivery were most critical in enabling benefits to be achieved?

Mentee responses related to importance of match

"The match itself has been perfect and was critical."

"Securing the right mentor is the most important aspect - you have to have the right person in terms of the knowledge, but you also have to click with them."

"The mentor's experience and background played a significant role in providing information that the business needed at that time (during the pandemic crisis). They needed clarity due to all the changes they were constantly facing. The mentor had been through similar situations this so could lean on his experience and share things."

"Finding the right match - I knew that I needed someone with finance knowledge and the mentor was very good in this area."

"The quality of the match - having someone with the right personality in particular is very important. If you don't get on with someone you won't buy into what they are saying."

Source: Mentee survey; open response (n=42)

- 5.4** **A minority of mentees (19%) reported that having regular, structured meetings was central to achieving outcomes.** As well as bringing momentum, this regularity also brought heightened "accountability" from the mentee's part. Indeed, one mentee reflected that they would continue to block out this time in their diary to continue to develop the business after the mentoring had finished. Mentor consistency was key to enabling this regularity: mentees

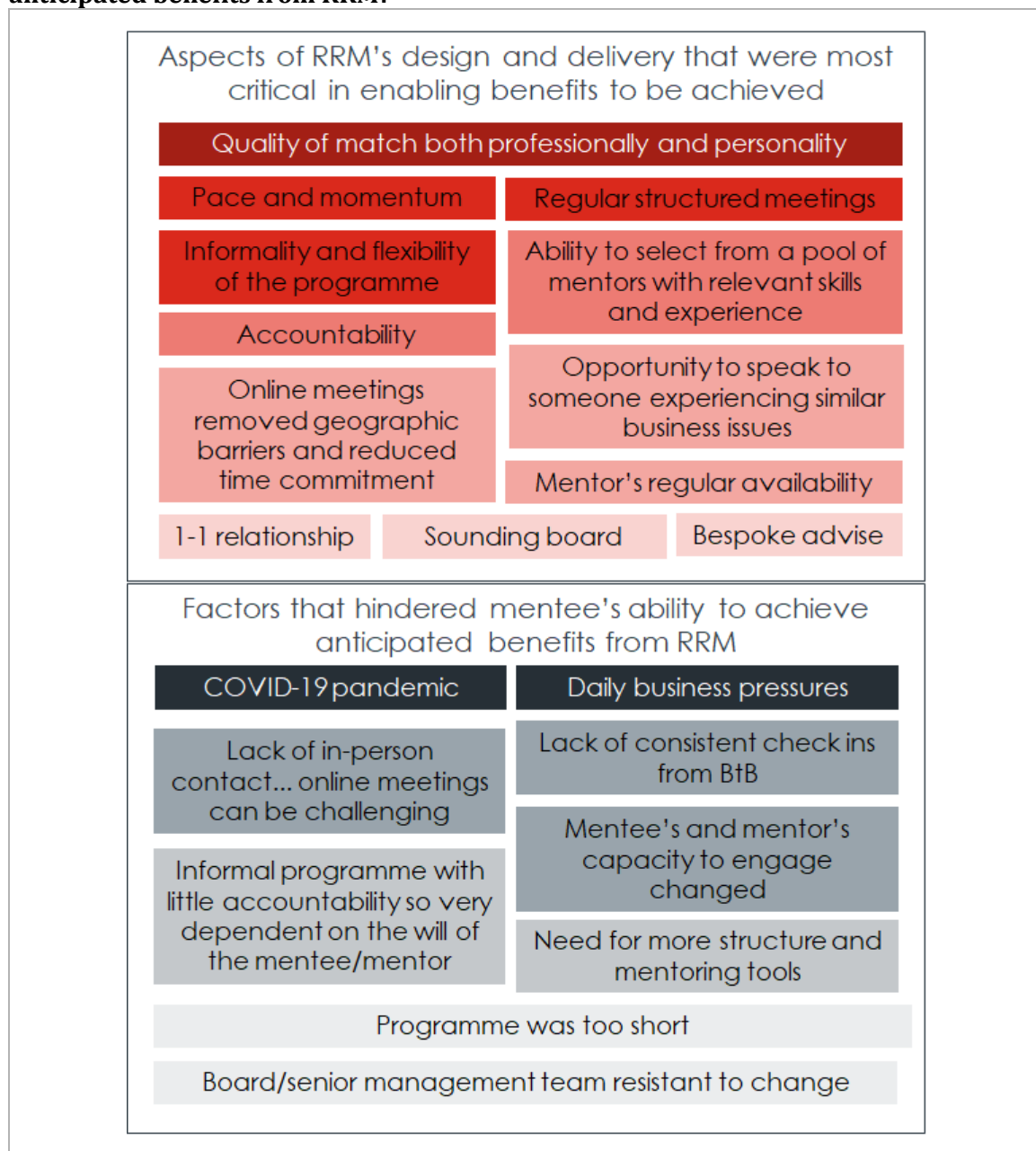
valued having a mentor who would stick to the regular slot as far as possible, although appreciated that a degree of flexibility is needed to allow for ongoing business pressures.

Limitations

5.5 Very few aspects of the programme were raised by mentees as being a weakness per se: when asked about factors that hindered their achievement of benefits, most mentees discussed issues unrelated to RRM, such as business pressures and Covid-19. However, a small minority of mentees raised issues relating to the following elements of the programme:

- **Virtual meetings were highlighted by 12% of mentees as a slight hindrance to the achievement of outcomes.** In most cases it was noted that meeting in person was “*not essential*”, but one consultee noted that online meetings “*fundamentally changed the dynamic*”, for the worse. Overall, 33% of the mentees thought that it would have been better to have all of the meetings in person, 36% said it would have been the same, and 14% did not know.
- **Looking forward, the evidence suggests that a flexible blended model would suit most mentees** – allowing face to face interactions to occur at the start, when building the relationship, and more time efficient online meetings to take precedence once the foundations have been laid.
- **A small minority of mentees suggested a more solid structure to the programme would be valuable.** One mentee reported that it was difficult to know if they were “*on the right track*” with their mentoring relationship due to the lack of support or “*checkpoints*” following the match. As with MfG, the overall flexibility of RRM is valued, so increasing the intensity of communication with mentees and mentors is the logical solution to maintaining this flexibility, whilst supporting relationships to develop.

Figure 5-1: Which aspects of RRM's design and delivery were most critical in enabling benefits to be achieved? Are there any factors that hindered your ability to get anticipated benefits from RRM?



Source: SQW (Note: darker colour shades indicate a higher number of mentees reporting the factor as enabling/hindering benefits.)

6. Comparison of mentoring programmes

- 6.1** BtB runs two separate mentoring programmes. The RRM programme was launched in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and seeks to increase firm-level resilience to adverse shocks, helping SMEs both to deal with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and to be better prepared for the future beyond this crisis. The RRM programme period is 12 weeks although some mentoring relationships extended beyond this. The MfG programme was launched in 2018 and seeks to raise productivity by improving management and leadership (M&L) practices through mentoring. The MfG programme period is 12 months.
- 6.2** This section contrasts the two programmes with the purpose of informing any future changes to the delivery methods BtB may consider, and/or selection of the model for a new mentoring scheme. Reflecting that RRM and MfG have different objectives, a detailed comparison is not appropriate. Therefore, we present a ‘high-level’ assessment that focusses on the key differences between the programmes – their length and mode of delivery (in normal times).
- 6.3** Table 6-1 summarises the benefits achieved by survey respondents on the two programmes.
- Unsurprisingly, the average number of contact hours was less on RRM than on MfG (9 and 14 hours respectively). This reflects the difference in programme duration (12 weeks versus 12 months) and the nature of support (intensive versus prolonged). However, the intensity of support (the number of contact hours per week of support) is higher on RRM.
 - Similar proportion of survey respondents on MfG (54%) and RRM (46%) had adopted new M&L practices. It is important to consider timing in this context. RRM provides more intensive support over a shorter timescale which allows less time for mentees to adopt new M&L practices.
 - Reported individual and organisational benefits were higher on MfG than on RRM. This is likely to be mainly a reflection of differences in programme duration (i.e., MfG allows more time for benefits to be fully realised).
 - The mentee survey suggests that RRM is more likely to result in wider benefits for customers, collaborators and suppliers. The RRM programme seeks to raise the levels of flexibility and resilience within firms whereas MfG is focused on increasing productivity.
 - 50% of surveyed RRM mentees reported that the programme helped them handle the Covid-19 crisis compared to 36% on MfG. This is perhaps unsurprising given the context in which the RRM programme was launched and its aim to help SMEs (mentees) navigate the crisis.
 - The net promoter score for both RRM and MfG is ‘excellent’ (79 and 58 respectively). Suggesting that both delivery models meet the needs of participants well.

