

The March Survey looked at changing attitudes to investment and sought the panellists' views on networking, postal deliveries and the issue of home working.

About the respondents

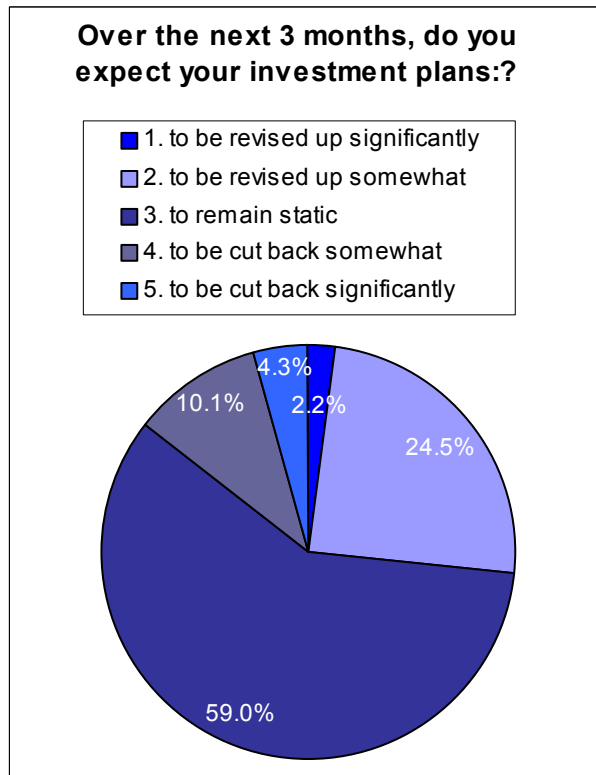
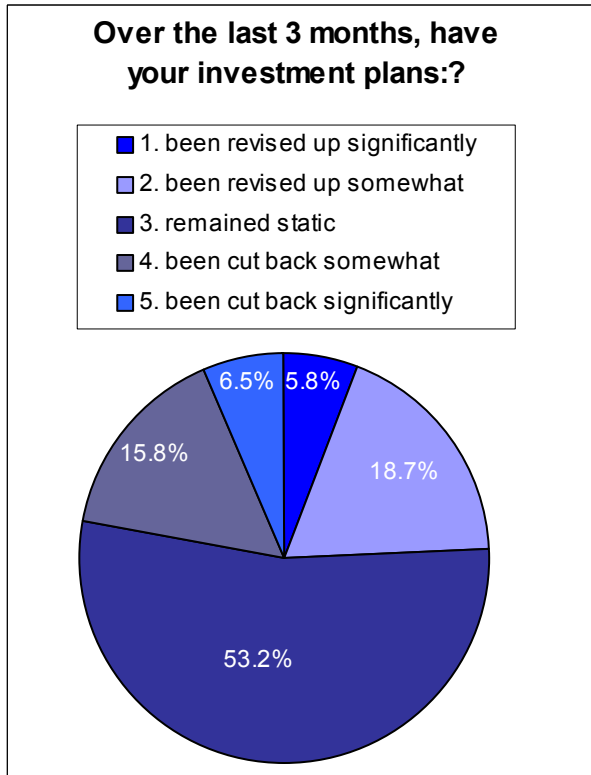
139 respondents were drawn with the following population characteristics:

Sector			
Production & Manufacturing	Distribution	Services	Total
36.0%	9.4%	54.7%	100.0%

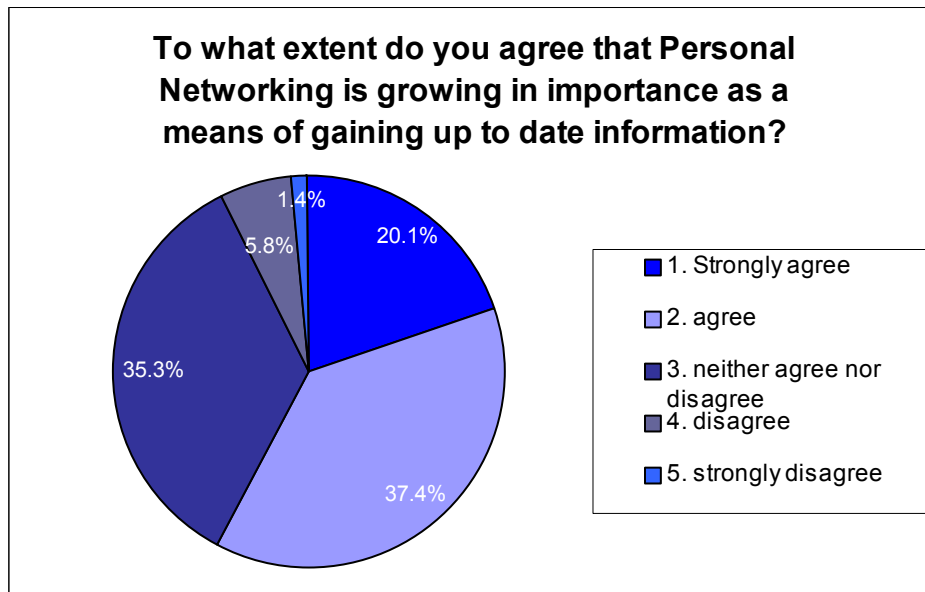
Turnover (£)			
< 1 M	1M-3M	>3M	Total
61.2%	21.6%	17.3%	100.0%

