

Growth Hubs pilot work evaluation

Final report

Prepared for

HMRC

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Glossary

| Term | Meaning |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Adviser | An individual that works with businesses providing impartial information, advice and brokerage. |
| BEIS | The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy – A government department set up in 2016 as a result of a merger between the Department of Energy and Climate Change and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. |
| CPD | Continuous Professional Development - the process of tracking and documenting the skills, knowledge and experience that you gain both formally and informally as you work, beyond any initial training. It's a record of what you experience, learn and then apply. |
| ERDF | The European Regional Development Fund – aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union by correcting imbalances between its regions |
| Growth Hub | Growth Hubs are local public / private sector partnerships with a principal stakeholder being the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). They join up national and local business support so it is easy for businesses to find the help they need. |
| Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) | In England, local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) are voluntary partnerships between local authorities and businesses set up in 2011 by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to help determine local economic priorities and lead economic growth and job creation within the local area. |
| Microsite | Part of the LEP Network web site (https://www.lepnetwork.net/the-network-of-leps/) specifically for staff at each LEP and / or Growth Hub, which requires log in details to access |
| SFEDI | Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative – an accreditation for business support professionals |
| Strategic Lead | An individual with strategic or managerial responsibility at a Growth Hub. |
| Test and Learn activities | The materials and tools developed by HMRC in collaboration with five Growth Hubs as part of a pilot. |

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1. Executive summary

1.1. Research need

Growth Hubs are local partnerships that join up national and local business support in England to make it easier for businesses to find the help that they need. There are 38 LEP-led, Government governed Hubs.¹ HMRC have been working with five of these Growth Hubs as a pilot, developing test and learn activities for use by Growth Hubs directly and / or the businesses they work with to encourage business growth.

HMRC commissioned Databuild to conduct research to:

- Assess the impact of HMRC's work with the five pilot Growth Hubs.
- Understand how HMRC can support business growth in the future.

Databuild conducted qualitative interviews with 50 individuals across a sample of 30 Growth Hubs, including the five pilot Growth Hubs. Where possible interviews were conducted with a strategic lead and an adviser from each Growth Hub sampled.

1.2. Context

The Growth Hub network is characterized by diversity – Growth Hubs employ different business models involving a range of partner organisations. In some cases, the business model is continuously changing or adapting, mainly in response to funding streams. Coupled with verifying this diversity, the interviews highlighted how Growth Hubs operate and how advisers work. This helps put into context later findings relating to awareness, use and impact of the test and learn activities.

It is worth noting:

- **Tax is not a subject that is frequently raised** between advisers and businesses, both by design and as a result of the support delivery model many Growth Hubs use (facilitated by an up-front diagnostic with businesses which does not include tax). Growth Hub staff are not expected to provide tax advice as they are not qualified to do so. The Growth Hubs' role is to 'signpost' rather than advise businesses.
- **Advisers tend to work in a reactive way**; they often research answers to specific queries raised by businesses rather than conducting background research on various topics. Advisers receive lots of information from many sources; which can mean they rely on tried and tested sources of information.
- **Advisers often have limited time to support each business, due to the type of support they offer.** They also have limited capacity to provide follow up support / communication to a business after an initial intervention. This means it is difficult for advisers to know what impact the support they provide is having.

All respondents had positive views of HMRC support to Growth Hubs and businesses and felt

¹ A core Growth Hub offer, linked to Government funding, applies to all of these Hubs.

that closer working between HMRC and Growth Hubs is needed.

All five Growth Hubs involved in the pilot were very positive about the pilot process. They felt HMRC worked collaboratively with the Growth Hubs and that their views and feedback were always taken into consideration.

Most of the strategic leads from the non-pilot Growth Hub sample were aware of the pilot activity. Many had a basic awareness from a presentation at the national Growth Hub conference in February 2017, but, as expected, many did not know about the test and learn activities in detail.

1.3. Test and learn activities

Overall, feedback on the test and learn activities was positive. While the number of people involved in the activities may have been limited, the Growth Hubs shared information and materials with a wider group by emailing and by sharing within their own "knowledge banks".

There were some examples of direct impact resulting from the test and learn activities, but in the main, impact was difficult to identify due to several reasons:

- It may take time for impacts to be realised, and the Growth Hubs have not had the test and learn activities for long.
- The strategic lead (who had the contact with HMRC through the pilot and distributed the materials) was unaware what, if any, use the advisers had made of the materials.
- The advisers had no way to follow up direct use with businesses post-use.

For the test and learn activities concerned with information provision (packs, checklists and a knowledge paper) strategic leads anticipated that they would be beneficial for advisers either through increasing adviser knowledge or saving them time in some way - although they could not cite examples to date.

Where advisers had an opportunity to interact with HMRC (through the workshop and webinar), this was felt to be an effective and beneficial way to increase their knowledge.

HMRC conducted targeted email campaigns for each of the five pilot Growth Hubs to raise awareness of and signpost businesses to the Growth Hubs. The Growth Hubs were keen for HMRC to do this and worked with HMRC to draft bespoke content for their emails. One of the email campaigns for Greater Manchester resulted in a number of referrals to a scheme promoted in their email. By and large the Growth Hubs were unable to evidence any impact from their test email campaigns. On reflection, they thought the emails could have been too generic, suggesting that they could have had more success if the email was regarding something more specific.

With regards to the provision of localised exports trade data, one Growth Hub had used the data in a number of ways with positive results (see Case Study 4 in Appendix A). However,

other pilot Growth Hubs have struggled to use the data, either because they believed the data did not correspond to their geographical coverage or because they felt it was too high level.

1.4. Future support

Respondents were provided with the following summary of the support that HMRC could offer to Growth Hubs and businesses in the future;

- Identifying and co-creating materials with Growth Hubs for use by them and other business support providers.
- Webinars for advisers to develop their knowledge.
- An online forum for businesses and advisers.
- Sharing and providing localised data, firstly on exports but with the potential to extend.

All respondents were generally happy with the package of support that HMRC could offer and felt it would meet their needs. The overall feeling was that any support HMRC can provide would be welcomed. The two most common areas cited by respondents with regards to what HMRC should prioritise relate to using HMRC data to:

- Help Growth Hubs identify scale up businesses.
- Send targeted emails to businesses to raise awareness of Growth Hub support.

Growth Hubs would also value having a named contact at HMRC to liaise with and / or have HMRC presence at some of their adviser meetings to provide regular updates.

Where specific methods of communication / information sharing were explored with respondents, they highlighted that:

- Growth Hub staff, and strategic leads in particular, would value regular communications from HMRC to keep them up to date with the support that HMRC offers and updates on changes to tax regulations so that they can keep businesses informed². They understood that email contact would be the most efficient way for HMRC to communicate with Growth Hubs, but many respondents commented that they would value some personal contact with HMRC.
- All respondents said that they would find webinars for advisers useful to a certain extent, but they would need to be concise and promoted well in advance to enable advisers to attend. Roughly half of respondents thought it could be valuable to link webinars to an adviser's Continuous Professional Development (CPD).
- Few respondents thought there would be value in developing an adviser peer to peer network, mainly due to the pressure on advisers' time. As a result, whilst some respondents

² Either through individual meetings that advisers have with businesses or through Growth Hub communications to businesses e.g. e-newsletters

thought the online forum was a good idea, many raised reservations and concerns.

1.5. Working with HMRC in the future

The majority of respondents said that they would be interested and willing to work with HMRC on future activities. Time is the main challenge for Growth Hub staff getting involved as their resources are limited. Respondents emphasised the need for sufficient amounts of time to respond and provide feedback and sufficient notice to attend meetings.

The majority of respondents stated that they would prefer to receive materials from HMRC via email, rather than have to remember to log in to a separate site.

2. Introduction

2.1. Background

Growth Hubs are local partnerships that join up national and local business support to make it easier for businesses to find the help that they need. There are currently 38 Growth Hubs in England. Growth Hubs typically provide businesses with information after a diagnostic to identify opportunities and barriers to growth. HMRC are keen to support Growth Hubs in encouraging business growth. HMRC worked with five Growth Hubs as a pilot, developing test and learn activities for use by Growth Hubs directly and / or the businesses they work with to encourage business growth.

HMRC commissioned Databuild to conduct research to:

- Assess the impact of HMRC's work with the five pilot Growth Hubs
- Understand how HMRC can support business growth in the future.

2.2. Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to outline the findings from the interviews conducted. As part of the report, five case studies have been developed to illustrate successes and challenges from the pilot work. These can be found in Appendix A, and are referenced in the main body of the report text where relevant.

2.3. Research overview

The research conducted was qualitative in nature and all interviews were conducted by telephone. The research consisted of two phases:

- Interviews with the five Growth Hubs involved in the pilot with HMRC
- Interviews with a sample of the other Growth Hubs (referred to in this report as non-pilot Growth Hubs).

Fieldwork was conducted between 26th January 2017 and 24th March 2017 in accordance with the MRS Code of Conduct and in line with ISO 20252 (the international quality standard for social and market research). Interviews varied in length between 35 and 90 minutes, dependent on the availability of the respondent.

2.4. Sample

The intention was to conduct 48 interviews in total, including interviews with someone with a strategic perspective and someone with an adviser's perspective from each Growth Hub

sampled. As fieldwork and recruitment of interviews commenced, it was found that:

- There is often an overlap in roles and responsibilities amongst Growth Hub staff. This means that respondents did not always fit neatly into the strategic lead or business adviser group, and were sometimes able to cover both perspectives.
- It wasn't always possible to secure an interview with an 'adviser' either because:
 - The Growth Hub did not have advisers as part of their delivery model
 - Advisers did not have time to participate.

The table below summarises the number of Growth Hubs engaged in this research and the number of individuals interviewed:

Table 1: Number of Growth Hubs and individuals engaged in the research

| | Number of Growth Hubs engaged | Number of 'strategic lead' respondents interviewed | Number of 'adviser' respondents interviewed | Total number of individuals interviewed |
|----------------|-------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Pilot Hubs | 5 | 9 | 1 | 10 |
| Non-pilot Hubs | 25 | 26 | 14 | 40 |
| Total | 30 | 35 | 15 | 50 |

HMRC provided Databuild with a database of strategic lead contacts for each of the Growth Hubs. Databuild recruited the strategic lead interviews by phone and / or email. Strategic lead respondents were asked to provide contact details for one or more of their advisers, where relevant, for Databuild to contact to schedule an interview.