Table 6-1: Summary of the benefits achieved by survey respondents on RRM and MfG

Inputs and Outcomes	Rapid Response Mentoring	Mentoring for Growth
Contact hours	Average: 9 33% had up to 5 hours	Average: 14 17% had up to 5 hours
New M&L practices adopted	46% In multiple areas: 36%	54% In multiple areas: 46%
Individual benefits	Awareness of M&L practices: 43% Knowledge and skills: 60% Confidence in implementing M&L practices: 57%	Awareness of M&L practices: 67% Knowledge and skills: 80% Confidence in implementing M&L practices: 75%
Business performance	14% <i>achieved</i> benefits on employment 7% <i>achieved</i> benefits on turnover	38% <i>achieved</i> benefits on employment 32% <i>achieved</i> benefits on turnover
Wider benefits	Customers: 48% Collaborators: 19% Suppliers: 19%	Customers: 30% Collaborators: 9% Suppliers: 16%
Programme helped to handle Covid-19	50%	36%
Net promotor score	79	58

Source: RRM mentee survey (n=42) and MfG mentee survey (n=69)²²

- 6.4 Both the RRM and MfG mentee survey indicate that there is reasonable demand for face-to-face mentoring.** For example, 33% of RRM survey respondents thought their mentoring experience would have been better if the meetings had been in person. Similarly, 48% of MfG survey respondents thought their experience would have been worse if all meetings had been online.
- 6.5** However, 36% of RRM mentees thought their experience would have been the same if the meetings had been in person. This indifference might reflect the fact that RRM mentees were more open to online mentoring due to having never been able to meet their mentor in person and therefore not having an alternative option to compare it to.

Reflections

- 6.6** A summary of the pros and cons associated with each mentoring format is provided in Table 6-2. We conclude that, while RRM provides more intensive support over a shorter timescale, the programme appears to perform well in terms of benefits achieved by mentees.
- 6.7** RRM appears to be more suitable for mentees that have well defined issues. For example, mentors were asked if there was an optimal level of mentoring in terms of number and

²² A detailed analysis of responses to MfG survey are presented in the Impact Evaluation of Mentoring for Growth.

frequency of interactions to maximise the benefits from the engagement. Most mentors thought that the optimal level of mentoring depended on the mentee's requirements.

"Really depends on the requirements. The mentoring should be taken case by case with both parties in agreement. Should be looking for a least a couple of hours a month but I don't think there is a minimum number of months that should span across – could just be 6 months or could be longer and dynamic relationship." [Mentor]

- 6.8** However, some mentors noted a longer programme allows time for the benefits to come through. One mentor commented that the 12-week programme did not allow enough time for mentees to implement actions. Other mentors suggested a blend of RRM and MfG would be optimal. For example, mentoring could be intensive at the beginning and then move to a less intensive/prolonged arrangement to provide sufficient time for mentees to implement actions and learning.

"The intensive programme worked well and seemed to get impacts quite quickly. Over a longer programme I would start with that intensity and then spread the sessions out so that learning and reflections is embedded." [Mentor]

- 6.9** Taking into account all points above, going forward Be the Business may want to consider a 'hybrid' solution in which: a) mentees would be first enrolled on a shorter programme with an option to move onto a longer programme if they felt they would benefit from more support, and b) a mix of face-to-face and online meetings would be used to leverage the benefits of both modes of delivery.

Table 6-2: Pros and cons associated with mentoring format

12 weeks (RRM)	12 months (MfG)
More intensive support: may be better suited for addressing well-defined issues	Allows time for the benefits to come through
Achieves a reasonable percentage of the benefits observed from a longer programme	Mentors see the results of their support and can offer further guidance based on the outcomes
Does not reduce mentors' workload proportionally ⇒ more demanding in terms of short-term availability	Momentum can be lost

Source: SQW

7. Conclusions

- 7.1** The Be the Business Rapid Response Mentoring (RRM) programme²³ was launched in response to the challenges associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. It seeks to help SMEs to navigate through unpredictable environment by improving their management and leadership capabilities through mentoring. These are expected to translate into increased resilience to adverse shocks helping SMEs both to deal with the effects of Covid-19 and to be better prepared for the future.
- 7.2** The main purpose of evaluation was to assess how the programme has been performing against its objectives. It was also expected to draw lessons from a comparison with another mentoring programme run by Be the Business – Mentoring for Growth – as they both seek to improve management and leadership practices of SMEs and have similar delivery mechanisms.
- 7.3** We highlight the following points relating to the evaluation:
- As of September 2020, 179 businesses signed up for RRM, 141 were matched with a mentor.
 - Mentoring relationships last up to 12-weeks. The intensity and nature of support is determined in individual mentor-mentee pairs
 - Mentoring is delivered virtually
 - The business survey received responses from 42 mentees, we estimate the margin of error in the survey results to be 13 percentage points
 - At the time of fieldwork, 60% of surveyed mentees were in an ongoing mentoring relationship while the rest had only recently completed the programme. Combined with the relatively short duration of support, there was limited time for the benefits to fully come through
 - Less than half (43%) of respondents identified Covid-19 as the main factor that made them seek mentoring support implying that in many cases the support was needed to address issues that were highlighted by the pandemic rather than to address its direct consequences
 - RRM was assessed against its own goals and objectives. The comparison to MfG was undertaken at a 'high level' and focused on the differences in duration (12 weeks vs 12 months) in mode of delivery (virtual only vs a mix of face-to-face – pre pandemic – and virtual – post pandemic).

²³ Also known as the Rapid Response Cohort (RRC).

- 7.4** Considering the timescales, we conclude the programme activities translated into key individual level outcomes which contributed to better resilience and preparedness for the future at the business-level. Almost all survey respondents have experienced, or expect to experience, personal benefits through their engagement with RRM including improved knowledge and skills (60%), and/or increasing mentee's awareness/knowledge of different management and leadership practices (achieved by 43% of respondents). Half of respondents indicated that their involvement in RRM had made handling the crisis easier and over 60% reported an increase in their organisation's preparedness for the future. Benefits to business performance were less commonly reported, as expected given the nature of the programme.
- 7.5** We also found evidence of the programme contributing to a growing pool of high-quality mentors, with more than 60% of interviewed mentors indicating improved skills and understanding of SME's needs.
- 7.6** Given the nature and duration of support, the findings on additionality of the programme are encouraging. For over half of mentee respondents RRM accelerated the benefits – by up to a year for approximately a third of them and by two years for over a tenth of them. Other factors, such as market demand, pre-existing business plan or strategy, and new senior management in the business were found to be contributing to the benefits alongside RRM.
- 7.7** The quality of the match in terms of personal characteristics and expertise as well as having regular structured meetings was identified as important elements for enabling the benefits. Virtual delivery was one of the more common factors mentioned as limiting the benefits from the programme. At the same time, mentees recognise the benefits of having an opportunity to hold an online meeting without the expectation that all communication has to happen face-to-face and the associated time commitments.
- 7.8** The intensity of support is determined within each mentoring relationship and varies between pairs. The evidence on the levels of engagement suggests that RRM is up to three times as intensive as support from MfG (measured as a ratio of the average number of contact hours to the length of the mentoring relationship). This allows short-term benefits to come through quickly, but for some mentees the ability to drive longer-term impacts may be limited by the length of support.
- 7.9** Considering the strong levels of satisfaction with RRM among both mentees and mentors, the levels of achieved benefits relative to the timescale of expected impacts, and the feedback on the mode and intensity of delivery we propose that going forward a **'hybrid' model** is considered, where: a) mentees join a shorter version of the programme and at the end of it move onto the longer programme if they require further support, and b) mentoring is delivered through a mix of in-person and virtual activities to leverage the benefits of both models.

Annex A: Case Studies

A.1 This annex contains ten paired mentee-mentor case studies as follows:

Mentee organisation	Mentor organisation
Infused Food Limited	BAE Systems
Faraday Predictive	BAE Systems
Not disclosed	KPMG
Inn Cornwall Company	BAE Systems Applied Intelligence
Dealey Environmental	BAE Systems
The Insights Family	BAE Systems
Catrin House	BAE Systems
CGA	BAE Systems
CGA	BAE Systems

Case Study 1

Profile & motivations

Infused Food Limited (Infused) is a specialist provider of hospitality training and consultancy. The company's founding partner joined the Rapid Response Mentoring programme as a mentee, **seeking support in navigating the Covid-19 crisis**. In particular, the mentee wanted support in developing a strategy for the newly launched training arm of the business. Given this focus, the mentee was matched with the head of BAE's Academy for Skills and Knowledge. The mentor's specific knowledge of training, in addition to previous experience of mentoring within BAE Systems and on RRM, meant they were well-placed to support the mentee through a challenging period.

Activities

The pair had a two-hour meeting every two weeks throughout the 3-month programme. Beyond this, the relationship continued albeit less intensely.

Early in the programme, it was clear to the mentor that the mentee is a very creative and driven entrepreneur. Infused Food was suffering as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions and the situation was made worse by the lack of focus and structure in the business model. The mentoring relationship was therefore initially focused on developing a short-term immediate strategy which could sustain the business throughout the pandemic. Within this, there were four key themes to discuss: mission & vision; strategic objectives; financial strategy; and a risk assessment plan. One of the tools that the mentor introduced in these discussions was the 'Plan on a Page'. This is a concise, one page synthesis of the key design elements of a plan, covering the aims; required resources; outcomes; risks; and mitigating factors. The mentee found it to be a valuable planning tool.