Number of Full-time Employees						
1-10	11-20	21-50	51-100	100+	unknown	Grand Total*
41.7%	36.0%	9.4%	3.6%	5.0%	4.3%	100.0%

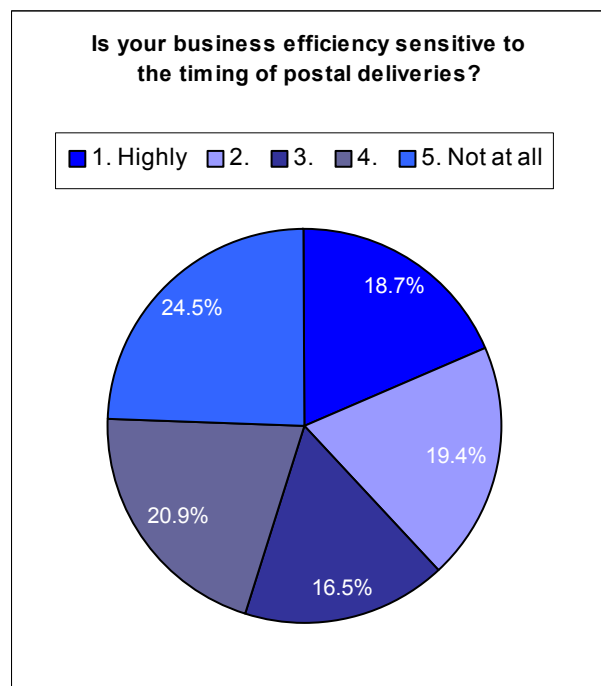
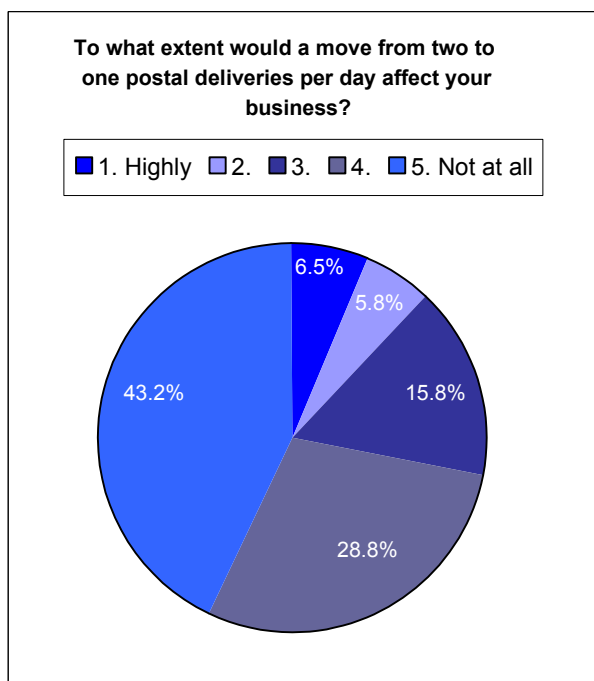
The first two questions were about investment intentions, where survey results show that the balance of intentions is slightly more positive than negative. Over the last three months, 24.5% revised up while 22% revised down. Over the next three months 27% expect to revise up while 14% expect to revise down. Looking at changes of direction between questions by individual respondents, 59% gave the equivalent response to both questions while 25% gave a more positive response looking forward but 16% gave a more negative response looking forward



