



North East
Data Hub

Growth through Mentoring Interim Evaluation

March 2020



Contents

Introduction	3
What do the numbers say?	4
What do people say?	7
What does this mean?	9
Contact	9

You might find this report helpful if you are thinking about:

- Developing a mentoring programme, there are some key takeaways to help shape the support offer
- Engaging with a mentoring programme, there are insights from those who have been mentored and the value this activity brings to personal and business growth
- Becoming a mentor, the report highlights the importance this relationship and support brings to the business community
- Commissioning an evaluation of a similar programme, the report sets out the methodological approach for this evaluation and provides a useful case study example.

Introduction

In 2018, the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) commissioned an external independent evaluation of its Growth through Mentoring programme to explore impact and effectiveness to date.

Growth through Mentoring is designed to support the development of leadership capability and strategic thinking of business leaders from high growth companies in the North East LEP area. It aims to do this by matching them with a business mentor with experience of successfully scaling a business.

The following research activities were undertaken as part of this evaluation:

- analysis of all programme information and data
- a review of key background documents including: the marketing and communication plan and materials; the mentoring code of conduct; and programme background papers
- In-depth interviews with 22 mentees participating in the programme
- In-depth interviews with 12 engaged mentors
- Interviews with programme management and delivery staff and key stakeholder organisations including members of the North East LEP Business Growth Board

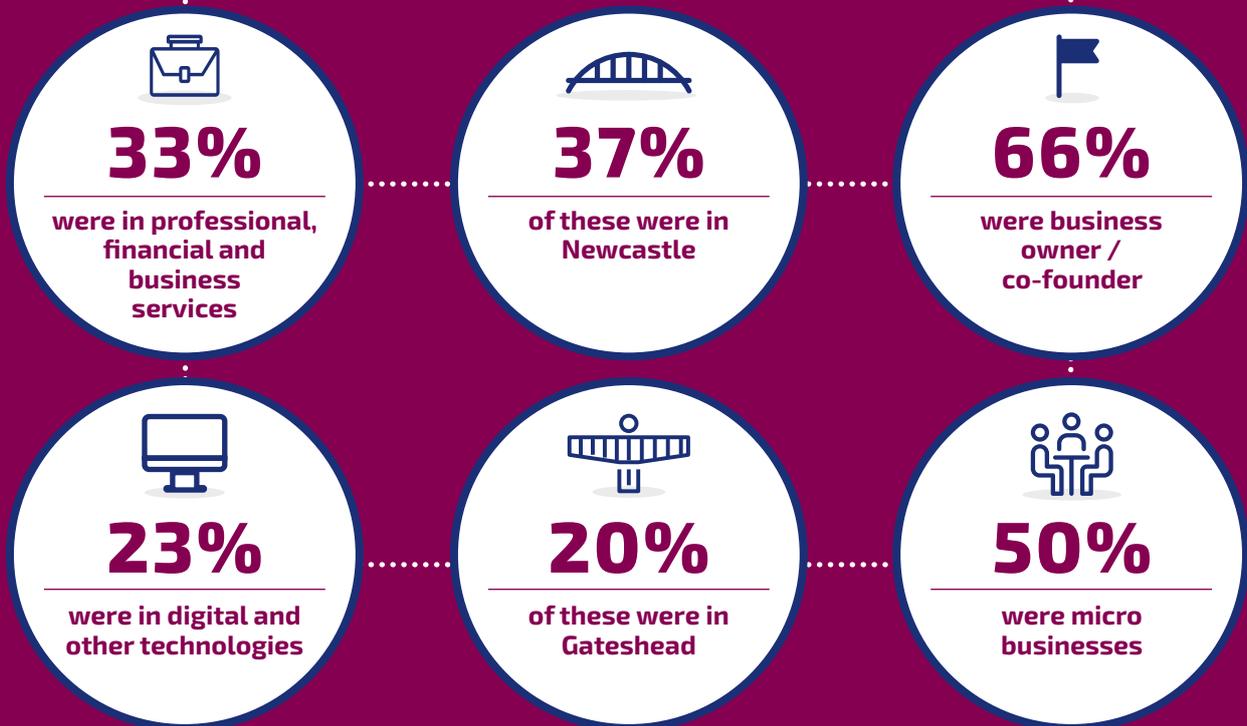
A quick summary of what the report tells us