Outcomes & impacts

As a result of RRM, the mentee reflects that Infused is better prepared for the future; both in terms of flexibility and financial resilience. This is partly due to a refined business plan which the mentor helped to develop using the Plan on a Page tool. The renewed business plan focuses on the training side of the business, which is transitioning to online delivery. In terms of personal benefits, the mentee has improved business acumen, and as a result now feels more confident both in making difficult decisions and in their ability to manage unpredictable environments. These improvements will contribute towards future business growth - the mentee expects an increase in R&D spend, employment and turnover, alongside a reduction in business costs, over the next

MENTEE

Role: Director

Organisation: Infused Food Limited

Sector: Accommodation and Food Services

Location: West Midlands

Issue: Covid-19 response, business strategy

MENTOR

Role: Head of Academy for Skills and Knowledge

Organisation: BAE

Sector: Aerospace

Location: North West

Experience: Skills and education leadership, business transformation, human resources

two years. To facilitate this growth, the mentor also helped the mentee to delegate more. More widely, the mentee's customers are expected to benefit as a result of the programme. The revised business plan means that the company is on track to becoming a mainstream apprenticeship provider faster than it otherwise would have done, thus improving the service offer

The mentor, who was partnered with two different mentees on RRM, has found the programme to be valuable in two ways. Firstly, it was an interesting experience to learn about other sectors and to refresh his knowledge of SMEs. Secondly, the mentor developed soft skills around encouraging the mentees to come up with their own solutions:

"You don't want to go into "telling" mode, you learn to pause, suggest and advise – you are not their line manager or boss".

The mentor notes that this is a different set of skills to normal management skills, and it will undoubtedly be useful in work scenarios at BAE. The mentor also mentioned that RRM is beneficial to BAE Systems in a broader sense, with regards to supporting the company's reputation and community investment strategy

Additionality & contribution

Without RRM, the benefits reported by the mentee would have occurred to a lower quality and would have taken up to two years longer. The mentor also reflected that the benefits may not have occurred to the same scale. As well as the input from the mentoring, the achieved benefits were facilitated by the slowdown in work due to Covid-19 – this allowed the mentee the time to *"step back and work on the business rather than in the business"*.

The mentor felt that, in the absence of the programme, they would have continued to develop the soft skills mentioned above by means of the mentoring they engage with internally at BAE. However, these skills would have been slightly different due to the nature of the teams he usually manages and the focus of the mentoring (largely career oriented). The benefits which came from "touching base" with SMEs would not have occurred without RRM.

Wider perspectives

The quality of the match and the overall flexibility of the programme were cited as reasons for the success of this mentoring relationship. The mentor noted that the programme provided the ideal opportunity for SMEs to access the expert advice and resources of larger firms. This was particularly valuable during the Covid-19 pandemic when larger firms had more resources to draw on in developing adaptation plans.

Benefits to



Greater flexibility / ability to pivot



Business resilience & performance



Improved business acumen

Benefits to



Improved soft skills



Potential reputational gains for the company

● Achieved

● Expected

Case Study 2

Profile & motivations

Faraday Predictive specialises in the optimised maintenance of a wide range of rotating machinery, such as pumps, fans and compressors. When the company's Operations Director was made aware of the Rapid Response Mentoring (RRM) programme by the Anglia Growth Hub, it seemed like a good opportunity to develop the business. In particular, support was required in the areas of manufacturing operations, marketing and sales. The Operations Director joined the programme as a mentee and was matched with a Sales Operations Leader at BAE Systems, who has a strong technical background.

Activities

For the duration of the 12-week programme, the pair had weekly phone calls which lasted around one hour each. The focus of the conversation was around adding more structure into the sales side of the organisation. Prior to joining RRM, the mentee's company made the decision to adopt a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software.

The mentor helped to guide the mentee on the best use of this tool, specifically around data collection and analysis. They also spoke about other elements of the business, such as opportunity prioritisation - like many SMEs, Faraday Predictive had a tendency to focus on a large number of relatively small opportunities. The mentee was therefore encouraged by the mentor to prioritise a smaller number of key opportunities.

To do so, the mentee began to set aside a regular weekly timeslot to assess the sales pipeline and prioritise certain types of work. To keep the process on track, the mentor set informal targets and objectives that were discussed at the weekly meetings. Following the end of the 12-week RRM programme, the pair continued to find the mentoring relationship constructive and so transitioned onto the longer Mentoring for Growth programme.

Outcomes & impacts

In terms of organisational benefits, RRM supported the mentee with the implementation of the CRM tool. For the mentee, the most valuable thing to come from the programme was learning how to utilise the data it collects:

"The mentoring increased our motivation to adopt the CRM system and to use it effectively"

MENTEE

Role Operations Director

Organisation: Faraday Predictive

Sector Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities

Location: East of England

Issue: Manufacturing operations, sales & marketing

MENTOR

Role Sales Operations Leader

Organisation: BAE Systems

Sector: Aerospace

Location: London

Experience: General management, project management, technology development

This has already directly benefited Faraday Predictive's customers. The system means that each customer is followed up methodically, and generally customer care has improved. In the medium-long term, suppliers are expected to benefit as the company grows and increases its purchasing.

In addition, the focus of on the opportunities pipeline helped to slightly increase the Faraday Predictive's financial resilience. Over the next two years, these changes are expected to have knock-on positive implications for investment in R&D, and employment & turnover growth. The use of the CRM tool is also expected to help drive down business costs.

On a personal level, the mentee gained new knowledge in several areas, including: sales and marketing; the assessment of business opportunities; and the use of CRM software.

The mentor also benefitted personally. Prior to joining the programme, the mentor had hoped it would be an opportunity to "feel the pulse" of the business environment outside of BAE Systems. Indeed, the mentor reported that the programme effectively provided a "refresh" of pre-existing knowledge of SMEs, which may benefit BAE Systems:

"I have an aspiration to bring more dynamism and agility back to my company"

The mentor also highlighted that BAE System's participation in the programme has generally been a good thing for the company, in terms of social responsibility.

Additionality & contribution

The mentee believed that it would have taken up to one year longer to achieve the described benefits without the support from the mentor. The rigour and routine provided by the mentoring helped to keep the mentee on track and bring about benefits more quickly as the mentee has tendency to be: *"side-tracked by technical rabbit holes and lose track of priorities."* In mentor's view without RRM the company may in fact never have achieved the same quality of benefits with regards to the use of the CRM software.

The progress that the business made during the course of the programme was aided by the company's pre-existing business plan, other R&D activities, and technology developments. These other factors were critical in achieving the benefits described. For the mentor, the benefits experienced are unlikely to have occurred without participation in RRM.

Wider perspectives

Overall, the mentor and mentee felt the programme had been a success. This was, in part, due to format of the programme being online which allowed more flexibility in the meeting arrangements, easier sharing of resources, and more time for the mentee to work on action points. The "rhythm" of weekly meetings was important to maintain momentum. However, more clarity/structure could have been provided in three respects. First, the mentee felt it may have been useful for the mentor to have more set guidance around the topics to cover and type of advice to give. Second, improved clarity around

the support structure i.e. how the programme is set up and run, would have been useful. Finally, the mentor would have appreciated systematic feedback as to whether mentees are getting value from participating. Despite these minor reservations, both mentee and mentor had a positive experience of RRM and are highly likely to recommend it to other businesses.

Benefits to mentee



Greater flexibility / ability to pivot



Business resilience & performance



Improved understanding and use of CRM



Improved understanding of SMEs



Reputational gains for the organisation

● Achieved

● Expected

Case Study 3

Profile & motivations

The mentee is a director of a construction firm based in the North West. Having worked in the business for over 30 years, the mentee wanted to “go back to basics” and learn about up-to-date management practices and business planning techniques. The mentee hoped this would rebuild their confidence following the loss of one of their business units, four years prior. The mentee was partnered with a Senior Tax Manager from KPMG who had experience of mentoring colleagues internally. Before joining the programme, the mentor sought to *“gain experience advising SMEs more widely than on tax – to develop experience as a general business adviser”*. This fitted well with the mentee’s rather general ambition to improve themselves and their business.

Activities

Over the course of the programme, the pair had around ten ‘contact’ hours via telephone calls. The topics covered were not related to Covid-19, but on general improvements to processes and procedures within the business, especially around supplier management. Within this, the mentor was able to expand the mentee’s knowledge of accountancy software and best practice for invoice management. They also talked about succession planning and worked on defining the longer-term strategic objectives of the company.

The mentee spent a considerable amount of time preparing for these calls (c. 20 hours). This was possible as a result of the pandemic slowing down the pace of business and freeing up some time for the mentee.

Outcomes & impacts

This mentoring relationship was very much about continuous improvement rather than achieving a specific goal: *“[the mentee] saw it as a working relationship rather than a programme to achieve a specific outcome”*.

Nonetheless, the mentee did outline some noticeable benefits to the business as a result of the programme, including **increased financial resilience and improved preparedness for the future**. These benefits came about through the mentee’s **enhanced knowledge of accountancy software and future planning**. Importantly, this led to an increase in the mentee’s **confidence**, particularly regarding their management and leadership skills. This was highlighted by the mentee

MENTEE

Role: Director

Organisation: Not disclosed

Sector: Construction

Location: North West

Issue: Confidence and sounding board

MENTOR

Role: Senior Tax Manager

Organisation: KPMG

Sector: Accountancy & Tax

Location: North West

Experience: 13 years in professional services from supporting small SMEs to large multinationals

as being the most important aspect of the programme and was an important factor in handling the Covid-19 crisis: *“The mentoring has lifted my confidence and put me in a better position to get through the pandemic”*.

The mentor’s confidence was also lifted by RRM. They gained a **better understanding of SMEs and improved their mentoring skills more generally**. The latter has had positive implications for KPMG through its internal mentoring programme.

