

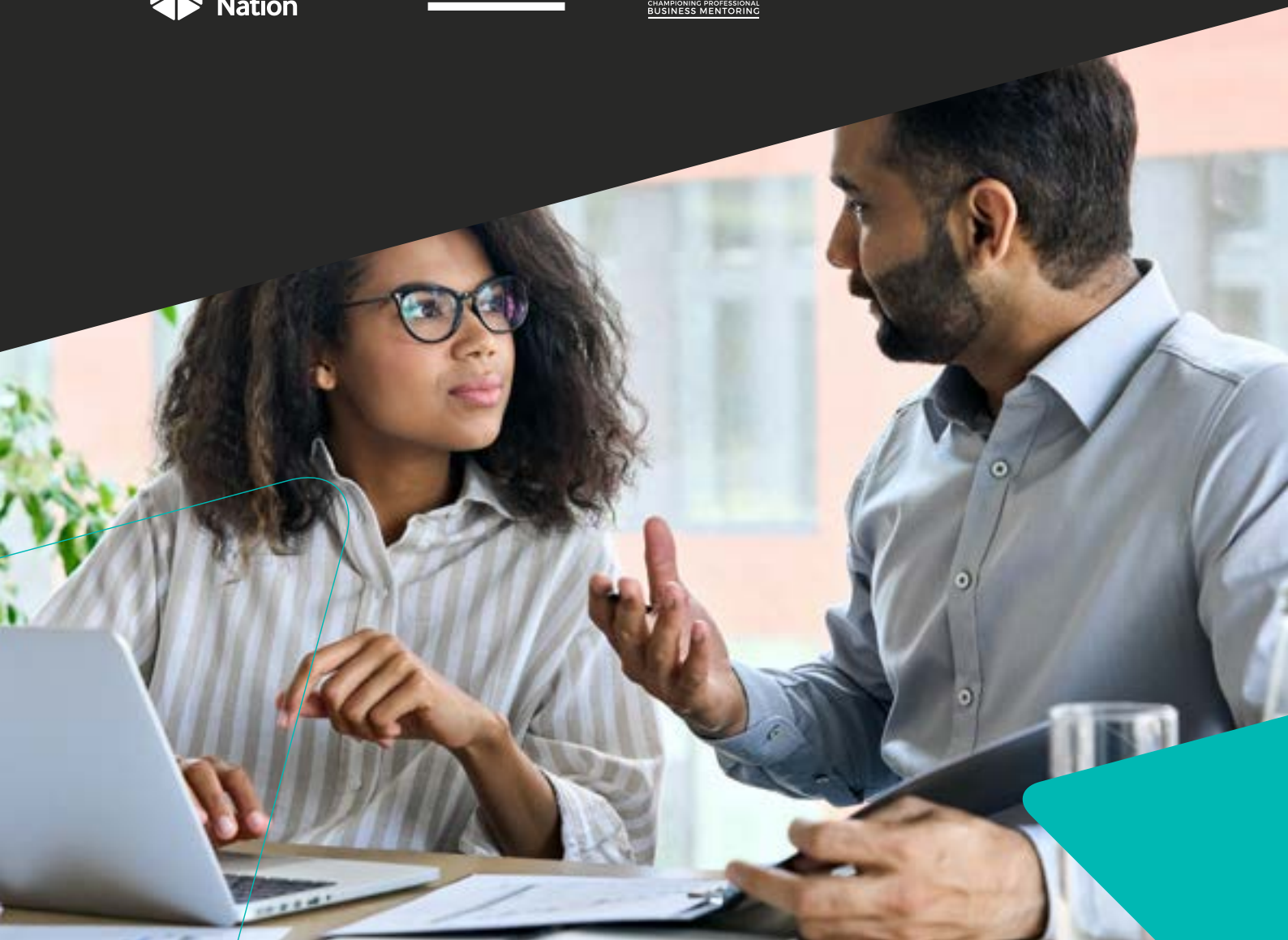
Mentoring Matters

The what, why and how of building a mentoring
army to unlock growth



Newable

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CHAMPIONING PROFESSIONAL
BUSINESS MENTORING



Foreword



Emma Jones CBE
Founder, Enterprise Nation

76%

of people who responded to our survey said mentoring has been important to their business growth

This report establishes the true power of mentoring on business performance and growth.

Until now, there has been very little research into the critical role mentors can play in success. So, to mark National Mentoring Day, we commissioned Mike Spicer and his team at PolicyDepartment to analyse what impact mentoring has, and how the wisdom and experience that mentors can bring can be unlocked for the UK economy.

It has been overwhelmingly established that both the demand for mentoring, and the desire to be a mentor, is on the rise. Younger business founders see fewer obstacles to accessing mentors than their older colleagues, suggesting that the role of mentoring is only expected to increase in the future. But the clear message is that more business owners, from all sectors and backgrounds, want a mentor, and a growing number of people wish to become one. This is largely due to the benefits that mentoring can generate. A significant 76% of people who responded to our survey said mentoring has been important to their business growth. This makes for a compelling proposition that we should do more to identify and recruit mentors and match them to businesses that are looking for the advantages that mentoring can offer.