2.5. Challenges experienced during recruitment of interviews

Challenges were experienced when securing interviews with some of the pilot Growth Hubs as the contacts explained that their Growth Hubs were, at the time, experiencing capacity issues (short staffed and busy staff) and were also very focused on funding / reporting activity at the time of the fieldwork. This meant it wasn't possible to speak to an adviser in each of the pilot Growth Hubs, but efforts were made to gain an adviser perspective from the other contacts interviewed at the Growth Hub.

2.6. Considerations for the reader

- The research undertaken was qualitative; the intention was to understand, in depth, the impact of the pilot work on the Growth Hubs involved and views of Growth Hubs about future HMRC support activity. It is important to note that the intention was not to quantitatively assess the impact of the pilot work.

- Databuild received a very positive response from the recruitment emails sent out to non-pilot Growth Hubs, with many contacts swiftly responding to arrange a time for an interview. As such, it is possible that the Growth Hubs interviewed as part of the research are those that are most keen to share their views, most interested in working with HMRC in the future or those in most need.
- Many of the Growth Hub respondents explained that they had competing pressures on their time, and therefore had limited time to spend being interviewed as part of this research. Where respondent time was an issue, attention was focused on awareness, use and impact of materials and were of less-depth than others.
- Respondents often talked about the changing business and political landscape in which they work, and therefore the development of their Growth Hub and the services they provide are often changing. This research provides a snapshot of the views and opinions of Growth Hub respondent needs at a particular time.

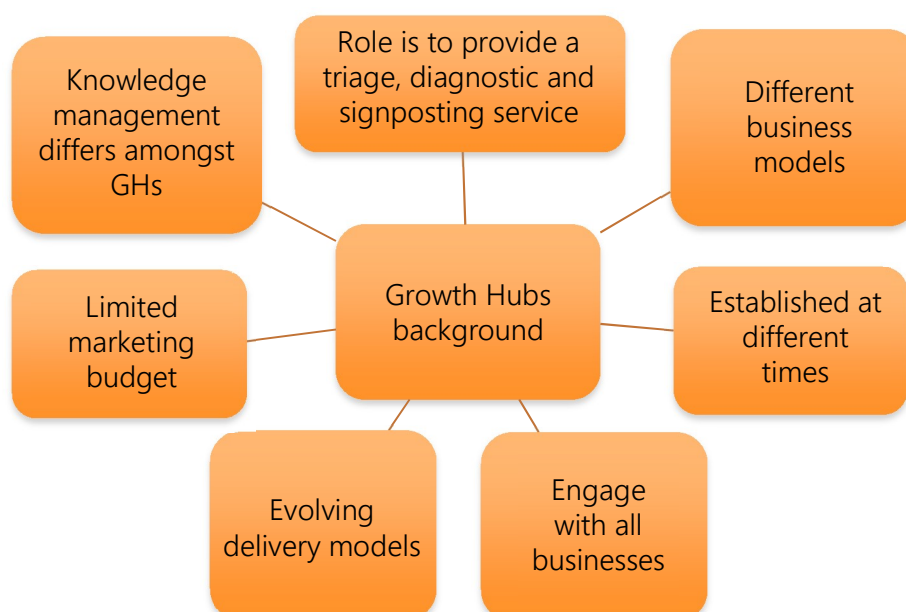
3. Growth Hub operation

This section provides background information relating to the role of Growth Hubs and draws on responses from all the interviews in relation to how Growth Hubs operate and how individual Growth Hub advisers work. The purpose of this section is to put into context later findings relating to awareness, use and impact of the test and learn activities.

3.1. Background

Figure 1 below summarises the main points that are useful to note to put later findings into context. Each point is then outlined in the sections below.

Figure 1 Background to Growth Hubs



3.1.1. Role of Growth Hubs

Respondents described their Growth Hub in many different ways, including phrases such as; *“we’re the first port of call for businesses”*, *“we provide a triage service”* and *“we provide a hub and spoke service”*. However, all Growth Hubs appeared to have a similar role: to identify business issues and opportunities for growth and signpost the business to appropriate sources of support.

Most respondents placed a significant emphasis on their role as ‘sign-posters’ rather than ‘advisers’. This is the role envisaged by Government when the Growth Hub network was established and affects how Growth Hub staff can support a business. In particular, respondents were very conscious that they are not able to provide businesses with advice relating to finance or tax as they are not qualified to do so. Instead, their role is to broker support to other organisations that can provide that advice. Growth Hubs must also remain impartial; not be

seen to recommend a particular private organisation when referrals are made.

3.1.2. Business models employed

Whilst it wasn't part of the remit of the research to discuss the business models employed by Growth Hubs in great depth, it is clear from respondent comments that each Growth Hub has a different business model. The Growth Hubs have developed in ways that meet local economic priorities (as set out in Strategic Economic Plans), and work with their geographies and existing local partnerships, rather than following a prescribed model.

Growth Hubs typically operated in strategic partnership with various organisations such as local authorities, Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Business, universities, business schools and the wider public and private sectors. The various organisations / partners had a different role / level of involvement in each Growth Hub, which affects who delivers the Growth Hub service, how it is delivered and where the Growth Hub is based. In some cases, a Growth Hub's business model was continuously evolving or adapting.

The involvement and role of various organisations / partners can affect how Growth Hubs operate. For example, some Growth Hub staff were located in the same building as other partners and this can facilitate closer working, which can result in the sharing of knowledge, resources and suggestions of best practice, as well as more easily facilitate signposting. As an example, one respondent talked about sharing the same office as colleagues from the Department of International Trade, and as a result this has facilitated the sharing of some business data.

3.1.3. Length of time Growth Hubs have been established for

Some Growth Hubs are more established than others. This affected:

- The extent to which the Growth Hub has developed its own materials and tools to support advisers and businesses; typically the longer the Growth Hub had been established for the more materials they already have in place to support businesses.
- The amount of time advisers have been in post, and therefore how much training they have undertaken and how familiar they are with the wide range of support available to businesses.

3.1.4. Types of businesses they engage with

When first asked, respondents typically stated that they provide support to all businesses within their local area. This usually means that the Growth Hub responds to a query from any business regardless of size, sector and life-stage.

The majority of respondents went on to explain that they are able to provide enhanced levels

of support to certain types of businesses, often dependent on funding³ accessed by the Growth Hub, such as:

- Scale-up businesses⁴, which is being driven by BEIS.
- Businesses in LEP priority sectors.

3.1.5. Delivery models

The majority of Growth Hubs that engaged in this research provided their service using a combination of online (web site and email enquiries), the national Business Support helpline and some face to face support. Whilst the online and telephone support appeared to be openly accessible to any business, the face to face support was often targeted at certain types of businesses e.g. priority sectors or scale-up businesses. In some cases, the Hubs ran events or

Extract from Case Study 1: Changing delivery models (North East)

The North East Growth Hub has been established for one year and is delivered by the Local Enterprise Partnership.

At the outset, the Growth Hub intended to focus on a digital delivery model; the aim was to stimulate demand for business support and to generate leads for business support providers. The Growth Hub had a limited budget and were looking to develop a service that was sustainable over the long term and leveraged the resource and expertise that already existed within the business growth ecosystem.

However, they are now also in the process of developing an intensive account management service which includes ongoing face to face meetings and telephone support for businesses with high growth potential. The reason for this change is twofold. First, it has been driven by a refresh in the strategic economic plan for the LEP, to focus on areas of the economy that can deliver the greatest productivity gains as well as direction given by BEIS to all Growth Hubs. Second, this change has been informed by challenges experienced by businesses and their need for support across multiple channels:

"Business owners are busy running their business. If they are planning to grow the business, then they need to make that transition of working 'on' the business rather than 'in' the business... The key challenge is leadership capability."

³ Funding streams include the European Regional Development Fund which aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union by correcting imbalances between its regions.

⁴ This term relates to the OECD definition that refers to businesses which meet or have the potential to meet certain turnover and employment thresholds

workshops to provide face to face support on a one to many basis. The changing nature of Growth Hub delivery models is illustrated in the case study extract below:

3.1.6. How Growth Hubs promote their service

All respondents talked about having a limited marketing budget to promote their Growth Hub service locally. As such, the main marketing methods employed by Growth Hubs tended to be low-cost, such as:

- Attendance at events.
- Networking meetings / clubs.
- Social media.
- Sending e-newsletters to businesses on their mailing list.

3.1.7. Storing and updating resources for advisers and businesses

Growth Hubs used a range of different ways to store information and resources for their advisers and businesses. Examples of storage include:

- The Growth Hub website which can be accessed by advisers and businesses alike.
- An internal digital platform, often called a 'Knowledge Bank'⁵. This was often linked to a CRM⁶ system which advisers / other Growth Hub staff can access.
- Advisers' own files to store digital materials and a portfolio of hard copy materials.
- Some used a combination of the above.

Storing and updating resources was conducted by a range of different staff within Growth Hubs, including a marketing / communications department, the Growth Hub manager or operations manager and the adviser team. It was often unclear whose responsibility it is to review, test, store and update materials.

3.2. How tax fits in with the Growth Hub remit

3.2.1. How Growth Hubs engage with businesses about tax

Growth Hubs typically engaged with a business in one of two ways, through:

- Addressing a specific query - the Growth Hub tries to answer a specific query raised by a business by providing information and signposting to other organisations that could help.

⁵ There is also a national Knowledge Bank, managed by the Business Support Helpline, that Hubs are able to use for storage

⁶ Customer Relationship Management

- An adviser using a diagnostic tool to identify issues and opportunities for growth across the entirety of a business' operations. Information and brokerage would then follow depending on the needs of the business identified by the adviser.

Respondents explained that tax is not a subject that is frequently raised between businesses and Growth Hubs in either scenario, mainly due to:

- Tax not being included in diagnostic tools used by advisers, and this tool tends to be the focus of dialogue in a meeting between an adviser and a business.
- The perception that they should not talk about tax as part of their 'signposting' remit.
- A lack of understanding of how tax can affect business growth, and lack of confidence to talk about it as they see it as a complex subject, so they therefore choose to focus on other areas of the business.
- A perception that businesses talk about tax issues with their accountant.

"I haven't particularly asked how businesses find tax, there is perhaps a gap as there are no specific questions / prompts on the diagnostic about tax."

When respondents were asked about advisers' confidence in dealing with tax queries, both strategic leads and advisers explained that advisers were confident in signposting to third-party sources such as HMRC or an accountant (i.e. they do not deal with these queries with businesses directly).

"I'm not a financial adviser, if talking in any depth about tax I try to avoid the situation. I would either signpost to gov.uk, HMRC or suggest they contact their accountant."