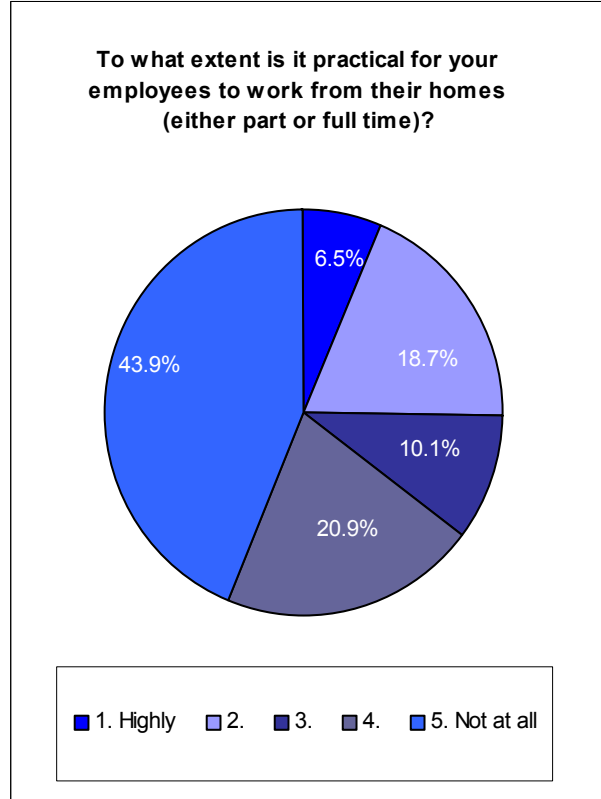
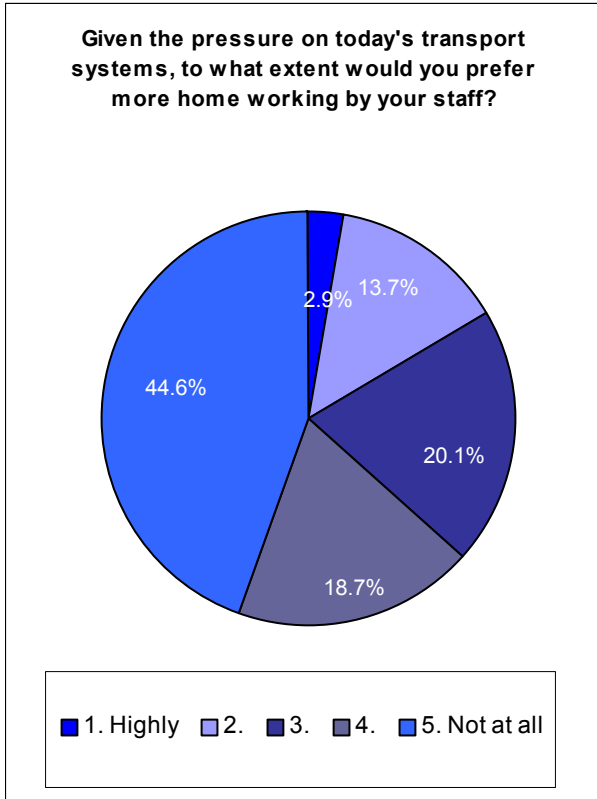
In view of the number of networking events that now take place we were interested to learn how important they are to smaller businesses. The majority of respondents (57%) think that personal networking is growing in importance, with only a small number (7%) disagreeing to any extent.



Questions 4 and 5 addressed some of the current issues over cutbacks in the postal service. 57% thought that a move to only one postal delivery would affect their business to some extent, and over one eighth of respondents placed this effect across the top two categories. Business efficiency is highly sensitive to timing of deliveries for 19% of respondents, with a fairly broad spread down to the 24% for whom timing of delivery does not affect their firm's efficiency.