There are many routes to mentoring, but a key one is through the government's Help to Grow: Management Course. This guides small companies on a pathway to stronger growth through training delivered by business schools, and via a national network of skilled mentors.

As a founder of a growing company myself, I've benefited from having a mentor over the past decade. When there are so many questions to address each day – about product, people, finances and growth – it's vital to have a sounding board; someone with experience who can hear you out as you navigate the entrepreneurial journey.

I was delighted when my company Enterprise Nation was selected with two other partners, Newable and the Association of Business Mentors, to form a consortium to deliver the national mentoring element of the government's Help to Grow: Management Course.

Our role, alongside Newable, has been to recruit mentors nationally and match them to Help to Grow: Management Course participants.

It's been inspiring to see the response from talented people who are willing to step forward and 'give back'. And these people are stretching and developing themselves at the same time. In the space of four months, we assessed and recruited over 2,000 mentors – some from large corporates, others seasoned entrepreneurs and trusted advisers. Once accepted onto the programme, mentors go through training with the Association of Business Mentors and are then matched with mentees. We're already seeing the positive impact of this.

To continue to build on this progress and create a mentoring legacy, the consortium partners commits to:

- working with the government and the Chartered Association of Business Schools to recruit even more mentors for the Help to Grow: Management Course, building on the already strong pool
- reaching the section of the working population aged 50 and over who have experience to offer – we'll do this by working with specific networks including Bravestarts, Next-Up and 55/Redefined
- building an online mentor training hub with the Association of Business Mentors that's open to people who have the right experience and skills to become mentors
- sharing experiences from people who have either benefited from being mentored or from being a mentor, so business owners can relate and mentors can see how the experience enhances their skillset, and
- using data to track the impact of the mentoring relationship, showing changes in levels of confidence and businesses' progression

At a time when small businesses are faced with a landscape of ever-changing challenges, there's never been a more important time to realise the full potential of mentoring. Whether you're a founder looking for a mentor, or someone able and willing to mentor, I hope you'll get involved. You can do so at

www.enterprisenation.com/help-to-grow-mentor

Introduction

For many owners of micro and small businesses across the UK, mentoring relationships are invaluable. Whether it's providing support in mapping out a strategy, helping owners work through personal challenges, or acting as an informed sounding board for sector-specific developments, mentors play a vital role in helping companies to survive, compete and grow.

Our survey of 823 businesses and two focus groups of mentors and mentees provide valuable insights into what business mentoring looks like in 2022. Business leaders and policymakers should take note – it's clear from the research that mentoring can play a critical role in business success.

But while the benefits of mentoring are obvious to most people who have had a mentoring relationship, too many leaders of the country's 5.5 million¹ small and medium-sized businesses are yet to take part.

Indeed, our research suggests that there could be a huge, untapped supply of mentors. Around 4% of the people we surveyed had never been a mentor or had mentoring, yet said that they're very interested in mentoring in the future. If this 4% were drawn from people who are managers, directors or senior officials, **it would make another 118,000 available to offer the benefit of their experience to businesses.**²

Moreover, there's a large potential of pent-up demand to receive mentoring. Around 9% of those surveyed had never been a mentor or had mentoring, but were very interested in accessing mentoring in the future. Again, focusing on those people who hold senior occupations

across all businesses in the UK, **this would mean 284,000 more senior business leaders benefiting from those who have 'been there and done it'.**

This population of new mentors and mentees would join those who plan to build on experience: 95% of the people who responded to the survey and have a history of being a mentor were interested in continuing this in the future. And 92% of respondents with experience of being mentored were interested in having a mentor in the future.

This report makes the case for the government and the business community to come together to recruit a mentoring army that drives UK growth, and address barriers to participation that vary by age and gender. Its chapters highlight the following:

- What the modern mentoring experience looks like
- The lasting legacy that mentoring can have
- What the future might hold for mentoring
- What recommendations we can make for how mentoring in the UK can reach its potential

1. 2022 Business population estimates for the UK and the regions (BEIS, October 2022)

2. The number of people in senior occupations that is assumed to be the population from which potential mentees and mentors can be drawn is taken from the Annual Population Survey, and the Standard Occupational Classification of 'Managers, Directors and Senior Officials'.



Executive Summary

The modern mentoring experience

Our survey and focus groups show that each mentoring relationship is unique and in its many tailored forms can support both personal growth **and** the development of skills like leadership. The most common way of finding a mentor is through a friend or colleague, and in most cases the mentoring is provided for free.

Modern mentoring covers a diverse mix of approaches, from daily or weekly video calls to monthly face-to-face meetings, and every combination in between. It's common for someone to have experience of being a mentor and of being mentored (27% of survey respondents).