Additionality & contribution

Without RRM, the mentee would have taken **longer to achieve the same benefits** both in terms of management practices and their personal confidence. The mentor also thought that the mentee would have made these improvements, but at a slower rate. Whilst engaged with the programme, there were not any other factors which contributed to the achievement of these outcomes that the mentee could point to. For the mentor, the benefits are **unlikely to have occurred at all** in the absence of RRM. It was the only way that they were able to gain the wider set of experiences which led to their boost in confidence.

Wider perspectives

Whilst few tangible benefits were achieved, this case study demonstrates the mutually beneficial role of mentoring in terms of increasing confidence. For this reason, the relationship was successful despite not having clear aims or objectives. The following aspects of the programme were considered to be important contributors to this success:

- The overall **flexibility of the programme** in terms of the meeting times, format and subject
- The **attitude of the mentee** upon starting the programme – being *“open to suggestions and making the most of opportunities”*
- The mentoring webinars provided by Be the Business.

However, one area for improvement concerns the lack of systematic feedback to mentors. The mentor pointed out that, once the relationship was completed, it would be useful to have some formal feedback from their mentee’s perspective, so that they can continue to hone their mentoring skills.

Benefits to mentee



Greater flexibility / ability to pivot



Business resilience



Improved confidence



Improved confidence



Organisational benefits through internal mentoring

● Achieved ● Expected

Case Study 4

Profile & motivations

The Director at the Inn Cornwall Company – a hospitality business based in South West – sought mentoring support to address management, leadership and communication challenges associated with remote working during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The mentee was matched with the CIO at BAE Systems Applied Intelligence who had managed a remote team prior to the Covid-19 pandemic so was well-placed to share their experience and learning. While the mentor had previously mentored colleagues within BAE Systems Applied Intelligence, the RRM programme was the first time they had mentored an individual from outside their organisation.

Activities

The mentoring relationship began in May 2020. The pair arranged weekly calls – the regularity of the calls was thought to be particularly valuable.

“Having regular meetings meant there was more accountability to staying on track and deliver changes”

The Covid-19 pandemic had forced the mentee to adopt remote working across the business. As a result, the mentee and mentor discussed how the mentee might manage employees more effectively while they were working from home. For example, the mentor recommended introducing regular zoom calls. The mentee appreciated the advice received through the RRM programme and so the mentoring relationship has continued informally beyond the 12-week programme period.

Outcomes & impacts

Communication across the business improved as a result of the RRM programme through the introduction of a weekly zoom meeting where the mentee discussed the direction of the business and answered questions raised by employees. **The participation in RRM also led to the adoption of new M&L practices across the following areas: operations management, performance monitoring, target setting, and leadership.** These outcomes resulted in small improvements to the business’s flexibility, financial resilience, preparedness for the future, and ability to retain key personnel throughout a crisis.

MENTEE

Role: Director

Organisation: Inn Cornwall Company

Sector: Hospitality

Location: South West

Issue: Management, leadership and communication

MENTOR

Role: CIO

Organisation: BAE Systems Applied Intelligence

Sector: Engineering

Location: South East

Experience: Internal mentoring

“I am more accessible to everyone inside the business. I introduced a tea and catch up break that has been successful - this was particularly welcome during a period where there was anxiety around Covid-19”

In terms of personal benefits, **the mentee had achieved an increased awareness of new M&L practices and improved knowledge and skills.** For example, the mentee introduced performance monitoring, held more structured meetings, and was able to make better decisions.

The mentee commented that handling the crisis would have been slightly harder had they not been involved with RRM. While the mentee joined the RRM programme to work through Covid-19 related issues, they reported a wide range of general benefits and received support that went beyond the specific needs of handling the crisis.

It was thought that customers, suppliers, competitors, and collaborators had also benefitted as a result of the mentee’s engagement with the RRM programme.

Initially, the mentor did not have any expectations about the benefits they or BAE Systems Applied Intelligence might achieve as a result of the RRM programme. However, they realised that **the programme provided an opportunity to reflect and “hold a mirror up to oneself” which enabled them to perform better in their own role. The mentor also reported that they had a better understanding of SMEs as a result of the RRM programme.**

“The mentoring provided a different view on business issues and brought a different lens to conversation”

Additionality & contribution

Without RRM, the mentee thought that the benefits mentioned above would have occurred but at a slower rate, they estimated it would have taken up to a year to achieve the benefits. Other external factors outside of RRM also contributed to the outcomes achieved by the mentee, such as economic conditions linked to the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, while changes to management, leadership and communication were needed more broadly, Covid-19 emphasised their importance and forced the mentee to make changes more quickly. The mentor commented that they would not have achieved the benefits reported without the RRM programme.

Wider perspectives

Both the mentee and mentor were complementary about the RRM programme. They believed that mentoring was a good approach to improving SME performance and dealing with business challenges. However, both thought that the programme might have been better if they were able to meet in person.

“[The programme] helped me to think about and incorporate the bigger/long term picture whilst implementing emergency strategies and policies. It encouraged me to dig deeper into why I was making certain decisions.”

In terms of the delivery of the RRM programme, the mentor stated that there was an “*initial surge of activity*” at the beginning to support mentee and mentors which diminished over time. They suggested that regular check ins with BtB would ensure the relationship is working and increase mentee/mentor confidence.

“After the initial matching and kick-off, no-one from BtB checked in with me other than to confirm how many hours I had dedicated to it [the programme]. This should be improved with BtB being proactive and reaching out to check in with the mentor (and mentee).”

“The programme has great benefits... I would encourage anyone to reach out!” – mentor

Benefits to mentee



Improved communication



New M&L practices



Improved knowledge and skills

Benefits to mentor



Improvement in performance in their own role



Organisational benefits



Achieved



Expected

Case Study 5

Profile & motivations

Dealey Environmental offers environmental protection services such as pest control and fumigation. The company's director is highly passionate about business improvement and, through their own learning, came to understand the potential benefits of mentoring. Through LinkedIn, they heard about the Rapid Response Mentoring Programme and thought it would be an ideal opportunity to improve the business. At that point in time (July 2020), the director wanted to develop the structure and vision of the business, in order to grow the company and reward the employees. The mentee was matched with the (then) acting head of commercial at BAE systems. Throughout their seven years of

experience at BAE, the mentor had held various managerial positions and had also mentored individuals internally (career-oriented). They joined the programme intending to use their experience to *"give something back"* and learn about mentoring for business improvement, rather than career development.

Activities

Through weekly meetings, which lasted around an hour, the mentor and mentee had seven hours of 'contact time'. It should be noted however that the relationship was very much a work-in-progress at the time of fieldwork, with around five meetings being held between the mentee and mentor's interviews.

The primary focus of the meetings was on **developing a strategy, mission and vision** for Dealey Environmental. The pair first discussed the key objectives for the business, then the critical enablers to achieving this. Importantly, there was an emphasis on how these should be communicated to the team. The mentor introduced the mentee to a graphic tool, called a 'Strategy House' which demonstrates how vision, mission, values and strategy fit together for an organisation. This tool was used by the mentee to present to the team, *"so everyone knows that they are working towards the same thing"*.

Once the business strategy was clearly developed, the mentoring shifted focus to **KPIs**. They discussed what outcomes should be measured to understand the overall success of the business, including indicators around procurement and productivity. They also carried out **competitor analysis** to see how Dealey Environmental compared with its competitors in terms of service offer and pricing. The mentor emphasised that the open-ended nature of discussions was

MENTEE

Role: Director

Organisation: Dealey Environmental

Sector: Agriculture, forestry and fishing

Location: East of England

Issue: Business structure

MENTOR

Role: Acting Head of Commercial

Organisation: BAE Systems

Sector: Aerospace

Location: South East

Experience: Project management, operational planning, process improvement

beneficial to the process: *“Most of the time we just free-styled, [the mentee] would send through their thoughts and we would chat it through. It would have been difficult if we had a strict structure to follow”*

Outcomes & impacts

The mentoring helped Dealey Environmental to **refine and communicate its business strategy**, with increased focus on KPIs, growth and profitability. This, in turn, led to improvements in the company’s **overall flexibility as well as its financial resilience**. Looking forward, the business is more aware of opportunities for growing the business and expects to increase employment, turnover and investment in R&D and innovation as a result.

The mentee felt they had personally benefited from the programme as well. They had become more aware of certain management and leadership practices such as **strategy development and delegation**, and also increased their knowledge of recruitment. The mentee reported a significant (8/10) increase in confidence due to these changes.

Working with Dealey Environmental had improved the mentor’s understanding of SMEs. Having come from an SME background prior to joining BAE, the mentor found that having some prior knowledge of SMEs was valuable. However, the mentoring programme provided a *“useful refresher”* and also made them *“more mindful of the challenges that SMEs have, which is useful when engaging with SMEs through BAE”*.

Like the mentee, the mentor also felt that the programme had been beneficial on a personal level: *“Being able to share ideas in an open forum builds your confidence – my confidence has been boosted massively”*. The mentor also reported an improvement in listening and questioning skills through engagement with the programme.

Additionality & contribution

At the time of the mentee’s interview, the relationship was in its early stages (c. 2.5 hours contact time). There were therefore a number of benefits which had not yet been realised, with the mentee emphasising that the relationship had “kickstarted” the process of change. Therefore, the mentee reported minimal additionality of the programme. By the time of the mentor’s interview, several months later, a greater degree of additionality was reported. The mentor felt that the mentee would have made progress without the programme, due to his passion for the business, but that the **benefits would have taken longer to achieve**.

