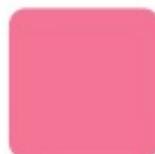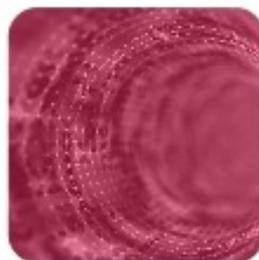# 3.Using this report

As well as the overall SME market, key elements have been analysed by a number of other factors where sample sizes permit. Typically, nothing will be reported on a base size of less than 100 – where this *has* been done an asterisk * highlights the care to be taken with a small base size. If appropriate, a qualitative or indicative assessment has been provided where base sizes are too small to report.

Much of the analysis is by size of business, based on the number of employees (excluding the respondent). This is because research has repeatedly shown that SMEs are not a homogenous group in their need for external finance, or their ability to obtain it, and that size of business can be a significant factor. The employee size bands used are the standard bands of 0 (typically a sole trader), 1-9, 10-49 and 50-249 employees.

Where appropriate, analysis has also been provided by sector, age of business or other relevant characteristics of which the most frequently used is external risk rating. This was supplied, for almost all completed interviews, by the sample providers D&B or Experian. Risk ratings are not available for 15% of respondents, typically the smallest ones. Dun & Bradstreet and Experian use slightly different risk rating scales, and so the Experian scale has been matched to the Dun & Bradstreet scale as follows:

D&B	Experian
1 Minimal	Very low/Minimum
2 Low	Low
3 Average	Below average
4 Above average	Above Average/High/Maximum/Serious Adverse Information

It is also possible to show many results by sector. The table below shows the share of each sector, from 3% (Agriculture) to 27% (Property/Business Services) of all SMEs, and the proportion in each sector that are 0 employee SMEs.

	Sector	% of all SMEs	% of sector that are 0 emp
AB	Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry; Fishing	3%	65%
D	Manufacturing	6%	68%
F	Construction	19%	84%
G	Wholesale and Retail Trade; Repairs	10%	54%
H	Hotels & Restaurants	4%	30%
I	Transport, Storage and Communication	12%	82%
K	Real Estate, Renting and Business Activities	27%	76%
N	Health and Social work	7%	83%
O	Other Community, Social and Personal Service Activities	12%	84%

Analysis over time

This report is based predominantly on four waves of data gathered across the 4 quarters to Q2 2017. In all four waves, SMEs were asked about their past behaviour during the previous 12 months, so there is an overlap in the time period each wave has reported on. These year-ending figures are defined by the date of **interview**, i.e. all interviews conducted in the year concerned.

Where results can be shown by individual quarter over time, they have been. However, small sample sizes for some lines of questioning mean that in those instances data is reported based on four quarters combined (YEQ2 2017 in this report). This provides a robust sample size and allows for analysis by key sub-groups such as size, sector or external risk rating.

Each report also comments on changes in demand for credit and the outcome of applications <u>over time</u>. Here, it is more appropriate to analyse results based on when the **application** was made, rather than when the interview was conducted. Final data is now available for any applications made from 2010 up to and including Q2 2016 but for other more recent quarters data is still being gathered. Results for events occurring from Q3 2016 onwards are therefore still *interim* at this stage (respondents interviewed in Q3 2017 will report on events which occurred in Q3 2016 or later).

Where analysis is shown by <u>date of application</u>, this typically includes <u>all</u> interviews to date

(including those conducted 2011-2015 which are no longer included in the year-ending data reported elsewhere), and such tables are clearly labelled in the report. For all reports from Q2 2013 onwards, when applications made are analysed by sub-group such as employee size, this is also now based on application date rather than date of interview. For the Q2 2017 report, this means such tables are based on all applications occurring in the 18 months between Q1 2016 and Q2 2017 to ensure a robust base size for analysis.

The exception to the approach outlined above is in the latter stages of the report where SMEs are asked about their planned <u>future</u> behaviour. In these instances, where we are typically reporting expectations for the next three months, comparisons are made between individual quarters as each provides an assessment of SME sentiment for the coming months and the comparison is an appropriate one.

Not *all* of the previous quarters are shown in the standard quarterly tables in this report. Quarterly data from 2011 -2014 is no longer routinely shown and subsequent reports will continue this policy of deleting the oldest wave before adding the latest.