3.2.2. Awareness and use of HMRC support for businesses

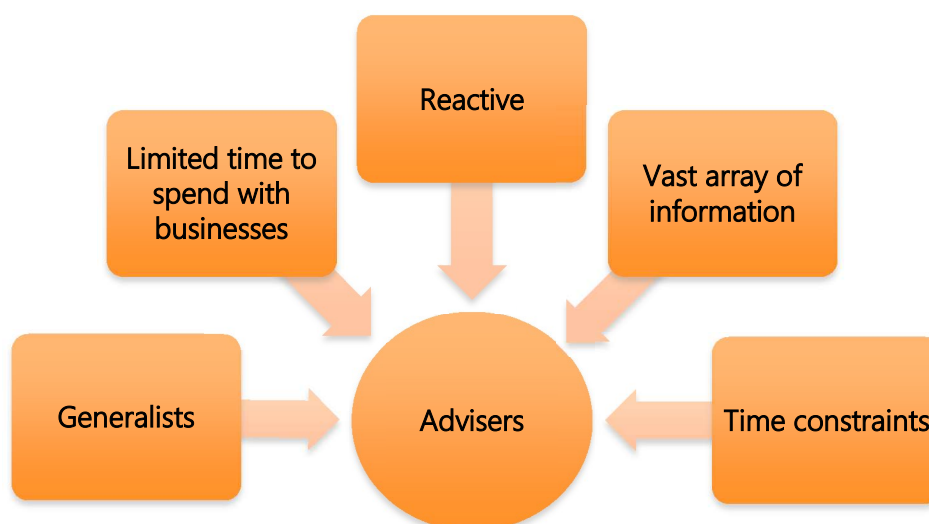
The extent to which respondents were aware of HMRC support for businesses varied. All respondents were aware of the HMRC website and the HMRC telephone helpline, and a few respondents were aware of the webinars for businesses. Awareness of the support available from HMRC is greater where the Growth Hub has had personal contact with someone from HMRC, which is the case for a small number of respondents. For example:

- The five pilot Growth hubs became more aware of HMRC support through their involvement.
- A couple of non-pilot Growth Hubs had a contact at HMRC, and used this as an opportunity to keep updated with the HMRC offering.
- A couple of non-pilot Growth Hubs mentioned HMRC attending the national Growth Hub Network conferences and found that a useful way of increasing their awareness and knowledge of HMRC support.

3.3. How individual advisers work

Figure 2 overleaf summarises the key findings relating to how individual advisers work, followed by a brief narrative of each point.

Figure 2: How individual advisers work



Most advisers are generalists

The role of an adviser in each Growth Hub can be quite different, depending on the delivery model. Where Growth Hubs used advisers, most advisers provided one to one, face to face support to businesses, although some only provided support via the telephone. The majority of advisers were described by respondents as 'generalists' and often commented that they needed to know *"a little about a lot."* This means that they need to know the basics of all areas of business operations, such as finance, marketing, operations, human resources etc. In a couple of cases, the Growth Hub employed advisers that specialised in a certain field, e.g. finance, and therefore their role was to provide more targeted advice and support to businesses in their area of specialism.

Limited time to spend with businesses

For the majority of Growth Hubs, advisers usually have a pre-defined or limited time to support each business, typically two to three hours per business.

Reactive working

As a result of having to know a "little about a lot" and having limited time to spend with businesses, advisers work in a reactive way; they often research answers to specific queries raised by businesses rather than conducting background research on various topics.

Vast array of information

Respondents talked about having to deal with information from lots of different sources, all relevant to how they do their job but which can be overwhelming and difficult to juggle. In some cases advisers tended to rely on tried and tested sources of information. Some respondents commented that advisers need to see new support materials / tools several times before they can recall and use them regularly. Growth Hub managers circulated materials to advisers for them to read and use. However, advisers sometimes feel they do not have sufficient time to read all the information sent to them.

Follow up options are limited

Time constraints mean advisers have limited options to provide follow up support / communication to a business after an initial intervention. This means in general it was difficult for advisers to know what impact the support they provide has had. However, Gloucester were able to conduct some follow up activity to the pilot work with businesses, and provided feedback from businesses about the impact of support relating to Research and Development information provision, as illustrated in Case Study 2 in Appendix A.

3.3.1. Level of experience

Advisers within Growth Hubs had varying levels of expertise and experience and this affects how they operate. For example, those that have been in the role for a long time may have built up a wealth of information and resources to share with businesses. Some reported therefore that they tend to use materials and tools that they have tried and tested previously, especially given the constraints on their time.

3.3.2. Continuous Professional Development and training

Some advisers already have or are currently undertaking a qualification in business support provision, typically SFEDI⁷. Some Growth Hubs do not currently have plans for advisers to undertake a business support qualification. In a couple of these cases, respondents had not heard of SFEDI.

Where awareness and use of SFEDI was relatively high, respondents were largely unclear on the CPD requirements of the qualification and many assumed that there were not any ongoing

⁷ Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative – an accreditation for business support professionals to demonstrate skills such as listening to businesses' needs, diagnosing issues and providing support.

CPD requirements⁸. The majority of respondents emphasised that the adviser’s focus was on undertaking interventions with businesses, rather than on CPD activity.

3.4. Challenges to business growth

3.4.1. Challenges experienced by Growth Hubs in encouraging business growth

Respondents raised the following internal and external challenges experienced by Growth Hubs in encouraging business growth:

| Internal | External |
|--|--|
| Managing the Growth Hub with little knowledge of funding in the future. | Developing a Growth Hub service to meet the needs of businesses who are time poor. |
| Explaining to a business what the Growth Hub does. | Raising aspirations amongst businesses, e.g. lifestyle businesses ⁹ where the business owners are not interested in growth. |
| Identifying scale up businesses in response to the requirements of BEIS. | |

3.4.2. Challenges experienced by businesses trying to grow

Respondents were aware that businesses in their regions faced challenges in trying to grow. The main challenges suggested by respondents were:

- Access to finance.
- Understanding new customers / markets.
- The time for business owners to set aside to focus on growing a business, as opposed to managing the day to day operations of the business.
- A lack of skills in the region which makes recruitment difficult.
- A lack of premises for businesses wanting to expand.
- A lack of leadership/ management skills.

Respondents did not mention tax as a barrier for businesses trying to grow. This may be

⁸ The SFEDI web site suggests that business support professionals should undertake Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activity and record it at least once a year. Examples of CPD activity could include shadowing other delivery staff or attending conferences or training.

⁹ A business that is geared towards supporting the owner’s income and personal requirements rather than maximising revenue.

because tax tends not to be a significant topic of conversation between advisers and businesses, as previously cited.

4. Pilot activity

This section focuses on the pilot work; it draws on responses from the five pilot Growth Hubs (Greater Manchester, Coventry and Warwickshire, GFirst LEP (Gloucestershire), Swindon and Wiltshire and SE LEP (South East LEP)) to outline why they wanted to get involved in the pilot and their views on the process and their involvement. It also draws on responses from the non-pilot Growth Hubs regarding their awareness of the pilot activity, and the views of all Growth Hubs about HMRC getting involved in supporting Growth Hubs and businesses.

4.1. Motivations for getting involved in pilot activity

Two of the five pilot Growth Hubs said that they volunteered to get involved in the pilot work activities:

- One respondent explained that they were keen to get involved as they are always looking for new materials to help businesses.
- The strategic lead from Manchester Growth Hub said that they got involved in the pilot as they had already been working with HMRC on an innovation programme; it made sense due to the existing relationship (see Case Study 5 in Appendix A).

Two Growth Hubs felt they were picked by HMRC¹⁰ but were not sure why and the final Growth Hub could not recall how they became involved in the pilot. Respondents said that they did not have any expectations about what the pilot would involve / achieve, but had wanted to be proactive and help in any way that they could.

4.2. Views on the pilot process

In general, all five Growth Hubs were very positive about the pilot process and described HMRC as thorough and professional. Respondents felt that HMRC worked collaboratively with the Growth Hubs and that their views and feedback were always taken into consideration. Comments from respondents also suggest the pilot work has helped Growth Hub staff to see HMRC as more proactive and willing to support businesses than some staff had previously thought.

"In the past, I have described HMRC as not about individuals, a huge faceless organisation who are not willing to engage or not wanting to be pro-active to help. However, since working with HMRC through this pilot I've learned that HMRC do genuinely want to assist businesses. There is a real willingness to engage with LEPs and Growth Hubs."

¹⁰ BEIS worked with HMRC to identify potential Growth Hubs for the pilot

One respondent felt that the pilot process was quite lengthy and time consuming due to the thorough processes that HMRC went through, and felt there was an opportunity to conduct the work with fewer or shorter, more-focused meetings / discussions. Another respondent felt that there were a lot of test and learn activities to review and respond to, which was challenging to manage with a limited resource.

“My only criticism is that the process could have been quicker, for example some of the teleconferences were a bit long winded, and after some I was left wondering why we had that conversation.”

4.3. Awareness of pilot activity amongst non-pilot Growth Hubs

Most of the non-pilot Growth Hub strategic lead respondents were aware of the pilot activity. Most had become aware of the pilot through a presentation at the national Growth Hub Network conference in February 2017¹¹. These respondents felt that they had a basic understanding of the pilot but did not know about the test and learn activities in detail. A couple of respondents mentioned that they have an existing relationship with HMRC and had been made aware of the pilot through ongoing communications. In these cases, respondents had a better understanding of what the pilot involved and what was developed as a result.

A small number of advisers from the non-pilot Growth Hub sample were aware of the pilot activity either because HMRC visited their Growth Hub to provide an update on HMRC support or through internal conversations at the Growth Hub.

4.4. Views on HMRC supporting Growth Hubs and businesses

All respondents had positive views of HMRC support to Growth Hubs and businesses. Respondents felt that closer working between HMRC and Growth Hubs would be beneficial for several reasons as outlined in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: How closer working between HMRC and Growth Hubs could be beneficial

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Improving support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth Hubs are continually looking for the best ways to support businesses |
| Perception | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the perception that some businesses have of HMRC, helping it to be seen as a supportive organisation rather than focusing on the collection of tax and associated deadlines |
| National to regional | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important for national messages to be translated at a local level, and the Growth Hubs are in a good position to do this |
| Raise awareness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth Hubs need help in raising awareness of what they do |

¹¹ Which was held part way through the fieldwork for this study

5. Test and learn activities

This section outlines the awareness, use and impact of each of the test and learn activities developed during the pilot work.