The modern mentoring experience is **overwhelmingly meritocratic**. Only small minorities of respondents saw characteristics like age, gender and location as important. **By contrast, life experience and relevant knowledge of business and sector issues were the top-three attributes that mentees look for in a potential mentor (chosen by 61%, 58% and 43% respectively).** Businesses of different sizes value the same attributes in a mentor. But micro businesses with five employees or fewer are in greater agreement about the importance of each attribute, compared to larger companies.

The mentoring legacy

Across every size of business, people who have been mentored say their mentors contributed to their business's survival and growth. **Over two-thirds of survey respondents (66%) who had accessed mentoring agreed that it was crucial in helping their business to survive. More than three-quarters (76%) agreed that mentoring was vital to their business's growth.** The top areas for improvement through mentoring were cited as strategy, growing turnover, and finding new markets.

The future of mentoring

Experience of and interest in mentoring is high, and 61% of respondents believe that mentoring's reputation among their peers and colleagues has increased over time. But there remain barriers to participation and unexploited opportunities to encourage more people to take part. These relate to perceptions of cost, relevance, and the difficulty of taking time away from work. **Around half of the respondents saw cost (51%) and time (48%) as barriers** – despite the availability of free mentoring and widespread use of online meetings. Barriers to seeking a mentor vary by gender: 59% of female respondents identified cost as a reason for not seeking a mentor, while 52% said it was the lack of available time. For males, the same figures were 42% and 43% respectively.

Building a new mentoring army

Converting the as yet unrealised supply of mentors, and demand for mentoring, into real-world outcomes would be transformative for UK business. If the findings of this survey were replicated across the UK, we would be looking at 118,000 new business mentors and 284,000 more mentees benefiting from mentors' experience, wisdom and guidance. These people would join the more than 90% of surveyed mentors and mentees who plan to continue their experience in the future.



The Modern Mentoring Experience

Our survey and focus groups captured the nature of business mentoring relationships in 2022.

The findings highlight that there are no hard and fast rules that govern mentoring relationships. They involve a mixture of daily, weekly or monthly contact; meetings that take place either face to face or via video call; mentoring that is free of charge or that carries a fee; and numerous types of business support.

But while each mentoring relationship is unique, there is consensus on the attributes that are most important for mentoring relationships to succeed. Above all else, mentees want their mentors to have both life experience and business experience.

This indicates that policymakers should be less concerned about how mentoring relationships are structured. Mentors and mentees will work this out for themselves. More important is finding mentors with the right experience and who are the right fit for the relationship.

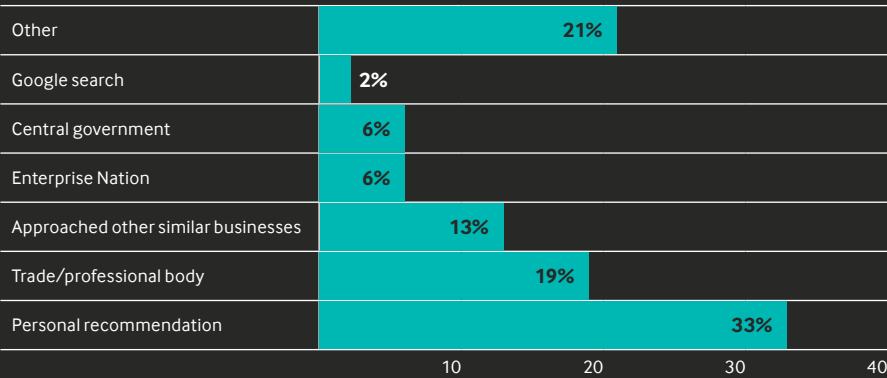
How does the modern mentoring relationship work?

- **There are two main routes to finding a mentor.** More than half of mentees found their mentor through either a personal recommendation from a friend or colleague (33%), or from a recommendation from a trade body or professional body (19%). (See [chart 1](#)).
- **There is flexibility in how frequently mentors and mentees meet.** The majority – 70% of mentors and 58% of mentees – had either weekly or monthly meetings as part of their mentoring relationship. But 10% of mentors and 17% of mentees reported one-off mentoring sessions, while 11% of mentees and 13% of mentors said their mentoring took place daily.
- **Mentors offer a wide variety of business support.** Our survey asked about seven types of business support that mentees received and mentors provided. These ranged from leadership to product development, and from strategy to personal growth and development. Most mentees and mentors had either received or given each of the support types listed ([see chart 2](#)).
- **Video conferencing is marginally more popular than meeting in person.** 72% of mentees and 58% of mentors had recently used video conferencing for mentoring, compared to 41% of mentees and 56% of mentors who had held sessions face to face.

- **Most mentoring is provided free of charge.** 70% of mentees and 61% of mentors reported that there was no cost attached to their most recent experience of mentoring.
- **It isn't uncommon for someone to have experience of being a mentor and of being mentored.** More than a quarter (27%) of people who responded to our survey fell into this category. 31% of respondents have experience of being a mentor only, 24% have experience of just being mentored, and 17% have no experience of either.