- Direct and personal contact between the Growth through Mentoring team and the mentor and mentee was important – it allowed the benefits of a mentee/mentor meant that the benefits of mentoring and the role of the mentor to be described positively and accurately and encouraged engagement and participation in the programme.
- A programme designed to be highly flexible and one that is structured to suit the mentor and mentee requirements is most effective. This includes tailoring the frequency and format of sessions to individual need.
- The matching process is an important component of establishing a successful relationship between the mentor and mentee and participants attributed this to the effectiveness of the Mentoring and Brokerage Manager at the North East LEP.
- The quality of the mentoring and skills of the mentors was highly regarded, in terms of their professionalism, credibility, understanding of leadership, business growth and strategy.
- Attributes of a mentor that were highlighted as important to mentees include: good listening and communication skills; the ability to inspire trust quickly; a combination of encouragement and constructive challenge; providing an independent, objective and fresh perspective and being insightful and clear-minded
- Mentees described the most beneficial aspects of mentoring being: building confidence; developing skills; improving understanding of business issues; practical problem solving; taking time out from the business; independent confirmation and validation of the mentees approach; and the ability to discuss business issues with someone external to the business.
- Businesses who have been supported this project, reported both personal development impacts i.e. improvements to strategic thinking and understanding, business confidence and leadership capability as well as business impacts e.g. business planning and strategy.

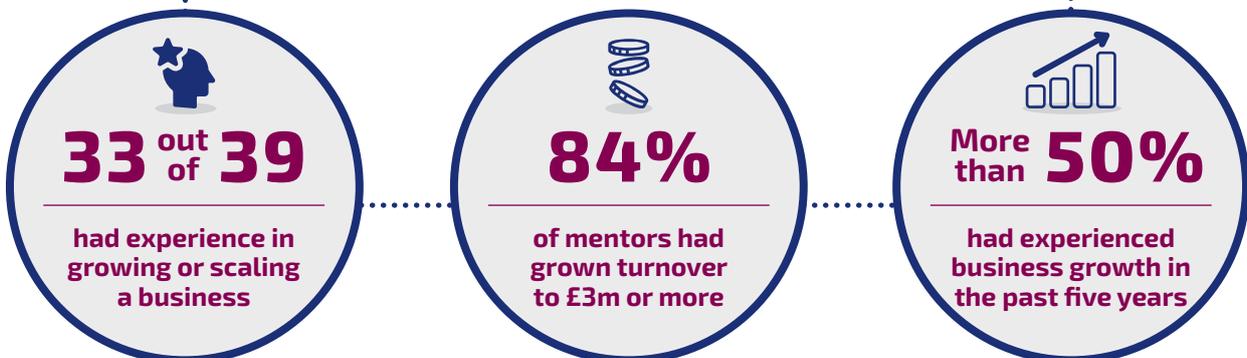
What do the numbers say?

Programme engagement

30 businesses supported



39 mentors were signed up to support mentees



Programme effectiveness



Of the **20 businesses** consulted...



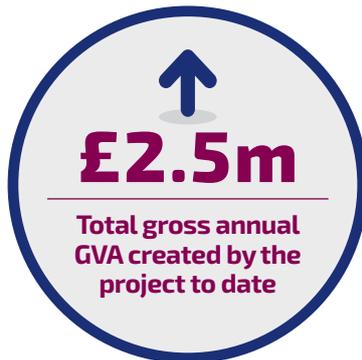
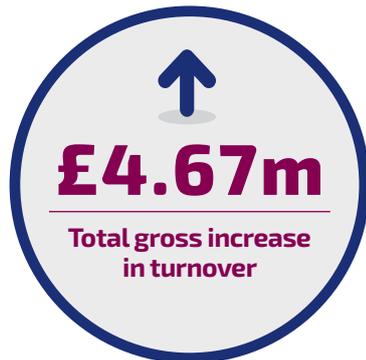
...**11** have created **58.5 new FTE jobs**...



with a further **57 FTE jobs** forecast in the next **5 years**



47% of these jobs are **better jobs**



*When adjusted for factors of net additionality

What did people say?

Motivations for engaging in mentoring are important and can influence the effectiveness and benefits of the mentoring provided. Mentees may seek a mentor to support their business growth ambition, or for personal or career development support, while mentors may be motivated by altruism or the opportunity to 'get out and see what other businesses are doing'.

What did the mentees say?

Reasons for engagement included:

- Lack of business experience, skills and background in order to grow their business
- Needing independent challenge and a 'fresh pair of eyes'
- Having someone external to the business to talk to in confidence – some mentees felt isolated running their business and lacked someone to talk to about key issues, challenges and decisions
- Support with a specific issue e.g. sales and marketing, internal business operation, etc.
- Personal and professional development needs – advise on their career progression

What attributes of their mentor which they valued, and which contributed towards the effectiveness of the mentoring, including:

- Good listening and communication skills, mentors appreciated that mentors really listened to them, and therefore the advice and suggestions were tailored and appropriate
- Inspiring trust, which encouraged open and honest discussion
- Providing a combination of encouragement and constructive challenge
- Providing an independent, objective and often fresh perspective
- Being insightful and clear-minded
- Specific business knowledge or skills

Tangible benefits have included:

- Set up a commercial sales and marketing function
- Made connections with potential investors for the business
- Set financial targets for the businesses, which has helped to create a focus and to motivate staff.
- Developed a new website and improve use of social media
- Developed a more realistic but ambitious growth strategy

What the mentors said?