5.1. Information provision

As part of the pilot work HMRC developed lifestage packs, checklists and a paper about choosing agents, these activities are summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Information provision activities developed during the pilot

| Lifestage packs | Checklists | Agents paper |
|---|--|--|
| Three information packs for businesses at different stages of their lives. They focused on starting, growing and sustaining a business. Each pack provided a range of relevant links to digital support such as guidance on GOV.uk, webinars and YouTube videos. The packs were developed in conjunction with the pilot hubs, and were shared with all Growth Hubs using the microsite ¹² in September 2016. | Checklists which pilot hubs reviewed and provided feedback on. Once finalised these were shared with all Growth Hubs on the microsite. The checklists covered the following topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Allowance • R&D - Incentives & reliefs • Time to pay arrangements | HMRC led a phone call with four Growth Hubs involved in the pilot to discuss the issue of helping businesses choose a good agent, and to promote and get feedback on a paper HMRC produced on the same topic ¹³ . Interviews were conducted with three out of the four individuals who joined the phone call. |

In addition to the five pilot Growth Hubs, a few non-pilot Hubs were aware of the lifestage packs and checklists either through the national Growth Hub conference and / or through the packs being emailed to them directly. None of the respondents had come across the packs which HMRC had uploaded to the microsite to share with Growth Hubs more widely. Only one

¹² The microsite is part of the LEP national web site whereby allocated members of staff from each LEP have log in details to access it.

¹³ Shared with the pilot Growth Hubs, but not more widely

pilot Growth Hub could recall the agent paper well enough to provide feedback.

5.1.1. Feedback

All respondents, whether aware of the materials or not, felt they were a good idea.

"Checklists are useful for advisers as they find them easy to use and they give the advisers confidence. We try and produce checklist style materials for advisers - so they have the right prompts to get the right information."

A couple of respondents mentioned that the lifestage packs were quite lengthy and would benefit from being more concise.

"We can have a conversation with the client which covers a dozen or more subjects of which this may or may not be one. We have to be relatively efficient in the information that we have to hand. [The packs] need to be condensed and as straightforward as possible."

Some Growth Hubs had slight reservations about the checklists, which concerned:

- Advisers needing **training** around each of the checklist topics in order to feel confident in using them.

"If we did a little bit more work with the advisers, so they are more familiar with them – might be able to use them more."

- Advisers still **needing to refer businesses** to a tax expert to answer specific queries.

"I feel that some of the topics covered in the checklists are what businesses would normally talk to accountants about, rather than an impartial business adviser."

The adviser's role is to be impartial, so they are reluctant to / do not recommend tax agents to businesses. Most Growth Hubs commented that they are not able to quality assure businesses in the private sector, so cannot make suitable referrals. Respondents suggested Growth Hubs could benefit from having guidance on choosing a tax agent to send to businesses, but in order for advisers to be comfortable using the guidance it should be HMRC branded. This would assure the adviser that the advice provided is from an official, professional source and that using it meets with their needs to be impartial.

5.1.2. Use and impact

The information provision activities have been used in the following ways:

- Circulated to advisers by strategic leads via email or storing in an internal knowledge bank.
- Uploaded to their website for businesses to access directly.

Strategic leads felt these test and learn activities would increase adviser knowledge and save advisers and businesses time by providing all the relevant links for their stage of business in

one place.

None of the respondents from pilot or non-pilot hubs could share examples of the materials being used yet, and therefore it was difficult to evidence the impact on advisers or on businesses.

5.2. Raising awareness and sharing knowledge

HMRC ran a series of workshops and a webinar which focused on Research and Development (R&D) tax credits and incentives, aimed at advisers.

5.2.1. Feedback

Respondents really valued the face to face contact with an HMRC expert during the workshop and live interaction with the HMRC expert during the webinar, and felt this helped the advisers to understand the subject. They also valued the opportunity to ask questions and get answers from HMRC.

"Workshops are a good way of sharing information rather than conference calls or webinars. Face to face interaction is invaluable – the presenter can see if the audience is bored or struggling."

Respondents also felt the benefit of webinars was not having to travel.

"The topic was clearly explained and the webinar shows you what to do; you are informed without having to leave your desk. It's a really big thing for people like me who are busy and do not always get a chance to go to training where you have to travel – it's an efficient way of sharing knowledge."

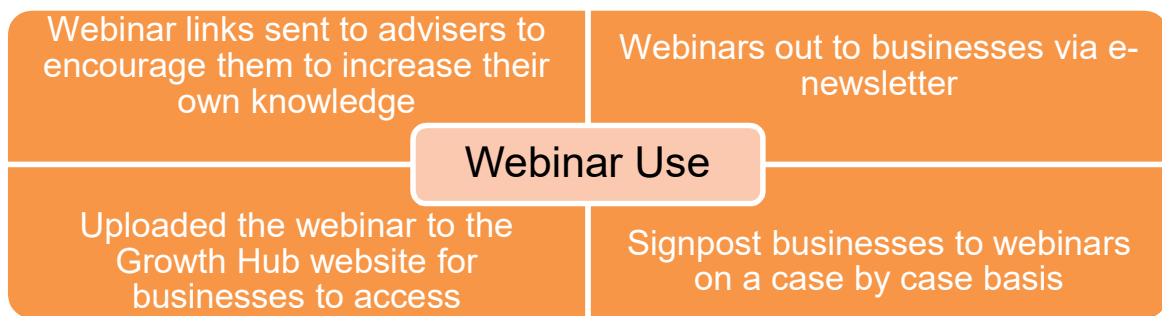
In terms of improvements, respondents felt that R&D was quite a dry subject and that the session would have benefited from being more targeted and interactive.

5.2.2. Use and impact

Respondents felt that the purpose of the workshop and webinar was to up-skill advisers so they were more confident in proactively talking to businesses about R&D tax credit and could perform more efficiently by asking businesses the right questions.

The webinar is being used in multiple ways, examples of use are shown in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Ways in which the webinar has been used



Whilst respondents felt that the webinar was a useful way to upskill advisers, many were unable to provide evidence to determine a resulting impact. However one Growth Hub has used the information from the workshop with businesses and as a result have saved businesses substantial sums of money, as outlined in the case study extract below.

Extract from Case Study 2: Value of R&D workshop (Gloucestershire)

The Growth Hub for Gloucestershire (<http://www.thegrowthhub.biz>) was established in October 2014 and is a partnership between the University of Gloucestershire and GFirst LEP.

The Growth Hub hosted a workshop on behalf of HMRC to upskill advisers on R&D tax credits and incentives, attracting 25 personnel from a number of Growth Hubs. The Growth Hub found the workshop beneficial for several reasons:

- It enabled staff from other Growth Hubs in the pilot activity to understand how Gloucester operates, particularly those that do not have a physical presence:
"I ran a tour of our facility as some Growth Hubs are not physical spaces like ours. People went away thinking we should be doing something like this in our patch."
- It helped to change the perception of HMRC through providing face to face contact with HMRC experts and increased the confidence of advisers to refer businesses to HMRC.
- Upskilling advisers to proactively talk to businesses about R&D tax credits. Businesses had provided feedback to advisers to suggest they had saved substantial sums of money:
"Clients aren't always aware that they should be claiming this back. As a result [of the information from the workshop], clients have managed to claim back thousands and thousands of pounds [in R&D tax credits]."
- Sharing of best practice between advisers about how to perform as an adviser and how to provide advice relating to R&D tax credits.

5.3. Outbound emails

During the pilot, HMRC trialled the ability to target emails to a Growth Hub's postcode area – to raise awareness of support and information for businesses, and to encourage businesses to take up local business support. HMRC worked with each Growth Hub to draft the messages to be included within the emails.

All five pilot Growth Hubs said they had been keen to engage in this activity. In terms of impact:

- One Growth Hub thought the percentage of opened emails was higher than for email campaigns they had run themselves but was unable to evidence any further impact, such as an increase in businesses engaging with their Growth Hub.

"The outbound email campaign was very successful in so much that the number of emails opened up was much higher than we would ordinarily have. Having HMRC in the subject line had the desired effect. What did not have the desired effect was reading the content from HMRC – there wasn't many click-throughs (as low as 3%). The content of the email would need a stronger call to action to get the person reading it to do something and click through."

- One Growth Hub (Manchester) received a few referrals following one of the email campaigns that HMRC trialled, as outlined in the extract from Case Study 3 below:

Extract from Case Study 3: Value of targeted emails (Manchester)

The Growth Hub worked with HMRC to send two rounds of targeted emails. The first outbound campaign was in 2015, focusing on general awareness raising amongst 22,000 businesses.

"It was a useful exercise in enabling us to raise awareness of the Growth Hub and we worked closely with HMRC to craft the messaging around our offer and theirs."

The second campaign, in autumn 2016, focused on international trade and exports.

Whilst they were not able to determine the impact from the first campaign, they did receive a few referrals following the international trade campaign.

The Growth Hub discussed with HMRC how joint working could be used to better target companies who would benefit from Growth Hub services, particularly Innovation.

"We identified that HMRC has a wealth of data that could be used to target and engage companies such as those accessing R&D tax credits, or those demonstrating certain levels of growth or working in certain sectors. This would help us reach out to these companies through HMRC with support to help their growth ambitions in a more joined up and efficient way."

The other three pilot Growth Hubs were unable to evidence any impact from their email campaigns sent by HMRC. Learning from this, respondents suggested that in future the emails could have more success if the email was less generic and about something more specific, e.g. the promotion of a specific event or support programme, as this would have a stronger call to action.

"I was really hopeful of the emails that HMRC were sending out to businesses in our region as we were hoping they would generate lots of new leads for us, but this was not the case. I am not aware of anyone who contacted us because of an HMRC email. I think the main reason for this is that we weren't promoting anything in particular in the email like a grant or an event."

Whilst respondents were disappointed that they were not able to evidence a more positive impact from the pilot email campaigns, they would be keen to engage in further email campaigns with HMRC, learning from this to trial targeting different audiences and different messages.

5.4. Trade statistics and local exports data

All five pilot Growth Hubs were made aware of export data (available through <https://www.uktradeinfo.com/Pages/Home.aspx>), during conversations with HMRC. HMRC provided a localised report of available exports data for each of the pilot Growth Hubs.

5.4.1. Use and impact of localised reports

One Growth Hub has used the data internally and to help businesses as outlined in the extract from case study 4 on the following page.

However, the other four pilot Growth Hubs reported difficulties in using the data. For some, this was because the respondents believed the postcodes used for their region were inaccurate, and therefore felt that the data did not provide them with an accurate picture. Other respondents felt the data was too high level.

"The data provided us with export spend and the key countries involved. Although they are handy statistics to have, we can't do much with it - perhaps the only way we can use it is as a lever with the LEP, for example we trade £2 million with Germany and this could cause an issue if we leave the EU. However, we don't know whether £2 million is good or bad. Really we need some advice for how we can use that information. As such we haven't done anything with it."