Of those people who had been mentored, one-third (33%) found their mentor via a personal recommendation from a friend or colleague. The second most popular answer was through a trade body or professional body (19%), while the third was an approach by other similar businesses (13%).

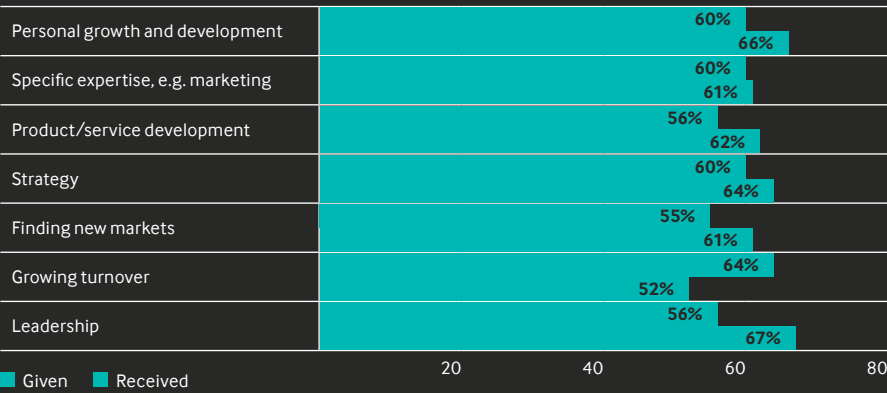
Chart 1:
Proportion of respondents answering what best describes how they found their mentor



The top-three answers for the type of support that a mentee had received were: leadership (67%), personal growth and development (66%), and strategy (64%).

The top-three answers for the type of support that a mentor had provided were: growing turnover (64%), specific expertise (60%), and personal growth and development (60%).

Chart 2:
Proportion of respondents answering what types of support they have received or given

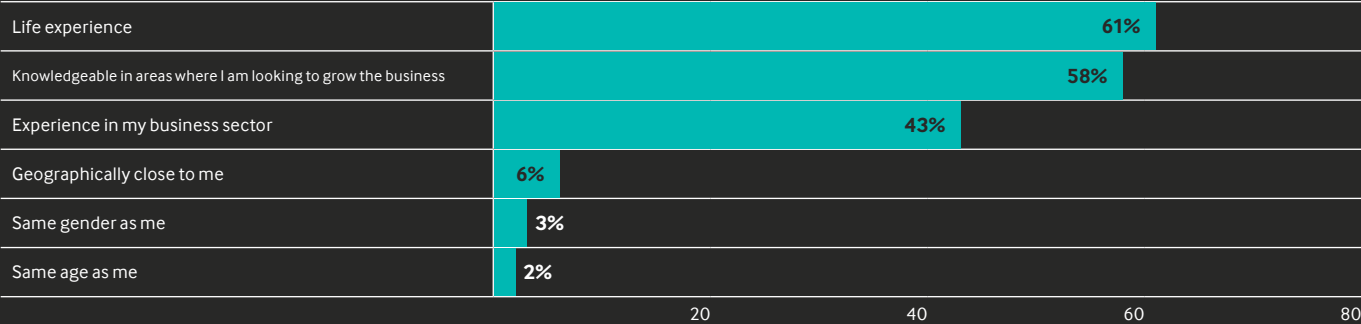


What should the modern mentoring relationship offer?

- **Life experience is the number-one attribute for a mentor to have.** Respondents cited life experience (61%), knowledge of specific business growth areas such as sales or marketing (58%), and relevant business sector experience (43%) as particularly important attributes for mentors to have. Having a mentor who is the same age, the same gender or based locally are attributes seen as much less important (see chart 3).
- **Smaller businesses (0–5 employees) and larger businesses (6+ employees) value the same attributes in a mentor.** Smaller businesses are in greater agreement about the importance of each attribute. 97% think life experience is a vital attribute for a mentor (compared to 80% of larger businesses); 96% believe business knowledge is crucial (87% of larger businesses) and 82% say experience of the business sector is important (76% of larger businesses).

61% A mentor’s most valued attribute is “life experience”, chosen by 61% of respondents. Being knowledgeable in the areas in which a business is looking to grow (for example, sales, marketing, technology and finance), and having specific experience in the business’s sector, come second (58%) and third (43%) on the list.

Chart 3:
Proportion of respondents stating a particular business attribute is “very important”.



What did our focus groups think is essential to building a successful mentoring relationship?

- **Clear roles, responsibilities and objectives set out at the beginning of the relationship will result in better outcomes.** “The mentee needs to know what they want, otherwise it cannot be measured.”
- **A good rapport needs to underpin any mentoring relationship.** “Trust is not like an electric switch. You have to nurture it and watch it grow, but it can be destroyed in an instant.”
- **Finding the right mentor to suit a mentee’s needs is essential to success, and some mentoring relationships can reach a natural end.** “You can outgrow a mentor...It can be hard to find the next person for the next level.”

What makes a good mentor

Fiona Minett,
founder of Boss Your PR

“A good mentor must be able to listen and remain objective. Mentoring isn’t about projecting your options and experiences in a way that will force mentees in any given direction.