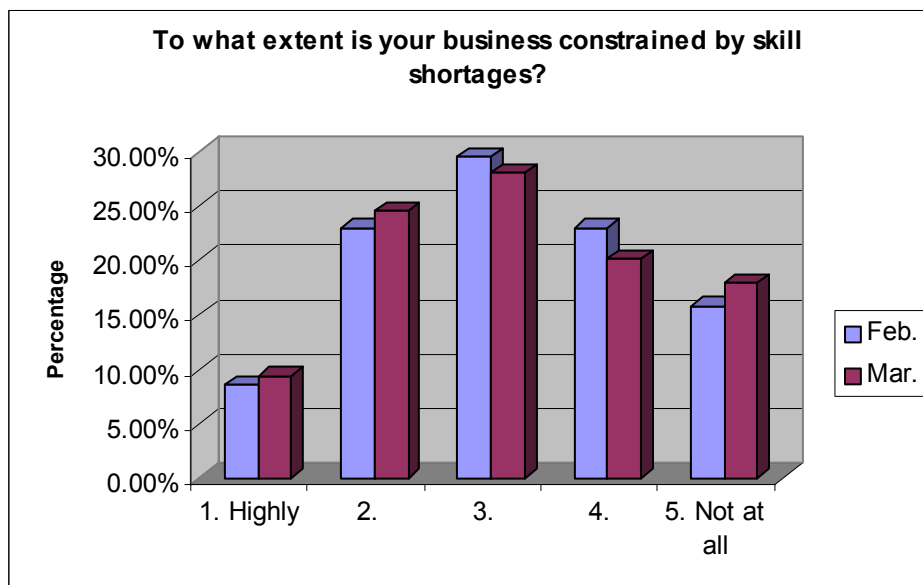


Our final two topical questions were on home working. Many respondents (44%) see home working as neither practical nor preferable. Nearly 17% would be keen for more home working although not all of these feel it is a practical proposition in their particular business circumstances. 25% overall believe it would be, or is, highly (or nearly so) practical to do some work from home.

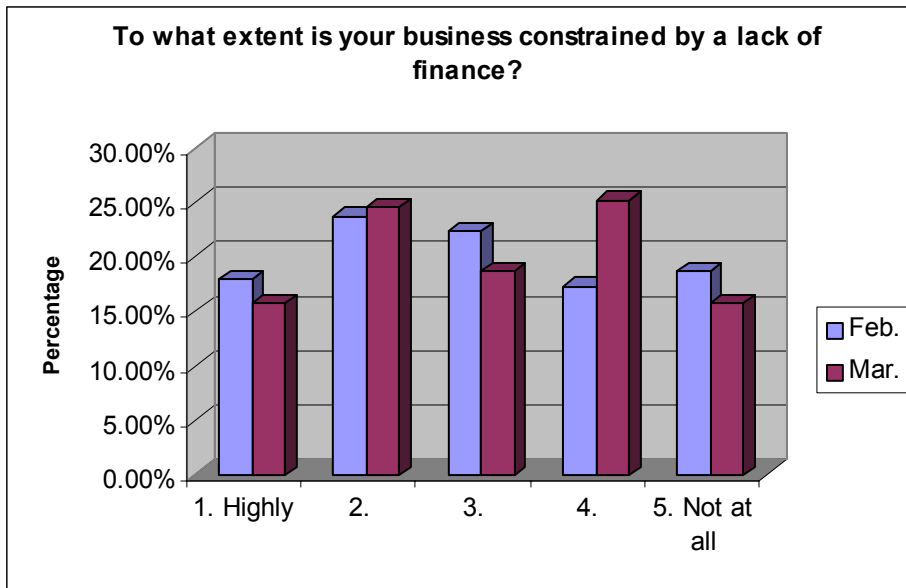


The responses to the Core Questions gave the following results in the March survey:

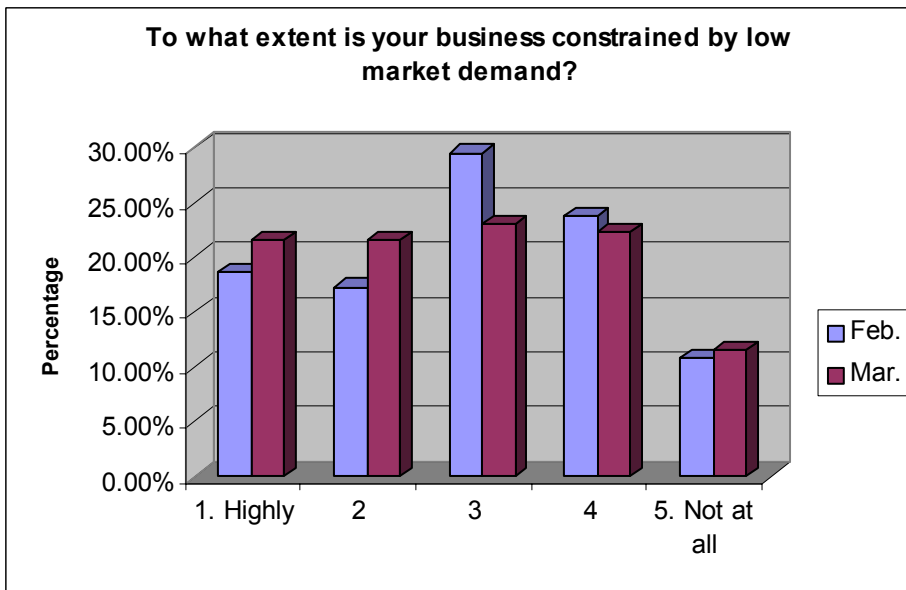
- In March, the overall constraint on businesses due to shortages of skills stayed close to levels experienced in February.