It should also be noted that as the data could potentially be used for different purposes, it may fall under different job role responsibilities within Growth Hubs, and therefore it may be necessary to engage with multiple individuals within each Growth Hub for the data to be used to best effect.

Extract from Case Study 4: Value of trade statistics (Gloucestershire)

The most valuable part of the pilot work was felt to be access to local trade statistics.

Gloucestershire had tried to access similar data in the past but were not able to. They felt that there was an added benefit of getting the data from HMRC as they perceive it to be a reputable source, and gave them greater confidence in the data.

"To get the data from a source you know, not a commercial source that you would question the value and accuracy of. To get it from HMRC, we could say to clients and other stakeholders, "This information has come from HMRC. So, it's the best, most accurate stuff we can get." So that, for me, was invaluable."

The Growth Hub used the data as follows:

Internal use

- It helped to prepare and run an event for businesses, 'Exporting outside of the EU', where specialists from regions such as China, India and West Africa (these regions were identified as key exporting countries from the data) talked about the pros and cons for exporting to these countries and encouraging businesses to talk to the Growth Hub and colleagues at the Department of international Trade if they were interested.
- Identified new clients for the Growth Hub as the data was broken down by postcode and businesses who are already exporting.
- Helped the LEP develop their export strategy through identifying the key exporting countries.
- Benchmarked their region's export activity with other regions to understand what they could aspire to achieve.

"The data helped us to identify which countries to promote, ... we would not have done it without the data."

To help businesses

- Conducted analysis to understand the potential impact of exiting the EU. The analysis revealed that the area wasn't as reliant on trade with the EU as they had thought, so they were able to communicate this to businesses, giving them confidence that they would not be as negatively affected by the UK leaving the EU as some had suggested.

"This information came out around the time of the Brexit referendum vote when there were a lot of anxious businesses. When we drilled down the statistics, we realised that as a region we were not as dependent on the EU for trade and business as some many think . Total exports for the county were just under £8bn (mostly US, China and India), but only £1.3bn were to EU countries. When that panic was going on you can say to clients, actually, the EU is important, but there are many other countries that we can trade with".

- Through understanding the significance of the region's trade with China, the Growth Hub carried out a virtual trade mission to China to showcase five Gloucestershire businesses.
- Helped some businesses establish a new target market by showing businesses the potential of exports to key countries.

6. Future support

Respondents were provided with the following summary of the support that HMRC could offer to Growth Hubs and businesses in the future;

- Identifying and co-creating materials with Growth Hubs for use by them and other business support providers.
- Webinars for advisers.
- An online forum for businesses and advisers.
- Sharing and providing localised data, firstly on exports but with the potential to extend.

This section explores views from all interviewed Growth Hubs regarding the support that HMRC could offer.

6.1. Overall

All respondents were generally happy with the package of support that HMRC could offer and felt that it would meet their needs. The overall feeling was that any support HMRC can provide would be welcome. In terms of what HMRC should prioritise, the two most common areas cited by respondents were related to the sharing and use of HMRC data to:

- Help Growth Hubs to identify scale-up businesses.
- Send targeted emails from HMRC to businesses in a Growth Hub's area.

A smaller number of respondents felt that the digital content (e.g. information and webinars to upload on to web sites) should be prioritised by HMRC as the activities that would provide them with the greatest value.

With regards to additional support required by Growth Hubs and advisers, the main theme from respondents was the desire to have a named contact at HMRC to liaise with.

"If the Growth Hub could have a particular HMRC contact for their area if a business wants more advice we can signpost them to, that would be very helpful."

Some respondents mentioned that it would be useful to have HMRC presence at some of their adviser meetings to provide regular updates.

"It would be useful to have a local HMRC contact to talk to, and if they could perhaps offer local surgeries to help businesses - that would probably go down well."

It was also mentioned that it would be useful for HMRC to develop case studies to illustrate how businesses have benefitted from tax related support as they believed this could be more powerful to other businesses in comparison to a fact sheet about tax.

6.1.1. Co-creating and producing content and materials

Most respondents said that they would be interested and willing to get involved in co-creating content and materials. However, none of the respondents cited this as an activity HMRC should prioritise.

Checklists

Respondents were specifically asked about their views on the future value of checklists for advisers. The majority stated that the checklists would be of value to advisers as an aide memoire when talking with businesses about various issues.

"We try and produce checklist style materials for advisers - so they have the right prompts to get the right information etc., so checklists from HMRC would complement what we already have and our style of working."

When asked during interview what topics would be of use there was limited response, but those who did respond suggested:

- Exports and imports
- Start-up businesses
- Corporation tax
- Apprenticeship levy
- Pensions
- Closing a business
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Key deadline dates for tax returns / submissions etc.

Some respondents raised concerns that might affect how advisers could use the checklists:

- The checklists should not encourage an adviser to answer specific tax queries raised by businesses, as this would be outside their signposting role and cross into the role of private sector accountants.
- Advisers may need training on the checklists before using them so they fully understand the nature of the topic and how they can talk to a business about it. Case Study 2 illustrates that up-skilling advisers through a workshop can be valuable in aiding them to talk more proactively about tax related issues such as R&D with businesses.

6.1.2. Regular partner communications

Growth Hub staff, and strategic leads in particular, said that they would value regular email communications from HMRC to keep them up to date with changes to tax regulations and the support that HMRC offers. Table 3 overleaf summarises respondent views:

Table 3: Respondent views on HMRC emails to Growth Hubs

| | Respondent views |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Who should the emails be targeted at | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the strategic leads felt that they were the most appropriate person to receive the email and suggested they would be able to disseminate the information as appropriate. • Advisers agreed that communications should be sent to strategic leads. • Some respondents also felt that a marketing / communications individual should receive the email as they could produce content such as e-newsletters etc. |
| Who should the email be sent from | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondents talked about receiving lots of emails and e-newsletters and that it was difficult to read them all. The HMRC emails should be sent from a regular named contact, so that the Growth Hub can look out for the email and prioritise reading and disseminating it. |
| What should the emails contain | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updates and reminders about the support available from HMRC. Some respondents commented that advisers need to see specific support materials / tools several times before they can recall and use them regularly. • Updates on changes to legislation relating to tax. • A familiar subject line e.g. Support for Growth Hubs, so individuals spot the email quickly and save the email rather than discarding it. |
| When should the emails be sent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth Hubs had a range of views on the frequency of emails ranging from weekly to quarterly, but most suggested a monthly email would be most effective. |

Respondents felt that email would also be the most effective way for HMRC to share materials with them (rather than through the microsite or online forum) as they may not remember to log into another site and therefore may miss something.

Whilst respondents understood that email contact would be the most efficient way for HMRC to communicate with Growth Hubs, many respondents commented that they would value some personal contact with HMRC, as mentioned above. Respondents believe that personal contact with HMRC:

- Helps advisers better understand tax issues and the support available.
- Helps advisers recall tax issues and support so that they can more readily use it with businesses.
- Provides a more efficient way of addressing specific queries if they had a contact to talk to.

6.1.3. Building adviser capability

HMRC could get involved in building adviser capability through developing a series of webinars to upskill advisers on a range of topics, linking webinars to adviser CPD and developing a peer to peer adviser network.

Webinars

The aim of the webinars will be to help advisers understand tax requirements for setting up and growing a business and the support HMRC offer to businesses in this regard. They would give live access to HMRC experts, can be tailored to the advisers' needs, and will be recorded so advisers can view on demand.

All respondents said that they would find webinars useful at least to some extent. They emphasised the limits on their time, so webinars would need to be short and not too frequent. They also suggested that Growth Hubs needed plenty of notice of the date and time of the webinar so that they could schedule it in their calendars. Respondents suggested webinars could be used:

- As part of an overall adviser training programme and / or to upskill new advisers joining the team.
- For advisers to learn about particular topics to help answer specific queries raised by businesses they are supporting.
- For Growth Hub marketing staff to produce their own content for their website/e-newsletters etc.

"Webinars could be useful if recorded and accessed at any time. Advisers are so busy and need to know about so many things, they will only use information from a webinar if it is useful to a business they are currently working with."

Some suggested topics for future webinars included tax implications relating to:

- Imports / exports
- Business start-up
- Taking on staff
- Social enterprises
- R&D tax credits¹⁴

Continuous Professional Development

Respondents' views were mixed over whether there was value in linking webinars to adviser

¹⁴ Where respondents were not aware of or had not viewed the existing R&D tax credit webinar.

CPD requirements. Where respondents saw the value, this was because they felt it would make the subject of tax a more formal part of the adviser's training. The general consensus was that SFEDI was the most appropriate business support qualification to link it to. There was also a suggestion that tax could become a new module as part of a CPD qualification.

Where there was uncertainty of the value of linking webinars to adviser CPD, this was because:

- The Growth Hub does not have advisers.
- The Growth Hub doesn't plan to put advisers through a business support qualification.
- Pressure on advisers' time may affect ability to attend/ view webinars.
- They were unsure about adviser CPD requirements.

Peer to peer adviser network

Respondents were asked whether those who had attended the R&D workshop led by HMRC, valued the ability to network and interact with other advisers. Respondents said they valued the opportunity to network with advisers from other Growth Hubs, although they were not able to cite any specific impact from this.

6.1.4. Online forum for businesses and advisers

HMRC are considering launching a new online forum that would have two aims:

- To provide a place for businesses to go to discuss and get answers to questions about tax in respect to growing their business from peers, advisers or HMRC experts.
- To provide a section for business advisers – HMRC would host material on this forum for users to access, and advisers would be able to offer peer to peer support as well as have access to HMRC experts.

The majority of respondents thought the online forum would be of value to businesses and as such felt that it would be something they would be willing to promote to businesses when launched.

"It sounds a useful tool to raise questions like 'what's the most tax efficient way of doing X/Y/Z.'"

"We wanted to do something around this as well but could not due to the lack of resources and lack of finances. It would be a useful way for businesses to access information quickly. We would like to embed this into our online service if the tool was free to use."

Where respondents did not see the value of a forum for businesses, this was due to:

- Businesses being reluctant to share information about their tax practices on a public forum

"I think businesses would have a natural hesitation to disclose information, as they might wonder who is checking up on them. It would probably need a statement from HMRC about their intentions, and whether it would be used as a policing tool."

- The forum not providing answers quickly enough for businesses who are busy

"If a business has a query they want an answer straight away, so they want to speak to someone on the phone whether that is HMRC or an accountant."

- Queries over how the quality of responses would be assured.