“Instead, it’s about pointing out opportunities and potential pitfalls, asking the right questions, listening to the responses, and opening up a mentee’s thinking and perspective on their own business and corresponding entrepreneurial journey. As a mentor, your experience and knowledge will direct you in asking the right questions and supporting the mentee’s business and personal development.

“I think it’s also incredibly important to have a desire to support other people and encourage their success, as well as a genuine empathy for them. It’s so helpful to be intuitively able to understand the pressures that a mentee might be under and help them to get a handle on the practical workings of their business.”



The Mentoring Legacy

Our survey and focus groups looked to capture the legacy that mentoring can leave on a business.

Responses showed unequivocally that mentoring has a positive impact on a business's growth and survival. Within this context, some types of expertise offered through mentoring are more important than others.

Of particular interest is the demand for support needed to develop business strategy. This was regarded as more important than other types of business expertise.

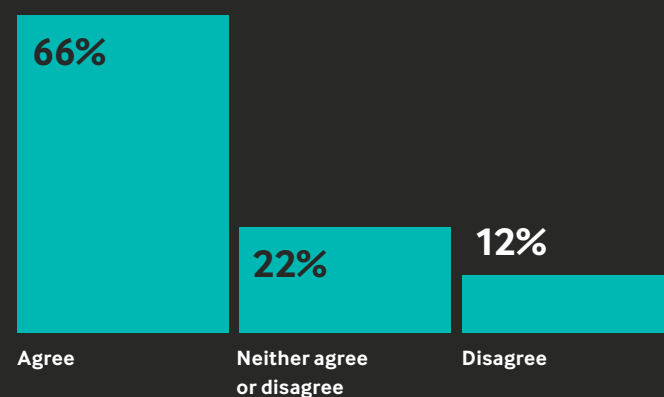
What is the impact of mentoring?

- **Mentoring can be critical to a business's survival.** Around two-thirds of respondents to the survey (66%) agreed that mentoring has been crucial in helping their business to survive to some degree ([see chart 4](#)). Moreover, businesses of all sizes agreed that mentoring had played a part in their survival.
- **Mentoring can also be vital to growth.** More than three-quarters of survey respondents (76%) believed this to be the case.

66%

Two-thirds of previously mentored respondents (66%) agreed that mentoring was crucial in helping their business to survive.

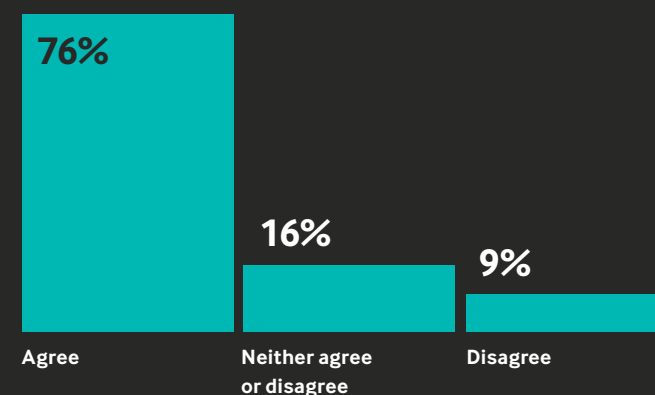
Chart 4:
Proportion of respondents agreeing that mentoring played a crucial role in helping their business survive



76%

More than three-quarters (76%) of previously mentored respondents agreed that mentoring had played an important role in their business's growth.

Chart 5:
Proportion of respondents agreeing that mentoring played an important role in helping their business grow



What is it important for mentors to offer?

- **Business strategy is the number-one type of support for a mentor to offer.** This is followed by operational expertise (for example, in marketing and sales) and then personal growth and development.
- **Smaller businesses look to a broader range of support than larger firms.** Of the seven types of mentoring support the survey raised, smaller businesses (0–5 employees) picked five on average, while larger businesses (6+ employees) picked three. The most popular answer across both groups is support on business strategy. However, the second most popular type of support for smaller businesses is personal growth and development; for larger businesses, it's finding new markets.
- **Certain types of mentoring support are thought to promote business growth more than others.** These types of support, as chosen by respondents, were strategy, growing turnover, and finding new markets ([see chart 6 over the page](#)).

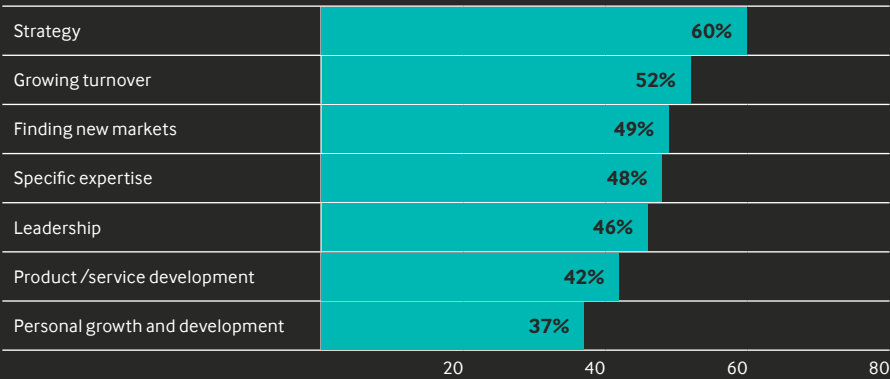
What did our focus groups think is essential to mentoring making an impact?

