



# Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy

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Meg Hillier MP  
Chair of the Public Accounts Committee

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## **ACCOUNTING OFFICER ASSESSMENT OF THE FULL BUSINESS CASE FOR HELP TO GROW DIGITAL PROGRAMME**

### **Introduction**

It is normal practice for Accounting Officers to scrutinise significant policy proposals or plans to start or vary major projects, and then assess whether they measure up to the standards set out in Managing Public Money. From April 2017, the government has committed to make a summary of the key points from these assessments available to Parliament when an accounting officer has agreed an assessment of projects within the Government's Major Projects Portfolio. This Accounting Officer Assessment considers the Help to Grow Digital Programme.

### **Background**

Help to Grow: Digital is a new UK-wide Small Medium Enterprise (SME) digital adoption Programme to boost firm-level productivity at a total estimated whole life cost of £296m over three years from December 2021 to November 2024. The UK has a long-standing productivity challenge at firm level. Evidence shows that increasing technology adoption and improving leadership and management skills in our SMEs can help to address this issue and narrow the gap to the UK's international competitors.

This scheme will consist of a new online platform where businesses can access learning and support on software to help them save time and money, and a voucher to purchase software at a discount. Support will be provided through interactive tools and technology-specific guides, and the voucher will provide up to 50% discount on the costs of buying new software, up to a value of £5,000 for the first year. Help to Grow: Digital is expected to help up to 100,000 businesses adopt new digital technologies over three years. Another component of the programme includes trialling approaches to one-to-one advice services.

Help to Grow Management, which is designed to upskill leadership and management capability in SMEs, went live in May 2021 and is a separate project. However, the marketing, communications, and business engagement for the two projects will be undertaken jointly to ensure clear and joined up messaging to business.

This Accounting Officer Assessment was made of the Help to Grow: Digital Programme at Full Business Case stage; the approval of which allowed the programme to appoint the Help to Grow: Digital grant administrator. I have made the assessment as the Accounting Officer for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

## **ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE ACCOUNTING OFFICER STANDARDS**

### **Regularity**

The Help to Grow Digital scheme is within the Department's legal powers under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act (IDA) 1982 with approval granted by the Industrial Development Act Board (IDAB). The motion for spending under section 8 was approved by the House of Commons on 22 September 2021. At full business case stage, the focus has been on compliance with public law and procurement regulations. I have assessed the programme in view of relevant public law and procurement regulation and found it be compliant. The programme is supported by scrutiny from external and BEIS legal advisers to ensure best practice has been applied across the programme development.

### **Propriety**

The Help to Grow Digital Programme has been approved at both Outline and Full Business Case stage by the BEIS Project Investment Committee, the Cabinet Office Commercial Spend Controls and the Treasury Approval Point process. As a result, this has my approval to proceed.

### **Value for Money**

The assessment shows that the scheme is expected to represent good value for money and therefore would be a sound use of public funds. The current delivery model approach requires BEIS to deliver a range of services for a short period of time until the delivery partner takes over service delivery. The impact to value for money is low given the programmes overall high net present value.

### **Feasibility**

The programme has undergone a Gateway 3 and Gateway 4 review in September and November respectively, which has provided confidence in delivery within the programme timescales. The reviews have confirmed the deliverability of the programme and readiness for service. In light of the approvals and recommendations received, I have assessed relevant risks around procurement timescales and found that the correct mitigations are in place to allow for the supplier to deliver against the necessary requirements.

There is a significant risk around meeting the full target number of small and medium businesses that Ministers have asked to be reached (up to 100,000). This is an ambitious target, representing around twenty percent of the target group and whilst there is risk in whether this number is feasible to reach, I do not judge this a sufficient reason not to launch. This is because the overall scheme design is feasible to deliver, the programme will still deliver clear value for money even if the full targets are not met and the scheme scope and eligibility criteria will be kept under review, consciously evolving from the initial go live offering based on evidence, stakeholder views and user feedback.

A Gateway 5 review is planned for April 2022 with a focus on the operational delivery phase of the programme. There will be a series of Infrastructure and Project Authority-led reviews that will take place over the life of the programme to provide ongoing assurance on the programme's ability to deliver the intended benefits and outcomes.

**Conclusion**

As the BEIS Accounting Officer I have considered and approved this assessment of Help to Grow Digital programme. I have prepared this summary to set out the key points which informed my decision. If any of these factors change materially during the lifetime of this project, I undertake to prepare a revised summary, setting out my assessment of them.

This summary will be published on the government's website (GOV.UK). Copies will be deposited in the Libraries of the House and sent to the Comptroller and Auditor General and Treasury Officer of Accounts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sarah Munby". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot at the end.

**Sarah Munby**