The mentor also thought it would have taken longer to achieve the reported personal benefits (up to one year), and they may never have occurred to the same scale. The mentoring that they do internally provides similar personal benefits in terms of developing soft skills, but does not provide the interaction with SMEs, which was *“refreshing and challenging”*.

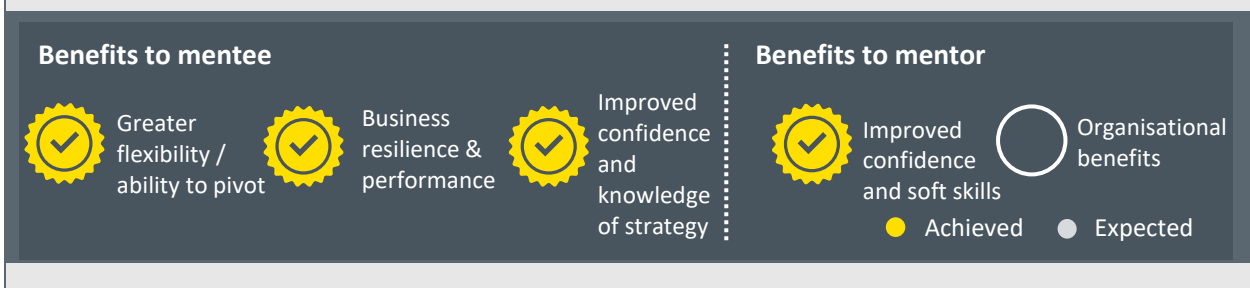
In this case, Covid-19 had limited impact on the mentoring relationship or the benefits it achieved. The mentor did note that some face-to-face interactions could have developed the

relationship “*further*”, but that it was not crucial to the process. The pair’s ability to develop an effective relationship over the phone was due to their **compatible personalities**.

Wider perspectives

The importance of the match was recognised by both parties, with the mentee stating that: “*The quality of the mentor and the match achieved through the questionnaire at the beginning of the programme*” was critical to achieving benefits. This sentiment was echoed by the mentor: “*[Growth Hub] truly listened to the characters of both of us when making the match, this was vital to achieving benefits, and it [the relationship] would not have worked otherwise*”.

While the overall flexibility of the programme was valued, the mentee mentioned that regular check-ins from the Growth Hub or Be the Business would have been useful to make sure the relationship remained on track. Despite this minor reservation, the mentee would recommend the programme to other potential applicants unreservedly, as would the mentor.



Case Study 6

Profile & motivations

The CTO at the Insights Family - a market research company based in the North West – joined the RRM programme to learn about the skills and capabilities required to move into a senior management position.

The mentee was matched with an International Director at BAE Systems who was able to engage with the programme due to increased capacity following the Covid-19 pandemic. They saw the programme as an opportunity share the knowledge and skills they have gained over their career with others. While the mentor had previously mentored colleagues within BAE Systems, this was the first time they had mentored anyone from outside their organisation.

Activities

The mentoring relationship started in September 2020 and finished in January 2021. Over the 12-week programme period, the mentee and mentor arranged weekly calls - the regularity of which was deemed to be helpful in ensuring sufficient engagement from both parties. All meetings were conducted over the phone. The mentee and mentor agreed that it would have been nice to have a meeting in person, but it did not have an impact on the overall outcome of the mentoring.

During the meetings the mentee and mentor discussed a range of personal development objectives including routes to improve confidence and skills, and long-term career aspirations. **They also discussed some challenges associated with Covid-19** including leading a team while working remotely. **The mentor stated that their role was to discuss the impacts of different actions rather than “give them the answer”.**

Outcomes & impacts

The mentee’s participation in RRM led to adoption of new M&L practices including: conflict management, time management, strategic planning, delegation, risk management, stakeholder management, and resource planning. Furthermore, the mentee expected business turnover and employment to increase in the next two years as a result of the RRM mentoring programme.

In terms of personal benefits, **the mentee reported an increase in confidence** when making difficult decisions and greater confidence in their ability to manage unpredictable environments. **They also reported an increased awareness of new M&L practices and improved knowledge and skills as a result of the RRM programme.** For example, the reported a greater

MENTEE

Role: Chief Technology Officer (CTO)

Organisation: The Insights Family

Sector: Information and Communication

Location: North West

Issue: Personal development

MENTOR

Role: International Director

Organisation: BAE Systems

Sector: Aerospace

Location: South East

Experience: Internal mentoring

understanding of how to successfully manage a team and an improved understanding of how to motivate individuals in the most effective way. This resulted in better goal setting and performance monitoring across the business.

"[The mentor] was really good at instilling confidence in my skillset and ability to adopt new M&L practices".

Despite not having any specific Covid-19 challenges to overcome, the mentee stated that handling the crisis would have been slightly harder had they not been involved with the RRM programme. This was attributed to the adoption of new M&L practices (e.g., risk management and resource planning) and the increased confidence referenced above. It was thought that customers, suppliers and colleagues have also benefitted indirectly as a result of the new M&L practices adopted as a result of the RRM programme.

In terms of benefits experienced by the mentor, they saw the RRM programme as an opportunity to gain "other business insights" and reported that they **had achieved a better understanding of SMEs as a result of the programme.**

Additionality & contribution

Without the RRM programme, both the mentee and mentor stated that the benefits reported above would not have occurred. However, the mentee thought that other factors outside the programme, such as other funders or organisations, were important and contributed alongside RRM e.g., the Growth Hub, which signposted the mentee's business, was enabling the benefits to be achieved through the programme.

Wider perspectives

Both the mentee and mentor were complimentary about BtB's delivery of the programme and would recommend the RRM programme to other potential mentees and mentors. The mentee described the personalised nature of the matching process as one of the programmes biggest strengths.

"The personalisation of the matching process is its biggest strength as it is important that mentees get on with their mentors."

The mentor believed that the RRM was a good programme that enabled them to share their knowledge and business experience. They found the resources available at the beginning of the programme to support mentors particularly useful and were positive about BtB's support throughout.

"It was fantastic, great experience, I learned a lot and can't thank my mentor enough for their time."

Benefits to mentee



New M&L practices



Improved business performance



Increased confidence

Benefits to mentor



Gained business insights



Organisational benefits

● Achieved ● Expected

Case Study 7

Profile & motivations

Catrin House is a health and safety services business based in the East of England. The mentee's motivation for applying for the RRM programme was to develop a marketing strategy to expand their customer base. The mentee believed that this was the right time to join the programme because Covid-19 had increased capacity for the mentee to dedicate time and effort to mentoring.

The mentee was matched with the Head of Procurement at BAE Systems. The mentor had previous mentoring experience through their role at BAE Systems. Their primary motivation for joining the RRM programme was to *"help others by sharing their business knowledge and experience"*. **They also saw the RRM programme as opportunity to develop business networks and learn about alternative ways of working.**

Activities

The mentoring relationship began in October 2020 and continued beyond the 12-week programme period. After the 12 weeks, the mentee and mentor were both reporting benefits and were keen to continue. Following a discussion with BtB, the pair were moved onto the Mentoring for Growth Programme – another mentoring programme delivered by BtB – which allowed them to formally continue the mentoring relationship for another 12-months.

Both mentee and mentor suggested that the inability to meet in person as a result of Covid-19 did not hinder the ability to achieve benefits.

"There are benefits to in person one-to-one meetings, it might have helped to develop a rapport more quickly, but the end benefits would have been the same."

During the RRM programme, the mentee and mentor arranged fortnightly meetings which amounted to eight hours of mentoring. Although this was less frequent than in the case of many other pairs on the programme, this was believed to be their "sweet spot" in terms of engagement. During the meetings, the mentee and mentor discussed improving the business's marketing strategy to generate more business. This included improving the business's branding, redesigning the business's website, and increasing the use of social media. Furthermore, when the country entered a national lockdown in November, the mentor helped the mentee navigate delivering services to clients virtually.

MENTEE

Role: Director

Organisation: Catrin House

Sector: Professional services

Location: East of England

Issue: Developing a marketing strategy

MENTOR

Role: Head of Procurement

Organisation: BAE Systems

Sector: Aerospace

Location: North West

Experience: Mentoring at BAE Systems

Outcomes & impacts

The mentee's involvement in RRM led to adoption of a new marketing strategy. The new strategy involved redesigning the business's website and making greater use of social media to improve brand awareness and gain new clients.

In terms of personal benefits, the mentee reported an increased awareness of new M&L practices and increased confidence in implementing M&L skills. The mentee also reported that the mentoring provided the opportunity to learn how other businesses/sectors operate and approach challenges differently. **They considered this to be a particularly valuable aspect of the programme.**

Despite not having any specific Covid-19 challenges to overcome, the mentee commented that handling the Covid-19 crisis would have been slightly harder had they not been involved with the RRM programme. The mentor made them more aware of the importance of effective business resilience strategies e.g., having sufficient cash flow and the importance of flexibility.

The mentor stated that *"the programme benefits mentors as well as mentees"*. **They reported a better understanding of SMEs and an improvement of personal soft skills as a result of the RRM programme.** The mentoring was thought to be a *"two-way relationship"* as the mentee was able to provide feedback to the mentor which improved their performance in their own role at BAE Systems.