- **The impact of mentoring can be blunted without specific understanding of business needs.** Key quote: “As a food and drink producer, I’ve always been paired with non-food and drink mentors, and they don’t understand our sector’s structure and regulations.”
- **A business’s strategy and personal development benefits from an outsider’s perspective.** Key quote: “We all have our own blind spots, and compassionately showing them and making me aware of them is important.”
- **For mentoring to have a big impact, mentees need to “own” their decisions.** Key quote: “You have to allow the mentee to resolve it themselves.”

The Help to Grow: Management Course was launched in 2021 to provide small and medium-sized businesses with leadership support. Each participant is matched with a voluntary mentor and Enterprise Nation is working with Newable and the Association of Business Mentors to recruit a national network of mentors to support small businesses on the course to grow.

Respondents thought that mentoring could help a business grow “a great deal” in the following areas: strategy, growing turnover and finding new markets.

Chart 6:
Proportion of respondents agreeing that a type of support can help them to grow “a great deal”.



Phil Agulnik is a participant on the Help to Grow: Management Course and was matched with mentor Howard Lewis. Howard has many years of business experience. Both outline their expectations for the mentoring engagement...

Phil Agulnik, co-owner of entitledto, a provider of online benefits calculators:

“I intended to join the Help to Grow: Management Course more for the training than the mentoring. But the mentoring has been a great bonus – really, really good. I knew it would be because my colleague had done it previously.

“At entitledto, we have an Ansoff matrix that covers growth, diversification, product development and market penetration. My colleague, through her mentoring, developed a whole growth plan for our business.

“I’m concentrating on diversification. That covers developing new revenue streams, looking at future opportunities, developing new business models and so on.

“Regarding a possible mentor, I just needed someone I could discuss things with. I had some ideas about how to diversify the business and develop a diversification plan. I wanted to run them past a mentor – someone outside the business, who can offer a fresh pair of eyes and doesn’t have the baggage”.

Howard Lewis has many years of business experience and mentored Phil. He explains what he provides as a mentor:

“Phil already runs a successful business and he’s now looking at different growth models. I believe I can help him with that.

“With mentoring, you have an independent sounding board and a person who has no vested interest in the discussion or the outcome. So, you get to confide in someone who’s truly unbiased and has your best interests at heart. The higher you are inside your business, the more difficult it can be to find people like that.”

The Future of Mentoring

Our survey and focus groups gauged the appetite for participation in mentoring, the biggest perceived barriers to taking part, and mentoring’s reputation.

The good news is that there’s a significant interest in taking part in a mentoring relationship, and that positive perceptions of mentoring are on the rise.

Nevertheless, there are perceived barriers to seeking a mentoring relationship. Moreover, these perceived barriers vary by business size, age, gender and ethnicity.

This suggests that different cohorts of potential mentees may require different approaches to sell the benefits of mentoring and encourage them to seek mentoring relationships. As for what organisations can do to take the lead in this selling and encouragement, the survey results show that personal recommendations and trade/professional bodies are the most popular choices for where businesses would recommend going for information on mentoring relationships.

What are the barriers to seeking a mentoring relationship?