Reasons for engagement included:

- Altruistic reasons – wanted to help other businesses to grow, to help boost the local economy and to 'give something back'
- Having previously benefitted from mentoring themselves and therefore recognise the value and importance of this type of support
- Opportunity to build their own networks and new relationships
- Remain active in the business community after retirement

The mentor workshops held by the North East LEP were highly regarded by mentors, saying that these meetings made them feel part of wider initiative.

Positive changes in their business included:

- A better understanding of business skills and planning
- Accelerated pace of growth
- Improved business leadership
- Developed a better, more sustainable business model
- Strategic thinking and leadership; business related knowledge like sales and marketing.

Opportunities for improvement

Both mentees and mentors suggest a small number of potential improvements to the programme, including:

- Introducing a diagnostic of mentee needs to ensure the mentoring is the most appropriate approach and sessions are focussed on appropriate issues
- Intensity of support - a small increase in the number of sessions (currently 3) would add value
- Opportunity to network with other mentees, who are going through a business growth process, to share good practice and to discuss key issues
- Regular information or updates from the North East LEP about how the Programme is progressing
- Information on options available once they have completed the mentoring programme

What does this mean?

The matching process works well. However, it is highly dependent on personal relationships and knowledge, which require dedicated resources.

In addition, some mentors suggested they would like to see the marketing increased to achieve high levels of awareness across the business community and boost the recruitment of new mentees.

A programme designed to be highly flexible and one that is structured to suit the mentor and mentee requirements is most effective. This includes tailoring the frequency and format of sessions to individual need. Evaluation feedback suggests that a range of support should be available, including three sessions of three hours each to six sessions of 1.5 hours. This could be another factor in the matching process.

Mentee motivation is an important factor in the overall success of mentoring. Feedback through this evaluation highlighted that **mentoring is most effective when mentees are self-motivated; clear about their objectives and the support they need from a mentor.** In the future, an initial diagnostic at the start of the process to clarify mentee motivations, objectives and job role will help to ensure mentoring process is effective and worthwhile for both the mentee and their mentor.

The **matching process is an important component of establishing a successful relationship** between the mentor and mentee. In this evaluation, mentors and mentees alike recognised that this is largely attributable to the skills of the Mentoring and Brokerage Manager at the North East LEP. Time and care were taken to speak to each individual, to really understand their needs or area of expertise and to make the most appropriate match.

The **focus on quality** is positive and has been welcomed by both mentees and mentors. This approach sends a clear message to the market about the calibre and motivations of the mentors and of the potential quality of the mentoring available. For example, the quality of mentors was highly regarded, in terms of their professionalism, understanding of leadership and business and management.

Businesses who have been supported this project, reported both personal development impacts i.e. improvements to strategic thinking and understanding, business confidence and leadership capability as well as business impacts e.g. business planning and strategy, creating and developing new tools and processes, etc. The **benefits of mentoring are both tangible and intangible**, with many of the businesses consulted describing impacts such as job creation and increased turnover.

Would you like to know more?



Contact:

Helen Lee

Mentoring and Brokerage Manager, North East Growth Hub

helen.lee@nelep.co.uk | 0191 561 5451

The North East LEP places up to date economic analysis, evaluation and evidence at the heart of its works, and aims to be known as a focus for innovative, collaborative and policy-oriented evidence development. Our activities include:



Encouraging, providing and promoting analysis and evidence activities

We want to ensure that decision makers have up-to-date economic analysis and evidence to support their activities. We actively work with our programme teams and our partners to ensure we are providing analytical support to meet their needs.



Monitoring and evaluation of programmes and projects

We are committed to collating and analysing data on performance, conducting independent evaluations and using this to inform current delivery and future project development.



Informing regional strategy and delivery

A rolling programme of research has been identified to inform our regional strategies, develop a deeper understanding of areas of strategic importance and service sectors and support our programmes of delivery.



Informing policy nationally and regionally

We continue to monitor public policy and work with regional partners to develop policy-oriented evidence in order to influence and shape public policy where a significant and shared interest is identified which will impact on our economy



If you would like to know more about the North East LEP's research activities, please contact:

Emma Ward

Research and Evaluation Manager

emma.ward@nelep.co.uk | 0191 561 5453