"The programme allows engagement with people from outside your business that you might not cross paths within normal circumstances."

Additionality & contribution

The mentee thought that, **without the RRM programme, the benefits reported above would have occurred but at a lower scale** - they estimated that approximately 50-75% of the benefits would have occurred. The mentee also believed that increased market demand and external economic conditions were important to achieving the benefits reported and contributed alongside RRM.

Wider perspectives

Both the mentee and mentor would recommend the RRM programme to other potential mentees and mentors. The mentee was complementary about the quality of the match with their mentor and emphasised the importance of a good mentee-mentor match to deliver outcomes.

"The quality of the match is very important – if you don't get on with someone you won't buy into what they are saying"

The mentor commented that BtB managed the programme well and was very supportive. In terms of future improvements, they thought that sharing a summary of the mentee's business and motivation for engaging with the RRM programme with mentors prior to the first meeting would enable the mentor to prepare and make better use of the first meeting.

Benefits to mentee



New marketing strategy



Increased awareness of new M&L practices



Increased confidence



Improved soft skills



Improved performance in own role



Achieved



Expected

Case Study 8

Profile & motivations

CGA provides specialist consultancy and research services to wholesalers, operators and investors within the food and beverages sector. CGA's Client Director was recently promoted to the senior leadership team when they were made aware of the Rapid Response Mentoring (RRM) programme at an internal meeting. Despite not having any specific challenges to overcome, the mentee thought that it would be useful to have a mentor to "*gain a different perspective*", in particular around the management systems and processes in place in larger companies. The mentee also felt that guidance from a mentor would **help them to become established as a senior leader, and more compelling at that level.**

A match was made with a mentor from BAE Systems who, with over 25 years of experience at the company, was well-placed to share their experience and learning around the areas **of people management, personal development and career progression.**

Activities

Initially, the pair scheduled fortnightly meetings, which lasted around an hour. Before each meeting, both mentee and mentor spent time preparing, so that the call would have structure and focus. The conversations were generally centred around two key themes:

- **Personal development:** Having recently joined the senior leadership team, the mentee wanted to establish themselves at their new, more senior level. The mentor helped the mentee to gain an insight into "*what keeps other senior leaders up at night*" and therefore how the mentee could act to become a highly valued member of the team. This played into the mentee's secondary goal of progressing their career further.
- **Team management:** In terms of business improvements, some of the discussions focused on "*how to leverage performance from the team*". In particular, they looked at different methods of **performance monitoring and talent management** – something the mentor had a lot of experience with through managing teams at BAE Systems.

The mentor ensured that **the conversations were mentee-led.** This worked well as it meant the focus of the conversation could be determined by the main challenges in the business at that particular point in time – an important feature when the company was responding to the Covid-19 crisis (although this was not the primary focus of the relationship).

MENTEE

Role: Client Director

Organisation: CGA

Sector: Professional services

Location: North West

Issue: Career progression, sounding board, team performance

MENTOR

Role: Head of Commercial - Qatar

Organisation: BAE Systems

Sector: Aerospace

Location: North West

Experience: Commercial, leadership, team management, international businesses

Outcomes & impacts

At a personal level, the mentee valued having a sounding board:

“Being able to ask questions on specific situations and get experienced-based answers is invaluable – it is the sort of thing you can look up online, but hearing it from someone’s lived experience is far more useful”

These conversations helped the mentee make some “*tough decisions*” and **positively affected their confidence** to do so. The mentee also felt that their ability to **communicate effectively** with their team had increased.

This last point ties into several organisational benefits that were experienced, including the adoption of new management and leadership practices. Specifically, the mentee adopted new practices around performance monitoring and talent management. More fundamentally, however, conversations with the mentor around the subject of team management led to a wider discussion on values. The mentee came to realise that you cannot necessarily change an individual’s values, and has since **adapted the recruitment process** to reflect the importance of the company’s values and get the right candidates.

Despite having few expectations as to how they may benefit, the mentor also took a lot from the programme. Firstly, it has changed the way they engage with their team:

“I have been pushing more on accountability and responsibility within my own team, based on the conversations I had with my mentee on how to tailor leadership in order to develop a high-performing team”

The mentor has also thought more about the efficacy of the processes they had in place, and where things could be made smoother by “cutting through the red tape”. This has been driven by the mentee’s experience of working in a flexible and adaptable SME.

The mentor has also personally developed through the programme, noting that they have become “*more reflective*”. In addition, they have adapted the way that they manage their team:

“I’ve been working on the approach of not giving someone the answers, but rather providing them with the means to get to their own answer”

This feeds back into the organisational benefit of increased delegation and accountability.

Additionality & contribution

The mentee felt that engaging with MfG **accelerated the achievement of benefits**. Furthermore, due to the broader perspective brought by the mentor, they achieved benefits to a higher quality than they would have done without the programme. Other factors, such as the **ongoing growth of the company and personal development resulting from handling the Covid-19 pandemic**, contributed to achieving outcomes.

Similarly, the mentor would have taken up to one year longer to achieve the benefits without the programme. The mentor is engaged with several other mentoring relationships, both internally at BAE Systems and externally for a charity, meaning she would have achieved the same, or similar outcomes eventually.

Wider perspectives

As well as being pleased with the relationship itself, both mentor and mentee were complimentary of the set-up and running of the programme. Through their engagement with Be the Business, the mentor felt well-prepared at the outset in terms of expectations, format and available support. After that, the **flexible format of the programme and “light-touch” approach worked well**. Covid-19 had limited impact on their experience or indeed the benefits achieved, although the mentor did note that face to face meetings can be beneficial in establishing the relationship at the start.

Overall, the mentor and mentee both had very positive experiences of RRM, so much so that they have continued the relationship informally beyond the initial 12-weeks.



Case Study 9

Profile & motivations

CGA is a data and research consultancy specialising in market measurement, consumer research and location planning for companies in the food and drink industry. The mentee, a director at CGA, joined the RRM programme to improve communication channels in the business and increase employee engagement. This was particularly pertinent given the shift to remote working during the pandemic.

“Covid-19 was the catalyst to enrolling on the mentoring programme”

The mentee was matched with the Business Improvement Manager at BAE Systems. The mentor had previous mentoring experience through supporting BAE Systems’s apprentices through their development programme.

Activities

Covid-19 meant that the mentee and mentor could not meet in person. As a result, all meetings were conducted by telephone. However, neither thought that this was detrimental to the effectiveness of the programme. The mentee and mentor arranged calls for every two to three weeks which typically lasted an hour. The mentoring relationship has continued informally beyond the 12-week programme.

The main focus of the mentoring was to address internal communication challenges. The mentor was able to help their mentee by sharing communication strategies and templates used within BAE Systems. In particular, the pair discussed replicating a BAE Systems forum that enables employees to discuss issues with senior management.

Outcomes & impacts

The mentee had an increased awareness of new M&L practices and had adopted new M&L practices as a result of the RRM programme. For example, the mentee learnt about different leadership behaviours and made changes to improve personal development routes. They also reported that they had improved their knowledge and skills as a result of the programme. For example, they were more confident in having difficult conversations and were better at delegating.

The mentee **expected investment in R&D and innovation to be higher as a result of the RMM** due to their increased confidence to push senior management to introduce new practices and

MENTEE

Role: Director

Organisation: CGA

Sector: Professional services

Location: North West

Issue: Business communication and employee engagement

MENTOR

Role: Business Improvement Manager

Organisation: BAE Systems

Sector: Aerospace

Location: Scotland

Experience: Internal mentoring of apprentices

products. Finally, the mentee thought that **handling the Covid-19 crisis would have been slightly harder had they not been involved with RRM.**

“The guidance received and the ability to reflect and discuss ideas with someone in an external organisation with a different perspective was particularly useful.”

Prior to starting on the RRM programme, the mentor believed that it would provide a fantastic networking opportunity and allow sharing of best practice between mentors and mentees. The mentor was also keen to learn about how different businesses were operating. As a result of the RRM programme, **the mentor experienced a better understanding of SMEs and improvement of personal soft skills.** Furthermore, they also stated that their involvement in the RRM programme allowed them to reflect on their own experiences and resulted in the *“reappreciation of their own business”*.

Additionality & contribution

The mentee believed that the benefits they experienced would have occurred without the RRM but at a slower rate. They thought it would have taken ‘up to a year’ to achieve the benefits without the programme. Furthermore, they believed that external factors, such as Covid-19, were also important in terms of achieving the benefits reported. Covid-19 increased the importance of improving internal communication systems while employees were working from home.

The mentor thought that the benefits they experienced e.g., a better understanding of SMEs and improvement of personal soft skills, would not have occurred at all without the RRM programme.

Wider perspectives

Both the mentee and mentor were complementary about the RRM mentoring programme. Both the stated that they would recommend the RRM programme to other potential mentees and mentors.

“Mentoring is very personal – it gives mentees time to explore business topics in more depth compared to other business support routes.” [Mentee]

“[The RRM programme] was a really good experience – everyone should have a shot at it. Mentoring validates your experience and there is learning for both mentors and mentees.” [Mentor]

The mentor stated that the interview undertaken to aid the matching process was particularly valuable. In terms of ways to improve the programme, the mentor commented that it was unclear who the point of contact was at BtB. They thought that having one point of contact would make it easier for mentors to engage.