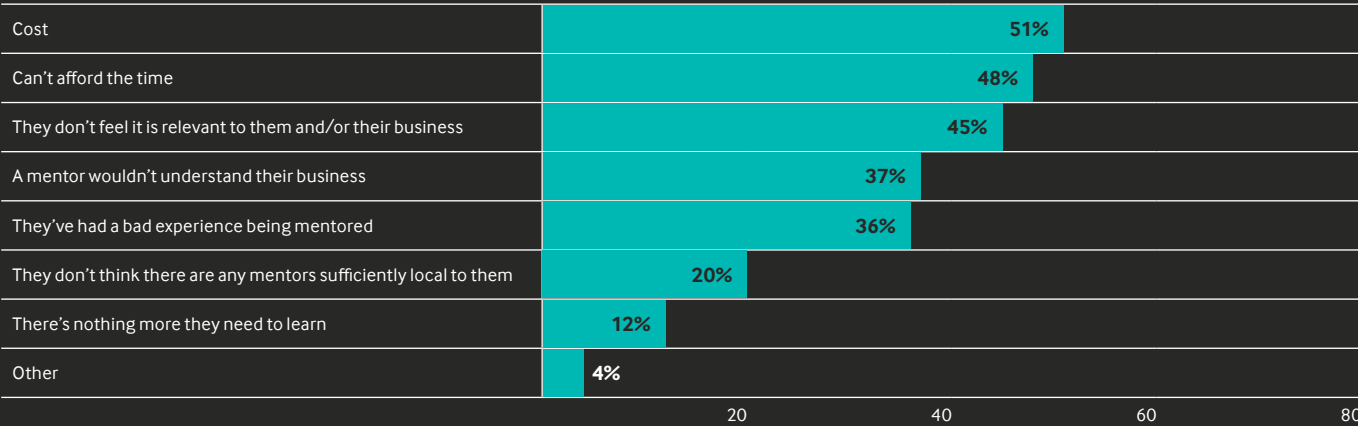
- **The perceived financial cost is the main factor stopping businesses from seeking a mentor.** This is despite most mentees responding to this survey (70%) reporting that their experience was free of charge. Another type of cost – the time needed to dedicate to a mentoring relationship – is second on the list. The perception that mentoring may not be relevant to a business is third. (See chart 7).
- **Barriers to seeking a mentor vary by size of business.** Smaller businesses (0–5 employees) see cost as the main barrier to them taking part in mentoring, while for larger businesses (6+ employees) it’s the perception that mentoring may not be relevant to their business. Additionally, 55% of smaller businesses cite not being able to afford the time to engage in mentoring as a key obstacle, while only 34% of larger businesses say the same.
- **Barriers to seeking a mentor vary by age – suggesting that younger people see fewer obstacles to being mentored.** 58% of respondents aged over 40 say cost is a barrier to seeking a mentor; only 38% of respondents under 40 agree. 52% of over-40s claim a lack of time as a barrier to taking part in mentoring, compared to just 40% of under-40s.

- **Barriers to seeking a mentor vary by gender – suggesting that males see fewer barriers to being mentored.** 59% of female respondents identified cost as a reason for not seeking a mentor, while 52% said it was the lack of available time. For males, the same figures were 42% and 43% respectively. And while only 9% of female respondents identified someone thinking that they have not much left to learn as an obstacle, the figure for male respondents was 17%.
- **Barriers to seeking a mentor vary by ethnicity.** 39% of ethnic minority respondents to the survey saw cost as a barrier, while 36% said it was a lack of time that stopped them seeking a mentor. The same figures for white British respondents were 57% and 54% respectively. 38% of ethnic minority respondents said that a perception of it not being relevant to their business is a barrier, compared to 48% of white British respondents.

The main barriers to businesses seeking a mentor are: cost (51%), not being able to afford the time (48%), and relevance (45%). The least cited barriers were: there’s nothing more they need to learn (12%), and they don’t think there are any mentors sufficiently local to them (20%).

The majority of those looking to take part in mentoring in the future (59%) wanted it to be free of charge. Only 37% of those wanting to be a mentor hoped it would be free.

Chart 7:
Proportion of businesses responding to the main things that might stop businesses like theirs seeking a mentor





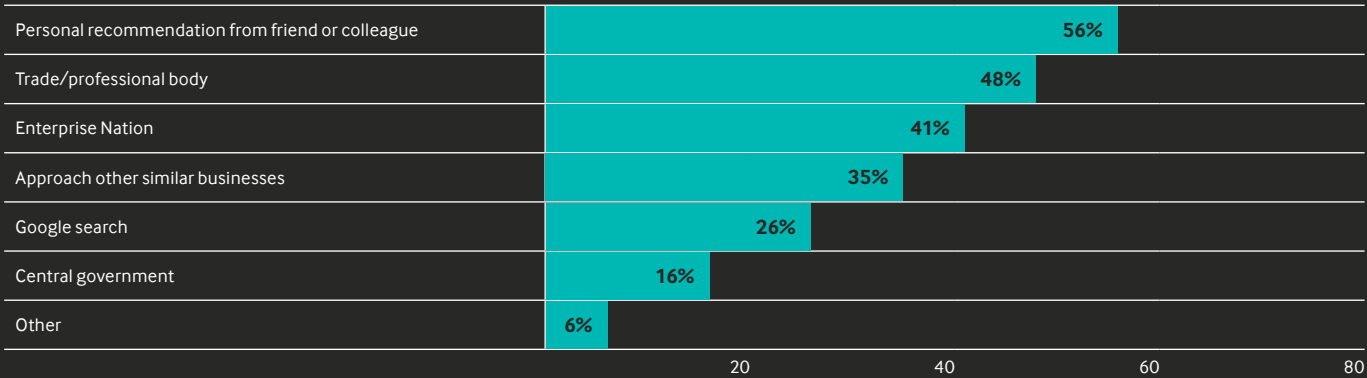
What is the future of mentoring?

- **There is significant interest in taking part in mentorship, or being a mentor, in the next five years.** A large majority (82%) of respondents are either “fairly” or “very” interested in having a mentor over the next five years. Similarly, 83% of respondents are either “fairly” or “very” interested in being a mentor over the same period.
- **The perception of mentoring seems to be growing more positive.** Around six in 10 (61%) respondents felt that the reputation of mentoring had generally increased over the last five years. A further 28% thought it had stayed the same, while only 11% thought that it had decreased. (See chart 9).