However, a series of <u>annual</u> summary tables have been developed and were included for the first time in the Q2 2016 report. These complement the series of key charts in the final chapter of this report which show <u>all</u> results over time for key metrics.

Definitions used in this report

Over time, a number of definitions have been developed for different SMEs and some standard terms are commonly used in this report. The most frequently used are summarised below:

SME size – this is based on the number of employees (excluding the respondent). Those with more than 249 employees were excluded from the research

External risk profile – this is provided by the sample providers (Dun & Bradstreet and Experian). Risk ratings are not available for 15% of respondents, typically the smallest ones. D&B and Experian use slightly different risk rating scales, and so the Experian scale has been matched to the D&B scale as shown at the start of this chapter

Fast growth – SMEs that report having grown by 20% or more each year, for each of the past 3 years (definition updated Q4 2012)

Use of external finance – SMEs are asked whether they are currently using any of the following forms of finance: Bank overdraft, Credit cards, Bank loan, Commercial mortgage, Leasing or hire purchase, Loans/equity from directors, Loans/equity from family and friends, Invoice finance, Grants, Loans from other 3rd parties, Export/import finance

Permanent non-borrower – SMEs that seem firmly disinclined to borrow because they meet all of the following conditions: are not currently using external finance, have not used external finance in the past 5 years, have had no borrowing events in the past 12 months, have not applied for any other forms of finance in the last 12 months, said that they had had no desire to borrow in the past 12 months <u>and</u> reported no inclination to borrow in the next 3 months

Borrowing event – these are defined as any Type 1 (new application or renewal), Type 2 (bank sought cancelation/renegotiation) or Type 3 (SME sought cancellation/reduction) borrowing event for loan or overdraft in the 12 months prior to interview. The definition also includes those SMEs that have seen their overdraft facility automatically renewed by their bank

Would-be seeker – those SMEs that had not had a loan or overdraft borrowing event and said that something had stopped them applying for loan/overdraft funding in the previous 12 months (definition revised in Q1 2016 – the question is now asked once for both loan and overdraft events rather than separately, but the question wording has not changed)

Happy non-seeker – those SMEs that had not had a loan/overdraft borrowing event, and also said that nothing had stopped them applying for any (further) loan/overdraft funding in the previous 12 months (definition revised in Q4 2012)

Issues – something that needed further discussion before a loan or overdraft facility was agreed, typically the terms and conditions (security, fee or interest rate) or the amount initially offered by the bank

Principle of borrowing – where an SME did not (or, looking ahead, will not) apply to borrow because they feared they might lose control of their business, or preferred to seek alternative sources of funding

Process of borrowing – where an SME did not (or, looking ahead, will not) apply to borrow because they thought it would be too expensive, too much hassle etc.

Discouragement – where an SME did not (or, looking ahead, will not) apply to borrow because it had been put off, either directly (they made informal enquiries of the bank and felt put off) or indirectly (they thought they would be turned down by the bank so did not enquire)

Major obstacle – SMEs were asked to rate the extent to which each of a number of factors were perceived as obstacles to their running the business as they would wish in the next 12 months, using a 1 to 10 scale. Ratings of 8-10 are classed as a major obstacle

Future happy non-seekers – those that said they would not be applying to borrow (more) in the next three months because they said that they did not need to borrow (more) or already had the facilities they needed

Future would-be seekers – those that felt that there were barriers that would stop them applying to borrow (more) in the next three months (such as discouragement, the economy or the principle or process of borrowing)

Average – the arithmetic mean of values, calculated by adding the values together and dividing by the number of cases

Median – a different type of average, found by arranging the values in order and then selecting the one in the middle. The median is a useful number in cases where there are very large extreme values which would otherwise skew the data, such as a few very large loans or overdraft facilities

Please note that the majority of data tables show **column** percentages, which means that the percentage quoted is the percentage of the group described at the top of the column in which the figure appears. On some occasions, particularly for data shown over time, summary tables have been prepared which include **row** percentages, which means that the percentage quoted is the percentage of the group described at the left hand side of the row in which the figure appears. Where row percentages are shown, this is highlighted in the table.

From the Q2 2016 report onwards, additional summary tables have been prepared for key questions to show the changes year on year since 2012. This provides a longer term context for the changes being seen in the most recent quarters, upon which most reporting is based.