Annex B: Profiling and matching to a comparison group

- B.1** An important element of assessing impacts of any programme is establishing a counterfactual position. In other words answering the question “what would have happened in absence of support”? A robust way of doing this involves establishing a comparison group of unsupported businesses and observing comparing their performance against a set of selected metrics to that of supported companies.
- B.2** It is possible to draw a comparison group of businesses similar to the beneficiaries from the ONS firm-level data. This allows to estimate the impacts of support on business performance. As RRM support was talking place in 2020/21 financial year, post-treatment observations are not yet available. However, at this stage we profiled the supported companies against the wider business population to better understand the level of benefits we may expect to observe when the data become available and selected two alternative comparison groups which can be used for counterfactual analysis. Establishing the comparison groups at this stage has an advantage of separating this analysis from any impact analysis ruling out the possibility to select the group that ‘works best’ based on observed outcomes.
- B.3** We note that the profiling and matching were performed using the full list of 179 businesses that signed up for the programme. This was done to: a) increase available sample size, b) account for the facts that unmatched businesses were still a part of the programme and could be potentially matched in the future, and c) to be able to capture the effect of intention to be treated for those companies that would not be matched.²⁴
- B.4** The remainder of this annex compares the beneficiaries to the wider business population, outlines our approach identifying suitable comparison groups, and presents the results of formal tests used to assess the quality of suggested comparison groups.

Data and approach

- B.5** The primary source of data for the analysis presented in this annex is the ONS Business Structures Database (BSD). BSD draws a snapshot each year from the ONS business register. The register has all businesses registered for VAT and/ or PAYE income tax. The annual updating means BSD provides a wide range of economic variables consistently across

²⁴The quasi-experimental approach chosen for this study seeks to imitate an experimental design (i.e. a random allocation of eligible businesses into treatment and control groups). In any experiment there is some level of attrition and non-compliance. An intention to treat analysis, i.e. the analysis of the effects of support based on the allocation to the treatment group rather than based on actual participation, provides an unbiased estimate of the effect of the programme (given the compliance level). The application process may already provide certain benefits through behavioural effects, e.g. by encouraging potential mentees to do additional research online, and/or influence mentees’ decision not to continue with the programme. It is also possible that certain observable characteristics of potential beneficiaries are correlated with not being matched with a mentor. An intention to treat analysis takes this into account.

businesses and over time, particularly around business age, turnover, employment, sector and survival. This means comparable data can be found for both RRM beneficiaries and other UK businesses that can act as a counterfactual.

- B.6** A statistical technique called **propensity score matching** (PSM) was used to identify a counterfactual. This can then form the basis for difference-in-difference analysis to understand whether the growth seen in supported businesses differs from the growth observed in the comparison group, an analysis that can be undertaken in later work as no post-support data is yet available.
- B.7** PSM involves estimating a statistical model of the selection process into support. This seeks to imitate the RRM recruitment, application and selection processes, but in a simplified quantitative model. If the model is robust, it can then be used to identify unsupported businesses that look – in terms of the modelled characteristics – very similar to the RRM beneficiaries.
- B.8** The modelling has to use variables available about businesses before support and for both RRM beneficiaries and the wider set of businesses. Variables available for analysis included: a) industry characteristics (highly knowledge-intensive and high-tech manufacturing), b) pre-growth employment or turnover trends, c) geographical proxies, d) age, e) employment and turnover size, f) whether tracked in Beauhurst and, g) prior receipt of Innovate UK grants. These variables were largely derived from the BSD. In addition, two datasets were linked to the ONS data:
- **List of businesses exposed to prior government innovation support.** Innovate UK reports all incidences of Innovate UK support since 2004, providing business details, grant amounts, start dates, end dates, product information and collaborators. This has been linked to the BSD. The fact that a business has received support in the past may reveal motivational characteristics, e.g. motivation to grow and actively seeking support to achieve this goal.
 - **Beauhurst database.** This commercial dataset is focused on the UK's growing businesses. These are over-represented in the MfG beneficiaries and therefore adding information to the BSD on whether a non-beneficiary is tracked or not may improve the quality of comparison groups.

Data-linking and profiling

- B.9** The 179 companies registered for RRM were linked to ONS data. 139 of these businesses could be found in the ONS database as unique businesses. The BSD provided the number of jobs in the businesses, with payroll data indicating this to be 3,954. There was a further loss of data points as the approach used to identify the counterfactual focused on businesses where there was at least one year of pre-support performance data, which mean that the number of businesses available for the matching was 122 (17 of which had been previously

supported by MfG and 97 had been matched to a mentor at the time the snapshot of monitoring data was taken).

- B.10** Table B-1 presents the summary statistics of the RRM supported businesses compared to the wider BSD, excluding those businesses with more than 5000 employees and £1b in annual turnover.

Table B-1: Summary statistics RRM vs Wider Business population in the year before treatment

Variable (mean)	RRM Only n=139	Wider BSD, 2019 ex Large* n=3,469,552
Live Local Unit	1.84	1.28
Employees	28.45	6.80
Real Turnover (£000s)	1909.85	881.48
Age	12.99	10.71
UK Only	99%	99%
Herfindahl Index	9%	9%
Industry Classifications		
Low Pay ²⁵	21%	27%
High Tech ²⁶	23%	14%
Manufacturing	11%	5%
High Manufacturing	1%	0%
High Knowledge Intensive Services	14%	8%
High Medium Manufacturing	2%	1%
High Medium Knowledge Intensive Services	26%	15%

Note: Large are over 5000 employees and £bn turnover. Source: Belmana

- B.11** Compared to the wider BSD, the supported businesses, tend to be larger in terms of size of employment and real turnover.²⁷ They are, on average, businesses with more than one office or workplace. They are also slightly older and more focused in the high-tech and manufacturing sectors. The Herfindahl index is a market concentration index which measures the size of firms in relation to the size of the industry they are in. This measure generally does not seem to differ for RRM businesses compared to the wider business population.

²⁵ As defined as defined in the Government evidence to the Low Pay Commission on the economic effects of the National Minimum Wage, 2011.

²⁶ Following Hecker, D. (1999) "High-technology employment: A broader view." Monthly Labor Review 122(6): 18.

²⁷ Real turnover was calculated using two-digit SIC GDP deflator, base year – 2019.

Comparison groups

Modelling selection into support

- B.12** Our chosen implementation of PSM used a Probit selection model. The dependent variable took the value of one for RRM beneficiaries and zero for the unsupported businesses. The BSD was trimmed by taking a 2% random sample of the small businesses to reduce processing times.
- B.13** Table B-2 indicates the estimates for four considered models (the rows represent variables included into each of the models, empty cells indicate that the variable was not included into a particular model). Positive estimates indicate a variable increases the chance of participating in RRM. Selection tends to target smaller businesses (up to 50 employees). Past performance is also a strong correlate, with pre-support employment growth resulting in an increased chance of selection. This was directly used in the alternative model (an alternative measure, the indicator of a scale-up business, was used in the preferred model). The regional aspects – especially whether the business is in London or the southeast –are also important reflecting the composition of the programme.

Table B-2: Selection models

Variables	Preferred Model	Alternative Model	Further Model I	Further Model II
Turnover Categories				
Turnover £101k-500k	0.28 (3.37***)			0.26 (3.18***)
TO £501k-1mil	0.56 (5.71***)			0.46 (4.23***)
TO £1-5 million	0.50 (5.88***)			0.50 (4.61***)
TO £5-10 million	0.26 (2.06**)			0.42 (2.76***)
TO £10-50 million	-0.17 (-0.87)			-0.02 (-0.09)
Employment Categories				
10-19 Employees			0.54 (7.49***)	0.34 (3.89***)
20-49 Employees			0.35 (4.69***)	0.14 (1.39)
50-249 Employees			-0.23 (-2.36**)	-0.4 (-3.1***)
250+ Employees			-0.24 (-1.17)	-0.06 (-0.27)
Sectors and other characteristics				
High KI Services	0.24 (2.90***)			0.24 (2.88***)
High KI Manufacturing	0.10 (0.33)			0.11 (0.33)
Scale-up business	0.36 (1.99**)			0.33 (1.81)
London/SE dummy	-0.16 (-2.58**)	-0.16 (-2.6***)	-0.14 (-2.30**)	-0.16 (-2.54**)
Beauhurst tracked	-0.02 (-0.17)	0.00 (-0.02)		-0.12 (-1.00)
Innovate UK supported		0.47 (3.35***)	0.43 (3.05***)	

Variables	Preferred Model	Alternative Model	Further Model I	Further Model II
Past employment change (t-1)		0.15 (3.66***)		
Constant	-3.5 (-47.9***)	-3.2 (-89.6***)	-3.3 (-73.5***)	-3.5 (-48.7***)
Adjusted R ²	0.04	0.01	0.05	0.06
Number of observations	222,386	228,938	229,041	222,386

* show the significance level: *** significant at the 1% level; ** at 5%; * at 10%. T-statistics in parenthesis. Standard errors are robust. Source: Belmana.