"I would also be concerned about the credibility of 'experts' in the forum – how will the quality of responses be monitored?"

Some respondents thought advisers would value their own section on the online forum, for example to raise queries on behalf of businesses. Those who felt the forum would not add value did so because:

- Advisers lack the time to take part; or
- Advisers would be concerned about straying into the area of providing advice relating to tax as they are not qualified to do so.

"At this point I think it would have limited value as our advisers wouldn't have the confidence to provide advice on a forum - they would need upskilling before using it."

6.1.5. Identifying data which can help build local business performance

Many respondents commented that they are particularly keen for HMRC to share data.

Trade statistics

Respondents were specifically asked about their views on HMRC sharing further trade statistics data, following the localised reports they produced for the Growth Hubs involved in the pilot. All strategic lead respondents stated that they would value HMRC producing a localised report of the trade statistics data. Advisers were less sure whether it would be of value to their role.

"This is vital information for us. We have a strategic objective to increase international trade, which is now more of a priority given the EU vote. We could use the data to target our support by sector to encourage international trade. We could also compare ourselves with other LEP areas to determine where it's working well and replicate best practice."

Strategic leads stated that they would look to use the data in the following ways, and Case Study 4 (see Appendix A) illustrates that it is possible to use the data in these ways:

- To develop specific support for exporters.
- To produce news stories to include on e-newsletters to business about how the region

performs in terms of exports.

- Identify exporters to engage with in the future.

"This would be useful. We have some ERDF export programmes in some parts of the region and it would be interesting to use the data to see if we should expand the schemes into other areas. We could use the data to shape our decisions around what business support activities we should focus on."

Respondents raised the following considerations for HMRC in taking this activity forward:

- It would be useful for HMRC to engage with each Growth Hub to help them understand the data, what it means and how it can be used.
- The data could be used in multiple ways, and this could fall under the remit of various job roles within the Growth Hub / wider LEP team, so it may be necessary to engage with multiple staff from each area.

Other data

While not asked specifically, a few respondents commented that it would be useful for HMRC to share other data on businesses to help with their own strategies and activities. For example, some Growth Hubs need to identify scale up businesses and are currently looking at options of purchasing commercial databases to help them do this. Respondents felt HMRC could be well placed to provide this data and, if that were possible¹⁵ it could save Growth Hubs a lot of money.

"We all agreed at the Growth Hub conference that we are all looking for data...The data we buy is often out of date (2013/14) and we are all wasting money buying the same thing. BEIS wants us to focus on scale up businesses, so there should be some help in identifying them, e.g. businesses that have grown by 20% year on year for the last three years."

Respondents also felt that they can be more confident in the data that HMRC have compared to other sources.

¹⁵ HMRC is bound by data privacy and confidentiality rules which set out how it can use or share its data with third parties.

The extract from Case Study 5 below illustrates the value of collaboration between HMRC and Growth Hubs through the sharing of data which enabled the Growth Hub to inform their local service delivery.

Extract from Case Study 5: Value of collaborative working with HMRC (Greater Manchester)

The Greater Manchester Growth Hub has been working collaboratively with HMRC to better understand the needs of businesses in relation to R&D support. The Growth Hub were very keen to get HMRC involved from the start. As part of this joint working, Manchester invited HMRC to add a question on R&D tax incentives into the Greater Manchester annual business survey.

"We learned that 60% of the businesses that were undertaking innovation in Greater Manchester did not understand R&D tax incentives."

The Business Growth Hub has used this data to inform their local innovation service delivery which now includes:

- Closer working with specialists that help companies access R&D tax incentives.
- The commissioning of further more in-depth research as to why there are barriers to take up these incentives.
- Developing a future service offer for businesses that will be based on the findings from the above once known.

"We are using the research to unpick the issues to shape and inform the delivery of services going forward ...we plan to then work with HMRC to jointly address the barriers."

6.1.6. Targeted communications to businesses

Targeted emails

All respondents said that they would be interested in working with HMRC to send targeted emails to businesses, either for HMRC to send emails on behalf of Growth Hubs or for Growth Hubs to access HMRC data and send them to businesses directly.¹⁶

Some respondents commented that they would want emails to be sent to all businesses in their area that HMRC have contact details for, as the Growth Hub are able to support all businesses. However, most suggested segmenting the data and sending targeted emails would be more

¹⁶ HMRC abides by strict guidelines which govern its ability to share data with other organisations, and takes taxpayer confidentiality seriously.

effective.

"I don't think a general email about our Growth Hub would be effective, we would have to think of specific campaigns that would work, e.g. something on R&D, but we would need to make sure our advisers were upskilled on that particular topic first."

Case Study 3 (see Appendix A) also suggests a more targeted email approach would be more effective. Businesses of specific interest to Growth Hubs include:

- Scale up businesses.
- Those in the priority sectors of each LEP.
- Start-up businesses.

Respondents suggested the following topics to be covered through email campaigns:

- Anything topical relating to tax regulations e.g. the Apprenticeship Levy.
- Export / import information.
- Information for start-up businesses.
- Information to upskill staff.

A couple of respondents raised the following considerations:

- There is a need for email campaigns to be integrated into wider adviser activity, for example making sure advisers are up-skilled on specific topics before sending out emails on the topic.
- It would be useful if HMRC could share with Growth Hubs a list of variables that they have data for to give Growth Hubs an idea of how the data could be segmented.

"The best thing HMRC could do is produce a list of things from the data that HMRC can tell us, with a separate column explaining how HMRC thinks each thing could be useful to us. We can then review it and look at what we have here and tell HMRC what messages to promote to which groups."

Other awareness raising methods

Many respondents believe that HMRC have an important role in raising awareness of the Growth Hubs due to their unique position in having contact with all businesses¹⁷. Respondents were asked for suggestions on other ways HMRC could raise awareness of their Growth Hub. These included:

- Adding the local Growth Hub telephone number on all HMRC correspondence.

¹⁷ Respondents did not specifically talk about the role of BEIS in raising awareness of Growth Hubs.

- Having a tool on the HMRC website whereby a business can input their postcode to find their local Growth Hub.
- Making HMRC staff (e.g. those dealing with queries from businesses) aware of the Growth Hub network so they can promote it when talking to businesses.
- Through HMRC's social media campaigns.

Opportunities for Growth Hubs to promote HMRC support

The majority of Growth Hubs felt that they already promote HMRC to a certain extent through digital content/ links on their website, their advisers, and through e-newsletters. Respondents also acknowledged if they were more aware of the HMRC support available, there may be further opportunities through the same channels.

6.2. Working with HMRC in the future

This section outlines respondent views on working with HMRC in the future and how HMRC should effectively engage with Growth Hubs.

6.2.1. Appetite for future joint working

All five pilot Hubs said they would be interested and willing to work with HMRC on future activities due to:

- The process of the pilot work being thorough and professional.
- Them valuing the opportunity to co-create materials with HMRC.
- Believing that it is important for them to collaborate with national agencies like HMRC.

From the non-pilot Growth Hub sample, all but a minority said that they would be interested and willing to work with HMRC in the future on developing new support materials/ tools for Growth Hubs and businesses. Most respondents expressed an interest in a particular activity that they would most like to get involved in e.g. the targeted email campaigns, webinars or the online forum. This is so they can find out more about the activity of most interest to them and be involved in the shaping and development of it.

"We're happy to work with HMRC – we may need to work closely on the data to make sure it works for us, we're also interested in anything related to R&D tax incentives."

For the small number of respondents who said they were not interested in working with HMRC, this is because they lack the time to get involved.

6.2.2. Considerations regarding HMRC engagement with Growth Hubs

Respondents raised several considerations regarding HMRC engagement with Growth Hubs,

and some suggestions to ensure future support is effective which are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Considerations for future HMRC engagement with Growth Hubs and considerations in developing support to encourage business growth

| Considerations for future HMRC engagement with Growth Hubs | Considerations in developing support to encourage business growth |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Growth Hubs are different and therefore each one may benefit from different types of support. • There may be multiple people at each Growth Hub / LEP that may be useful to engage with, e.g. data or marketing personnel, and Growth Hub managers. • All Growth Hubs lack time, so engagement needs to be efficient with plenty of notice to attend meetings or provide feedback. • There is concern for the future as current funding packages finish at March 2018, so many are unsure how they will be funded. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build tax into the business diagnostic tools used by Growth Hubs to help identify opportunities for businesses to use tax incentives to help grow their business. • Upskill Growth Hub staff regarding how tax fits into the business growth agenda. • Upskill advisers on support materials to improve adviser understanding of how they can be used, the content of the topic and ensure consistency of message amongst all advisers. • Most Growth Hubs would value face to face meetings with HMRC as they believe this would provide a more effective means of collaboration. • Integrate various activities; appropriate materials and upskilling of advisers should be in place before sending out targeted emails to businesses to raise awareness of Growth Hub support, to ensure advisers are equipped to deal with enquiries. |

6.3. Considerations for future evaluation of support

It was difficult to determine the impact of support materials developed as part of the pilot work due to a number of barriers. HMRC may wish to consider the following to improve the evaluation of future support materials:

- Ask Growth Hubs to build follow up interactions between advisers and businesses for them to gather feedback on the usefulness and impact of support provided to them.
- Observation of advisers at work may reveal interesting findings about how they operate.
- Research interviews with businesses receiving support to gather feedback on the usefulness and impact of support materials provided to them.

- Seek the views of other stakeholders such as accountants, tax advisers and relevant trade associations such as the ICAEW regarding what support they think businesses need relating to tax and business growth, and how the support would be best delivered.

Appendix A

Case Studies

CASE STUDY 1:

Changing delivery models (North East)

Growth Hub delivery models are continually evolving which needs to be considered when developing future support



Background

The North East Growth Hub is delivered by the Local Enterprise Partnership and has been established for a year.

At the outset, the Growth Hub intended to focus on a digital delivery model; the aim was to stimulate demand for business support and to generate leads for business support providers. The Growth Hub had a limited budget and were looking to develop a service that was sustainable over the long term and leveraged the resource and expertise that already existed within the business growth ecosystem.

"We have limited resource to deliver meaningful support to businesses."

Challenge

However, at the time of interview they were also in the process of developing an intensive account management service for businesses with high growth potential. The reason for this change is twofold. First, it has been driven by a refresh in the strategic economic plan for the LEP, to focus on areas of the economy that can deliver the greatest productivity gains as well as direction given by BEIS to all Growth Hubs. Second, this change has been informed by challenges experienced by businesses and their need for support across multiple channels.

The resulting change means that they face the challenge of now needing to produce and deliver support across multiple channels to a range of different businesses.

