

14 February 2021

Dear Lord Callanan & Mr Scully,

Re: *Help to Grow: Digital*

We represent hundreds of thousands of members who serve or are themselves small businesses.

Each of our respective organisations support the ambition and objectives of the new *Help to Grow: Digital* scheme recently launched by Government to enhance digital skills and digital technology adoption, both of which are widely recognised as lacking across the UK.

However, we are all concerned that as currently implemented, this scheme is likely to fail to address this digital shortfall in any meaningful way.

As a result, we urge you to consider the following recommendations as a matter of urgency:

- **Reduce the eligibility threshold**
As with the *Help to Grow: Management* scheme, this Digital scheme for small businesses needlessly excludes over 90% of small businesses from participating by only being eligible to those employing 5 or more people. This should be reduced to 1 to broaden eligibility to a much larger pool of talent and to recognise that those who have taken the step of employing their first member of staff are most likely to benefit from digital adoption, most likely to realise productivity gains and are most likely to grow.
- **Widen the range of providers available**
There is a very short list of suppliers for users to choose from. For example, in the accountancy field only three different providers, Sage, Crunch and Intuit, are listed. In comparison, HMRC lists [more than 500 software suppliers](#) as being compatible for its Making Tax Digital programme, including [over 40 Self-Assessment commercial software suppliers](#).
- **Widen the types of software available**
CRM and e-commerce software is currently covered by the scheme but Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), which is inextricably linked with CRM and just as important, is not. Accounting software is also covered but only in its most basic form, planning and forecasting software, vital for improved productivity and growth, is not.
- **Widen the vendor cohort**
Resellers and partner networks are specifically excluded despite their obvious importance and considerable experience in this area. This unnecessarily excludes an army of potential recruiters for the scheme.
- **Broaden the range of costs for which the £5,000 of available funding can cover**
This will not result in any increased costs for the taxpayer as the £5,000 limit will remain in place but it will greatly enhance the effectiveness and participation rates for the scheme. At present only licensing costs are covered, the smallest cost in adopting digital technology, compared to the far greater costs of installation, training and advice/consultation.

Like you, we are keen to see this scheme succeed so that small and medium sized organisations, their customers, and the UK economy, can benefit. However, without prompt Government intervention, this could prove to be yet another missed opportunity and a well-intentioned Government scheme that underdelivers.

We are all ready and willing to help wherever possible and look forward to receiving your comments.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah Beale, Chief Executive



Claire Bennison, Head of ACCA UK



Philip Salter

Phil Salter, Chief Executive, Entrepreneurs Network



Ian Cass

Ian Cass, Managing Director, Forum of Private Business



Dom Hallas

Dom Hallas, Executive Director, Coadec



CC Helen Whately MP, Economic Secretary to the Treasury
HM Treasury, 1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