Chart 8:
Proportion of businesses responding where they would suggest similar businesses going for advice and guidance about how to find a mentor

The top-three answers for where businesses should go for advice and guidance on how to find a mentor were: personal recommendation from a friend or colleague (56%), a trade body or professional body (48%), and Enterprise Nation (41%).



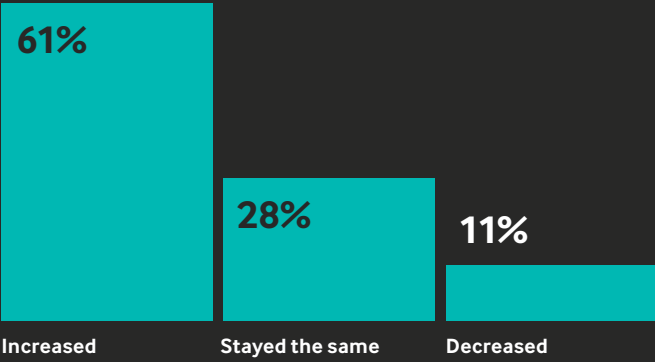
What factors did our focus groups think crucial to future participation in mentoring?

- **Mentees must want to be mentored.** “If you have someone going into a mentoring situation who doesn’t want to, they are not going to get the best out of it.”
- **Cost and time commitments are the investment to bring benefit from mentoring.** “The barriers of time and cost may come from a lack of understanding of what the time and cost is.”

There is clear evidence suggesting that paid-for mentoring as part of a formal relationship with a professional mentor can add great value to the business and its owner that far outweighs the relatively low cost. Mentoring can be a worthwhile investment in both the business and the owner.

Respondents were asked to think about the attitudes of their business peers and colleagues: 61% believed that the reputation of mentoring had increased. Only 11% felt that it had decreased and 28% felt it had stayed the same.

Chart 9:
Proportion of businesses responding to a question about how they feel the reputation of mentoring has changed over the last five years



Conclusion

The findings of our survey and focus groups demonstrate how important mentoring can be to the UK's small businesses. Mentoring's reputation is on the rise – most likely driven by a growing appreciation of the benefits it can bring to a business's performance. Over three-quarters of people who responded to our survey believe it to be critical to business growth, while two-thirds agreed it was crucial in helping their business to survive. Heading into 2023, as UK businesses navigate rising energy prices and a tough macroeconomic environment, the value of the experience and wisdom that mentors can bring has never been greater. Converting potential mentoring relationships into real ones could lead to 118,000 new business mentors and 284,000 more mentees – which could be transformative for our economy.

How can we make this happen? The findings of our survey suggest that removing the barriers to mentoring is, at least partly, about addressing perceptions. The financial cost of taking part was more frequently cited as a barrier than any other (51% of respondents), yet most of the mentoring our respondents received was free of charge. Lack of relevance was also a popular barrier (cited by 45%), but platforms to match mentees to mentors with relevant knowledge of their sector and business issues do exist. And while taking time out of the business can be challenging, our survey finds that the approach to engagement can be tailored to need – taking place at a frequency and in a manner that suits both the mentor and mentee.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Whether you're looking for mentorship or want to share your skills and experience as a mentor, Enterprise Nation, Newable and the Association of Business Mentors recommend you take a three-step approach to your mentoring experience.

- First, know what you want from the experience or what you're comfortable offering as a mentor. Is it sharing sector-specific knowledge? Being a sounding board for business plans? Support for improvement in a particular area of business? Support for taking on the first employee? Knowing what you need will help to identify both the type of support (such as mentoring, coaching, consulting) and the best person to help.
- Second, set objectives for what you want to achieve from the mentoring and how the process should operate. This includes how often you'll meet, what method you'll use (for example, face-to-face sessions, video conferencing etc.), whether you'll have follow-ups and 'aftercare' and so on. You may be eligible to [volunteer as a mentor for the UK government's Help to Grow: Management Course](#) or sign up as a participant to access a mentor.
- Finally, mentees should move on to a different mentor whenever their needs for development or support change.



Methodology

- Survey fieldwork was conducted between 30 August 2022 and 2 October 2022.
- The report had 853 respondents.
- 44% of respondents have no employees. 22% have between one and five employees. 6% have between six and nine. 20% have between 10 and 50 employees. 9% have more than 50 employees.
- 41% of respondents gave their age as being under 40, 57% as over 40, and 2% preferred not to say.
- Focus groups were undertaken online on 22 September 2022, with the same interview script being used for both groups. All focus group participants had prior experience of being a mentor, a mentee, or both.

Appendix

1. 2022 Business population estimates for the UK and the regions (BEIS, October 2022)
2. The number of people in senior occupations that is assumed to be the population from which potential mentees and mentors can be drawn is taken from the Annual Population Survey, and the Standard Occupational Classification of 'Managers, Directors and Senior Officials'.

Research and analysis provided by PolicyDepartment (www.policydepartment.com)

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