Future

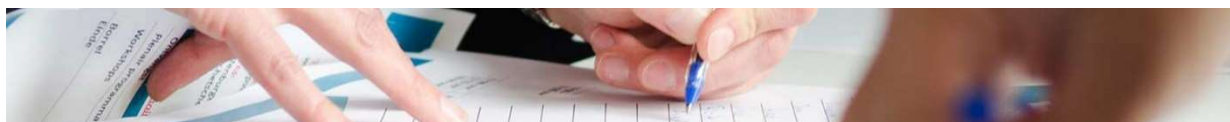
The different Growth Hub delivery models is something that they think needs to be borne in mind when considering the support offer.

"We are keen for HMRC to provide support to Growth Hubs, but they need to bear in mind that everyone works in a slightly different model and there isn't a one size fits all in terms of content. HMRC probably need to work with a range of Growth Hubs."

CASE STUDY 2:

Value of R&D workshop (Gloucestershire)

Gloucestershire Growth Hub hosted a workshop on behalf of HMRC to up-skill advisers on R&D tax credits and incentives resulting in several benefits.



Background

HMRC experts delivered a workshop which attracted 25 personnel from a number of Growth Hubs. The purpose of the workshop was to help advisers proactively talk to businesses about R&D tax credits.

Value

The Business Guide felt that the workshop was beneficial for a number of reasons, both in terms of learning about the topic but also from networking with HMRC and other Growth Hubs.

- It enabled staff from other Growth Hubs to understand how Gloucestershire operate, particularly those that do not have a physical presence.
- Changing the perception of HMRC through providing face to face contact with HMRC experts.
- Businesses had provided feedback to advisers suggesting they had saved substantial sums of money.
- Sharing of best practice between advisers about how to perform as an adviser and how to provide advice relating to R&D tax credits.

"I ran a tour of our facility as some Growth Hubs are not physical spaces like ours. People went away thinking we should be doing something like this in our patch."

"Clients aren't always aware that they should be claiming this back. As a result [of the information from the workshop], clients have managed to claim back thousands and thousands of pounds [in R&D tax credits]."

"The workshop was great. You imagine HMRC as a faceless organisation, but to see them in the flesh was very good. It gives you confidence to refer organisations on to the experts."

Future

The Growth Hub believes that workshops are a useful format to upskill advisers in the future and would be keen to work with HMRC in the future on this type of activity.

CASE STUDY 3:

Value of targeted emails (Greater Manchester)

The Growth Hub worked with HMRC to pilot two rounds of targeted emails to businesses in their region to raise awareness of the Growth Hub and the support on offer



Background

The Business Growth Hub (<http://www.businessgrowthhub.com>) is part of the Manchester Growth Company. The Hub was set up in 2011 and works with ambitious businesses that want to grow their bottom line, boost their profile, and create new business growth.

The Growth Hub collaborated with HMRC to pilot two rounds of targeted emails:

1. A campaign in 2015 that focused on general awareness raising amongst 22,000 businesses.
2. A second campaign that focused on support available regarding international trade and exports.

Value

Whilst they were not able to determine the impact from the first campaign, they did receive a number of referrals following the international trade campaign.

"Although there was no significant increase in enquiries... Compared to our usual marketing, the locally targeted emails did offer a different route into businesses, so it was a useful exercise to try a different approach."

"We worked closely with HMRC to craft the messaging around our offer and theirs."

Future

The Business Growth Hub continues to be interested in working with HMRC on other email campaigns as part of their joint action plan. They feel it would be useful to explore the extent to which you can accurately target companies on the HMRC database that:

- Demonstrate certain levels of growth.
- Work in particular sectors that are a priority for the region.
- May be able to take advantage of R&D tax credits.
- Have missed tax payments and need some help.

"Going forward, HMRC have an important role to help raise awareness; as businesses move to digital tax returns, businesses need to be made aware of local Growth Hub services to help them with broader issues and challenges from innovation to accessing finance or accessing international markets."

CASE STUDY 4:

Value of trade statistics (Gloucestershire)

HMRC provided Gloucestershire Growth Hub with a localised report of export trade statistics which the Growth Hub have used in a number of ways

THE GROWTH HUB

HELPING GLOUCESTERSHIRE
BUSINESSES GROW

Background

The Growth Hub for Gloucestershire is the single front door to business support in Gloucestershire.

Value

The Growth Hub had tried to access similar data in the past but were not able to.

Having the data come from HMRC, a reputable source, gave the Growth Hub greater confidence in the data than they would otherwise have had from another source.

Gloucestershire have used the data to:

Help with internal activities

- Develop the LEP's export strategy by identifying which countries to promote.
- Identify new clients for the Growth Hub by breaking down the data by postcode and by those who export and then used for marketing purposes.
- Benchmark their region's export activity with other regions to understand what they could aspire to achieve.
- Communicate different stories and messages to businesses.

"I think the data will ensure the Growth Hub looks like they have their finger on the pulse and is THE place for businesses to go for help."

"The data helped us to identify which countries to promote... we would not have done it without the data."

Help businesses

- Run an event for businesses, where specialists from China, India and West Africa talked about the pros and cons for exporting to these countries, encouraging businesses to seek support from the Growth Hub if they were interested.
- Conduct a trade mission to China to showcase five local businesses, through understanding the significance of the region's trade with China
- Provide businesses with information about where other businesses are exporting to help them establish a new target market

"This information came out around the time of the Brexit referendum vote when there were a lot of anxious businesses. When we drilled down the statistics, we realised that as a region we were not as dependent on the EU for trade and business as we thought. Total exports for the county were just under £8bn (mostly US, China and India), but only £1.3bn were to EU countries. When that panic was going on you can say to clients, actually, the EU is important, but there are many other countries that we can trade with".

Future

"We would be keen to work with HMRC in the future on other activities. It would be good to get Growth Hubs and HMRC together a couple of times a year to brainstorm other activities that they could collaborate on."

CASE STUDY 5:

Value of collaborative working with HMRC (Greater Manchester)

Manchester worked closely with HMRC to help businesses access R&D tax incentives



Background

The Business Growth Hub worked with HMRC to develop a joint action plan, and discussed how joint working could be used to better target companies who would benefit from Growth Hub services, particularly innovation.

"We identified that HMRC has a wealth of data that could be used to target and engage companies such as those accessing R&D tax credits, or those demonstrating certain levels of growth. This would help us reach out to these companies through HMRC with support to help their growth ambitions in a more joined up and efficient way."

Manchester invited HMRC to add a question on R&D tax incentives into the Greater Manchester annual business survey to better understand business take up of R&D tax incentives. The research identified that businesses were not utilising R&D tax credits to their best potential.

"We learned that 60% of the businesses that were undertaking innovation in Greater Manchester did not understand R&D tax incentives."

Value

The Business Growth Hub has used this data to commission further in-depth research to understand the barriers to businesses taking up R&D incentives and work more closely with specialists that help companies access R&D tax incentives.

Future

"We are using the research to unpick the issues to shape and inform the delivery of services going forward and we plan to then work with HMRC to jointly address the barriers."

Appendix B

Example Topic guide

Topic Guide for Pilot Hub strategic leads

Introduction

Hi [insert name]

It's [insert name] at Databuild on behalf of HMRC. Is now still a good time to discuss your views on the test and learn activity¹⁸ that HMRC have been working on with your Growth Hub?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Researcher to confirm if they are happy for conversation to be recorded for quality purposes & passing anonymized transcript to HMRC. Ensure they understand that the final report will be published, but that no responses they provide will be used in an attributable format.

Background

As context for our discussion, could you briefly tell me about your role and provide some background to the Growth Hub?

- What does your role involve?
- How long have you been in your role?
- How long has your Growth Hub been established?
- What are the aims of your Growth Hub?
- Could you describe the type of businesses that your Growth Hub engages with?
- With regards to encouraging business growth, what are your biggest challenges at the Growth Hub?
- Before your involvement with HMRC on the test and learn activities, to what extent were you aware of HMRC's products and services aimed at businesses?

How HMRC have worked with them

We understand that you worked collaboratively with HMRC in the development of a number of test and learn activities (tools, data and guidance) for use by your Growth Hub and others.

- Why did you volunteer to work with HMRC in the development of these test and learn activities?
- What were your expectations about your involvement?
- How did you find the process of working on the test and learn activities?
- How did you find HMRC's way of working with you?
- Do you feel that your views and ideas were taken into consideration?

¹⁸ Agreed that test and learn activity is the correct phrasing to use with respondents initially, but the researcher may need to expand to provide more detail if the respondents doesn't sound sure what we are talking about.

- What has been the most valuable part of working with HMRC? Least valuable?

Use of current products

Overall:

There were a number of test and learn activities undertaken across the past 12 months or so.

- Which activities were you involved in?
- How have the test and learn activities contributed to your ability to deliver your Growth Hub offer?
- How have the test and learn activities supported advisers?

Activity specific:

Building on this, I would like to go through each of the test and learn activities in turn and understand how you have used them and the impact they have had. We will also talk about HMRC's plans to provide information and support to GHs in future, and the value you think it could have.

Life stage packs

- I would firstly like to ask you about the three life stage packs. The packs focus on starting, growing and sustaining a business. After developing the packs, HMRC has shared them with all GHs using the microsite on the LEP web site.

Can I just check that you are aware of the packs?

(Researcher to provide more detail about the packs if needed - that HMRC collated in response to GHs saying they and their customers did not find it easy to navigate GOV.uk and find information).

If aware:

- How have you and your wider team used the packs? Or do you plan to use the packs in the future?
 - Are they a resource for your own teams or have you shared them with clients? Why / why not?
- What have the packs enabled you to do / what learning have you taken from them?
- How has using the life stage packs helped advisers in their role? (Prompt: increased knowledge, increased confidence, ability to provide better quality advice, saved time)
- Are there any improvements that you can think of that could be made to the packs?

Check lists

- Moving on to the check lists for advisors, can I just check that you are aware of the

check lists covering the following topics:

- o Employment Allowance
- o R&D - Incentives & reliefs
- o Time to pay Arrangements
- o [Only ask to Greater Manchester] Taxation of payments from flood recovery schemes

(Researcher to provide more detail about the check lists if needed).

If aware:

- o How have you and your wider team used the check lists? Or do you plan to use the check lists in the future?
- o Why did you use them in this way? / Why do you plan to use them in this way?
- o What have the check lists enabled you to do / what learning have you taken from them?
- o How has using the check lists helped the advisers in their role? (Prompt: increased knowledge, increased confidence, ability to provide better quality advice, saved time)
- o Are there any improvements that you can think of that could be made to the check lists?
- o Are checklists a good way of HMRC sharing information with customer-facing staff in Growth Hubs ?
- o Are there any other topics that it would be good for HMRC to cover in checklist form?