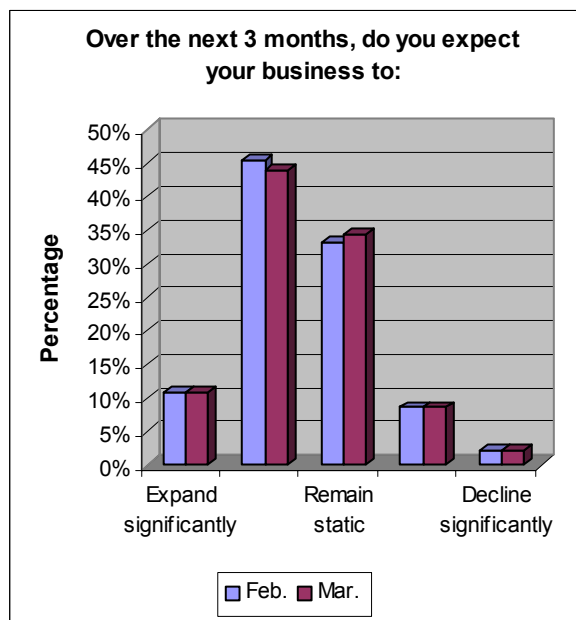
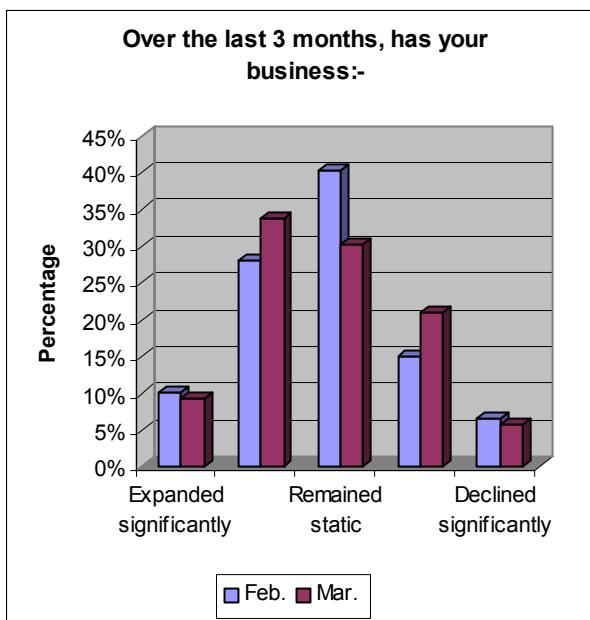
- The average level of business constraint due to lack of finance was slightly higher, focused around distribution sectors and businesses with turnover of under £1m.



- Average constraint due to low market demand was little changed from February.



- The March survey showed the profile of growth over the last three months with a very small overall upward change from February.
- Expectations about growth over the next three months were less optimistic overall and this shows mostly in the Distribution sector and in firms with turnovers in excess of £1m.



Listed below are extracts from feedback received in Survey BB46 March 2002.

Comments are listed under sector headings.

Views expressed are those of individual panellists and may not represent those of the University.

Production & Manufacturing

Networking has always been very important; it used to be called keeping in touch with relevant people. A new name for it does not mean that the idea is new.

We have only ever had one postal delivery the time of which is becoming more erratic. The post office delivers next door's post by a van whilst ours & others are delivered by foot later.

Regarding timing of postal deliveries, it is extremely important for this company to receive post as early as possible at the start of the working day.

We have seen a significant pick up in activity levels.

Retail

'Personal networking' is very important to me, especially in seeking ways to survive the sea of legislation in which small business is presently drowning.

Business services

Provided the mail delivers early 8- 8.30 no problem later causes delays and inconvenience - we very rarely get a second delivery

As my business is business advice the main constraint at the moment is the lack of investment/confidence in a lot of SME (and unfortunately some bad experiences with government backed business advice initiatives !)

Other

Postal services. No problem with 1 delivery as long as all mail arrives early. If it doesn't, we need a 2nd delivery.

Postal deliveries should be before 9am. Recorded and packets after 9am but before 12noon

In my opinion, house and land prices have soaked up any inflationary areas in the economy however this has and is causing problems with people starting out at the beginning of the ladder. Then putting pressure on employers for expected wage increases.

We do use home workers at the moment. The only drawback is getting the work to them and the volume of work that they have to have in their house to complete a task such as collation of sheets of paper.