

1. Please describe the nature of the organisation you represent and its involvement in smart cities in the UK and overseas.

Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) is the global body for professional accountants. It offers business-relevant, first-choice qualifications to students around the world who seek a rewarding career in accountancy, finance and management. ACCA has 200,000 members and 486,000 students in 181 countries.

ACCA advocates a stronger voice for the accountancy profession on Smart Cities (SC), to complement the views of technology providers. The profession brings skills in budgeting and forecasting, risk management, governance as well as control mechanisms and oversight. In the UK, ACCA's 82,000 members work across central government, local government and commercial organisations – all three of which are critical for sustainable SCs.

2. What are the biggest (a) challenges and (b) opportunities the UK faces in developing the potential of its smart cities sector?

Challenges:

Empowering citizens

Citizens living in a city understand its problems better than anyone else. So the challenge is to increase their role in co-creating (or at least contributing to) solutions, and reducing the risk of UK's SC agenda being dominated by commercial providers.

Up-skilling citizens

The future is digital and empowering citizens is exponentially more useful if they have strong digital skills. While there is a core of tech-savvy citizenry, the challenge is to up-skill a high proportion across all groups, for eg those in rural areas or the older demographic.

Opportunity: coherent, strategic approach

As highlighted in ACCA's submission to APPGSC's 'Top Tips for City Mayors', a smart city is a journey of continuous improvement, not a destination. The UK has an opportunity for a coherent SC journey that's sustainable in the long-term by ensuring initiatives across the country are strategically aligned with common foundational principles and processes. This avoids piece-meal implementation and enables greater RoI¹ for tax payer funds.

3. What three things could national government do to overcome these challenges/seize these opportunities?

a. Empowering citizens

Create forums through which citizens' voice can be heard.

For example Amsterdam's cross-sector platform, Amsterdam Smart City, allows citizens to participate by connecting them to businesses, academics and municipalities so that their ideas can be properly examined.

b. Up-skilling citizens

Commit long-term investment for building digital skills across the country.

For example Singapore has developed the SkillsFuture² and Silver Infocomm Initiative (SII)³ help improve digital readiness amongst the community, including the elderly and less technology-savvy population.

¹ Return on investment

² <http://www.skillsfuture.sg/>

c. Coherent, strategic approach

Create and periodically refresh integrated national strategy with intra and inter country connectedness

For example a smart traffic management system with centrally controlled sensors may help with localised peak-time congestion, but lack of reliable high-speed internet might be stopping working-from-home. A recent global study⁴ of broadband speeds placed Singapore at the top, with the UK at 31st. Has the underlying problem been fully articulated with a strategic assessment to compare (localised) support for bespoke traffic solutions versus improvements through (centralised) policy support for core infrastructure?

Consider connections among smart cities across the world say Singapore, London, Shanghai, Sydney, Kuala Lumpur etc. This will facilitate trade, technology and talent flows among these cities that would have very similar needs and aspirations – thus co-developing these cities.

ACCA with its global and pan UK network strongly supports any initiatives for greater connectivity.

4. As many powers relating to smart cities are devolved to local and combined authorities, how can national government best support devolved decision making in this area?

Local authorities are understandably delivery and near-term cost focused. National government is better placed to examine long-term value, synergies between authorities solving the same problem and articulating a shared policy approach. An integrated national strategy allows comparability of SCs under different authorities, informs the understanding of successes to be propagated and failures to be learnt from.

5. Do you see the Government's primary responsibility for smart cities as enhancing the development of smart cities domestically or promoting the export of our smart city expertise around the world – or both?

Both. Domestic via integrated strategy (per above). International because the UK is respected for innovation and best-practice in governance and public service delivery. ACCA's report on SCs in India⁵, for example, revealed appetite to hear about latest thinking in the UK.

³ <https://www.imda.gov.sg/community/consumer-education/digital-inclusion/silver-infocomm-initiative>

⁴ Cable.co.uk, 08/08/2017

⁵ http://www.accaglobal.com/content/dam/ACCA_Global/Technical/Future/pi-smarter-cities-simpler-cities.pdf