Agents

- Are you aware / did you take part in the phone call to discuss the issue of helping businesses choose a good agent? (Researcher to provide more detail about the call if needed).

If aware / took part:

- o How have you and your wider team used the information from the phone call / referenced in the phone call? Or do you plan to use the information in the phone call / referenced in the phone call in the future?
 - Did the phone call prompt you to review the way you signpost businesses locally to professional support?
 - Did you use the copy on the CCAB website to influence your own

materials / messaging for businesses?

- What has the insight from the paper enabled you to do / what learning have you taken from the paper and the accompanying phone call?
- How has the agents paper contributed to the Growth Hub offer? (Prompt if needed: increased knowledge / referring businesses to agents for specialist advice / helping businesses understand how to select agents / saved time)
- Can you cite any examples where this information has been useful to help businesses?
- What other ways could HMRC help you / Growth Hubs to signpost customers to professional support?

Outbound emails

- I'd now like to talk to you about the emails that HMRC have sent to businesses within your region, can I just check that you are aware of these? (Researcher to provide more details about the emails if needed).
 - What were your expectations of this test activity – i.e. HMRC's ability to target messages, your ability to influence the content?
 - How did the process work for you?
 - What impact have you seen as a result? (anecdotal / hard data / customer behaviour)

If not already mentioned by respondent:

- Has the Growth Hub received more enquiries from businesses?
- Has the Growth Hub attracted new clients?
- Has the Growth Hub revived relationships with existing clients?
- Have more businesses attended your events?
- Have more businesses applied for grants?
- Have more businesses signed up to support programmes?
- Have any of your clients / businesses commented to you about receiving an email from HMRC? If so, what was their comment?
- How do you think the emails complimented your own marketing efforts?
- Are you able to compare this activity with other marketing / promotion you have done? If so, how do the results differ?
- If HMRC are able to support the GH network or individual Hubs through future targeted mailing, which client groups would be of most interest to you (i.e. start up, scale up) and what topics / messaging would be most

beneficial?

- o Is there anything else that HMRC can do to raise awareness of the Growth Hubs amongst businesses / potential businesses?

Support for advisors

Workshops for advisers

- HMRC ran a series of workshops which focused on R&D. can I just check that you are aware of those workshops? (Researcher to provide more detail about the workshops if needed).

If aware:

- o Did you or any of your advisers attend the workshop? If no, why not?
- o (If they attended).
- o What value did your advisers get from having access to HMRC subject experts?
- o What value did your advisers get from attending an event with advisers from other Growth Hubs?
 - Did it result in any exchange of information / ideas either specific to the topic or about the support that Growth Hubs provide in general? If so, what?
- o How has the R&D workshop been useful to advisers in their role?
 - To what extent did the workshop increase awareness / knowledge / confidence about dealing with R&D queries?
- o How has the insight from the workshop contributed to the Growth Hub offer?
- o Was a workshop a good way of sharing information with you / your advisers?

Webinars

- Moving on to talking about webinars. Firstly – are you aware of the range of information and support that HMRC provides, via webinars, videos and online guidance?

If familiar:

- o How have you used this? (i.e. the range of information and support that HMRC provides, via webinars, videos and online guidance?)
 - Did your advisers use them for their own information / knowledge?
 - To what extent did you / your advisers promote these to your clients

before your work with HMRC?

- Since working with HMRC on the test and learn activity, has your use of or thoughts on HMRC webinars, videos and online guidance changed? How?
- HMRC trialed two webinars in December 2016 – one on R&D and one on trade statistics.
 - Were you aware of these webinars?
 - (If aware): Did you / anyone from your Hub take part in the live session or play back the recorded version? If not, why not?
 - How has attending the webinars on R&D and Advance Assurance helped advisers in their role?
- HMRC would like to run a series of webinars for advisers. The aim of the webinars will be to help advisers understand tax support and requirements for setting up and growing a business. These will give live access to HMRC advisers, can be tailored to the advisers' needs, and will be recorded so advisers can view on demand.
 - To what extent do you think people in your GH would use / find a programme of webinars of value?
 - If the webinars could be used as part of advisers CPD (continuous professional development) would this be of interest? If so, would there be value in aligning the modules with a particular business support qualification, e.g. SFEDI?
 - Is there anything that HMRC should consider in developing the webinar series?
 - Do you have any suggestions for topics that should be covered?
- HMRC would like to involve Growth Hubs in helping them to test webinars for customers in the future. How should Growth Hubs best be engaged in the process?

Trade Statistics

- Are you aware of HMRC's work to highlight the data that is publicly available on exports, and also to make localised reports of this data available for the five pilot Growth Hubs?

If aware of data:

- Were you aware of the data that is publically available on exports prior to HMRC's work to highlight this?
 - Had you used the information? Why / why not?
 - Does this data contain useful information?
- With regards to the data that is publicly available on exports. Have you used the data since the phone workshop? If so, how and what has it shown

/enabled you to do?

- Why did you use the data in this way? / Why do you plan to use the data in this way?
- Has the data enabled you to do anything that you weren't previously doing?
- Have you shared the data with any other partner / delivery organisations? Who? How has this been used?
 - Can you cite any examples where you have shared data with a delivery partner? How have they used this? Do you have any examples of the outcomes of this [e.g. enhancing their offer]?
 - Can you cite any examples where you have shared data with a business? How have they used this? Do you have any examples of the outcomes of this [e.g. started exporting, explored new markets]?
- Did the workshop alert you to new data / new ways of using the data?

If aware of localised report:

- Have you used the insight in the localised report? If so, how and what has it shown / enabled you to do?
 - Why did you use the information from the report in this way? / Why do you plan to use the information from the report in this way?
 - Has the insight from the report enabled you to do anything that you weren't previously doing?
 - Have you shared the data with any other partner / delivery organisation? Who? How has this been used?
 - Can you cite any examples where you have shared data with a delivery partner? How have they used this? Do you have any examples of the outcomes of this [e.g. enhancing their offer]?
 - Can you cite any examples where you have shared data with a business? How have they used this? Do you have any examples of the outcomes of this [e.g. started exporting, explored new markets]?

- HMRC wants to create greater awareness of the existing data. To that end they

delivered a live webinar in December 2016 for all GHs and a number of other partners.

- Were you aware of the live HMRC webinar? Did you / anyone from your GH attend? Are you aware that it is now available as a recorded webinar?
- Likewise, HMRC wants to extend the provision of localized data and is producing similar reports for all 39 LEP areas.
 - What benefit do you think GHs, LEPs and partners will gain from having access to UK-wide local data?
 - How could HMRC best make GHs and LEPs aware of the new localised reports?

Questions for Greater Manchester only

We understand that HMRC is working with you to develop work to better understand business' awareness, understanding and uptake of R&D tax credits. HMRC has helped develop the business research questionnaire and has agreed to provide localised R&D statistics for the purposes of the research.

- How has HMRC's input helped shape your thinking / delivery of this research project?
- What are you hoping to gain from the local data on R&D take up?
- Are there other ways that HMRC data or expertise could help you, or other Hubs, to develop better understanding of how to support business innovation and identify businesses with potential to grow and innovate?

Interest in future products

HMRC would like to continue to work with Growth Hubs helping them to support business growth. We would like to ask you a few questions to get your thoughts on working with HMRC, how HMRC should best communicate with you, and with regards to some ideas that HMRC currently have to help you in the future.

Firstly, I'd like to ask your thoughts on working with HMRC in the future.

- Would you be interested in working with HMRC in the future on co-creating, testing and assuring new materials for growth hubs and businesses?
 - Based on your experience on working with HMRC on this pilot, is there anything they should bear in mind when working with Growth Hubs in the future?
 - Is there anything they should do differently in terms of how they work with the Growth Hubs?
 - Is there potential for greater working with the Growth Hubs?

Secondly, thinking about how HMRC communicate with you. Before I test some specific ideas with you, what are your thoughts on:

- How HMRC should keep you informed of new initiatives and support materials?
 - (If not mentioned above) How about contact via email? Who should this be directed to?
- How you can provide feedback to HMRC so they can identify new materials

There are two main ways that HMRC is planning to communicate with Growth Hubs and their advisers; the first is via a regular partner email (sent to named contacts within the GH, often a marketing or communications manager), the second is via a new online forum.

- The online forum will be for businesses and Growth Hubs. It will have two aims – first to provide a place for businesses to go to discuss and get answers to questions about growth and developing their business from peers, advisors or HMRC experts. Second, the forum will have a section for business advisors – HMRC will host material on this forum, and advisors will be able to offer peer to peer support as well as have access to HMRC experts.
 - What are your thoughts on this? As a tool for businesses? As a tool for Growth Hub advisers?
 - Who might use this and how?
 - What are the main things HMRC should consider in developing the online forum for it to be effective?
- HMRC has recently used the Growth Hub microsite on the LEP internet site as a place to share materials and information (e.g. the life stage packs).
 - Are you aware of the Growth Hub microsite?
 - Do you / your team use the microsite? Or do you think you would use it in the future? Why / why not?
 - Using the new forum to share materials would mean HMRC can better manage its distribution of materials to advisors (i.e. everyone goes to the same portal). What are your views on whether HMRC should use the forum, the microsite or a combination of the two?
- Are any circumstances / topics when having face to face contact with an HMRC expert would be a lot better than via a digital channel (e.g. webinars, online forum, microsite)?

Finally, thinking about how HMRC supports Growth Hubs,

- What support from HMRC would be useful to you in the future? i.e. topics, content, data
 - How should that support be delivered?
 - Why would that support be useful?
 - Why are HMRC well placed to provide that support?
 - What should HMRC prioritise?
- To recap from ideas that have been raised in our conversation so far, the areas that

HMRC will focus on in the future include identifying and co-creating materials with Growth Hubs to then be hosted on the Growth Hub microsite, webinars for advisers, the online forum, and sharing and localizing existing export data. On that basis,

- Does the package of support look right for GHs?
- Is there anything missing?
- Is there anything where you are not sure it would add value?

Case study

- Would your Growth Hub be willing to be the focus of a case study to help illustrate HMRC's activities with Growth Hubs and the impact this has had? (If yes, researcher to check whether respondent would be willing for their comments to be attributable)

Close

That's all the questions I wanted to ask, is there anything else you would like to add to what we have already talked about?

If I've missed anything could I give you a quick call back?

Thank you for your time.



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