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**Using RCTs as a research method for SME policy
research: The UK experience**

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RCTs have a number of theoretical advantages over more standard quasi-experimental or econometric research methodologies, particularly the avoidance of selection bias. In the UK, budgetary pressures have created a renewed interest in evidence-based policy-making and one aspect of this has been the implementation of a series of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) to investigate the effectiveness of different types of SME support. These focus on the value of external business advice, innovation support, leadership coaching, management and leadership training and the effectiveness of alternative forms of communicating with firms. We briefly describe the trials and identify the operational and tactical issues which arise in the implementation of research experiments based on an RCT approach. Experience from medical trials also suggests the value of replication and synthesis, epitomised in the Cochrane Reviews, suggesting the value of repeated trials.