- B.14** PSM identifies the closest comparators for beneficiaries based on observable characteristics. Differences in important unobservable characteristics (for example in propensity to seek support, management style and openness to change) may remain. For this reason, when estimating the programmes' impact using a quasi-experimental approach it will be important to consider multiple complementary comparison groups.
- B.15** The table's four models are named in terms of their potential to provide counterfactual for RRM supported business, with the preferred model being one that uses turnover categories for size, with a range of sectoral, location and high-growth indicators to model selection. The alternative model is one that is more parsimonious and uses past employment change primarily to match.²⁸
- B.16** Generally, for a descriptive point of view, a well-matched comparison group would be one where the supported and matched businesses appear to be on similar growth trends in the period leading up the RRM support. Including past growth in the selection model forces this to be the case. However, including past growth into the set of matching variables increases the chances of capturing businesses that happen to grow either above or below their potential during that period. If this is the case, and those businesses revert to their natural trajectory, DiD analysis may over- or under-estimate the effect of the programme.

Identifying comparator businesses

- B.17** Selection modelling provides a score for each business that reflects their likelihood of being supported by RRM. These scores were used to match each beneficiary to an unsupported business with a similar score (i.e. a similar set of observable characteristics).
- B.18** The choice of the preferred model relates to two broad tests:
- a formal statistical balance test which compares key observable characteristics between the beneficiaries and proposed comparators to see if any substantial differences remain (Table B-3, characteristics on which a good balance was achieved are represented by insignificant coefficients).

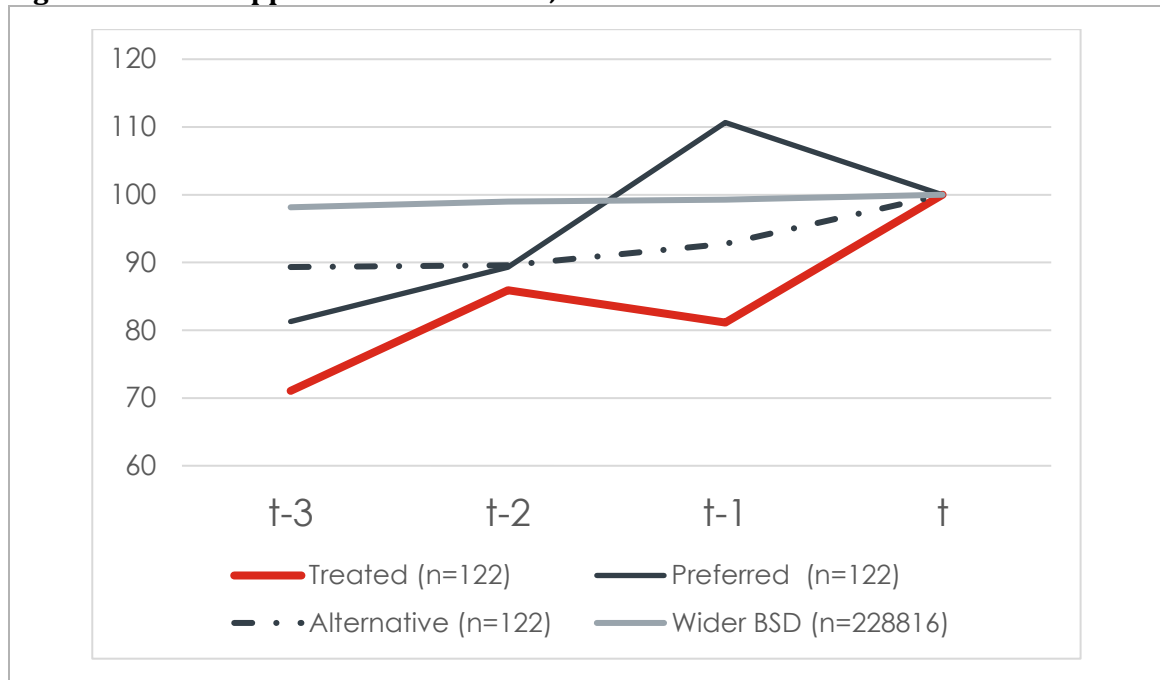
²⁸ Past turnover performance could also be used as a matching characteristic, however turnover of SMEs tends to be too volatile over time to use past trends as a reliable matching characteristic.

- a descriptive graphical test that focuses on the past trends in the two sets of businesses.

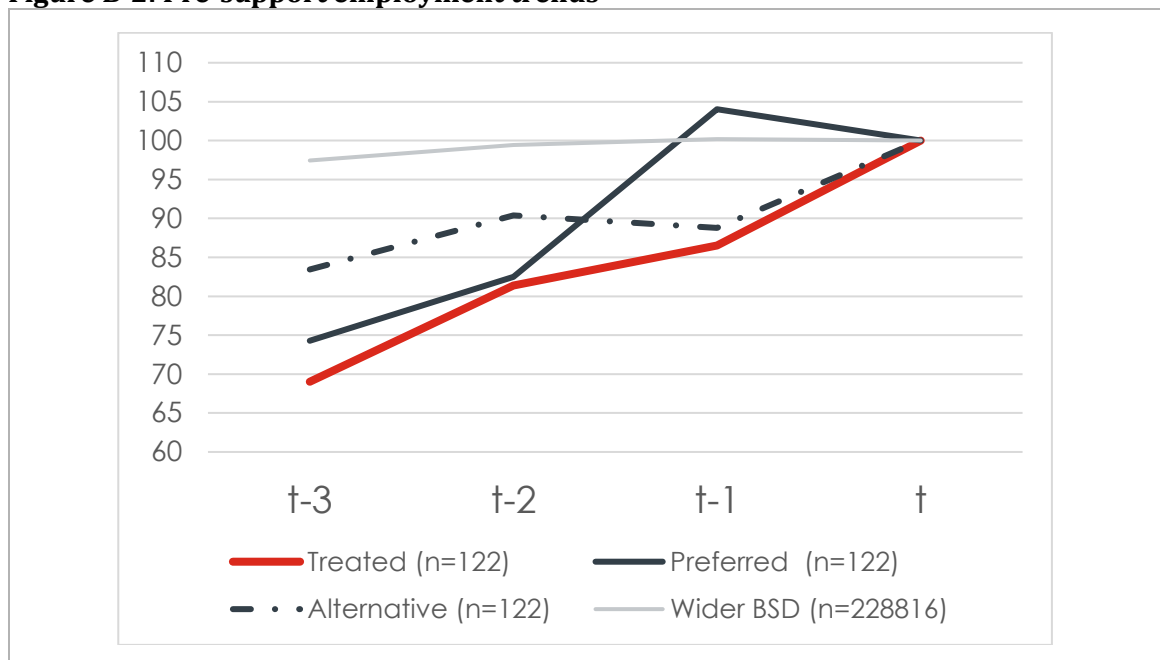
Table B-3: Propensity score balance test

Variable	RRM	Wider BSD	Preferred model	Alternative model
UK owned	99%	96%*	98%	95%*
Low paid industry	21%	29%*	30%	42%***
High technology industry	25%	14%	23%	24%
Manufacturing	11%	7%	11%	22%**
Age	13.1	14.5	14.51	13.63
Beauhurst tracked	6%	4%	6%	7%
Herfindahl index	0.08	0.09	0.14***	0.22***
London/SE	24%	35%	24%	22%
Emp	28.5	38.7	41.72	71.91**
Real turnover	1871.5	3059.5	2066.77	6175.91
Hi know intensive manuf.	1%	1%	1%	0%
High KI Services	14%	8%**	14%	6%**
Hi/med KI Manuf.	2%	2%	7%	16%***
Hi/med KI Services	26%	14%***	18%	7%***
Scale-up business	1%	1%	1%	3%

* shows the significance level; *** significant at the 1% level; ** at 5%; * at 10%. Standard errors are robust. Source: Belmana

Figure B-1: Pre-support turnover trends, index

Note: t is the time of treatment, values are normalised to 100 in the year of treatment. Source: Belmana

Figure B-2: Pre-support employment trends

Note: t is the time of treatment, values are normalised to 100 in the year of treatment. Source: Belmana

B.19 As illustrated in the figures above, RRM beneficiaries have been growing at a much faster pace than the rest of the business population. This emphasises the importance of using statistical matching to select a number of appropriate comparison groups to be able to estimate the effect of support accurately.

B.20 Neither of the proposed groups are a perfect match in terms of pre-support trends. This is common, as PSM can only capture a set of observable characteristics which do not fully

determine the growth trajectory of businesses. The effects of unobservable characteristics often are particularly substantial for high growth SMEs. We therefore recommend to explicitly account for potential differences in trends when undertaking impact analysis using secondary data. This can be done within a difference-in-difference framework by introducing additional control variables (linear group-specific trends).

B.21 We note that the graphical analysis of trends indicates that the model we selected as an alternative comparison is closer to the beneficiary group than the preferred group. This is to be expected given it uses past growth trajectory as a matching characteristic. However, this model performs substantially worse in terms of balance on other observable characteristics as demonstrated in Table B-3. Considering the alternative comparison is more likely to contain businesses which may have temporarily deviated from their natural growth trajectory (as discussed above) we recommend using this group for triangulation of results rather than as the main source of inference.²⁹

²⁹ Our assessment of the 'further' selection models is that they performed worse than the preferred and alternative ones across the range of tests.

Annex C: List of consultees

Table C-1: List of scoping consultations participants

Name	Designation	Organisation
Nicolas Garcia	Senior Policy Officer	BEIS
Stephanie Walker	Analyst	BEIS
Kevin Saldanha	Senior Policy Officer	BEIS
Michael Macfarlane	OPV Head of Programme	BAE
Will Matthews	Sales Effectiveness Director	BAE
Jane Howells	Programme Director	Be the Business

Source: SQW

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About us

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