

Innovate UK

Results of Competition: Business Basics 2 - SME Productivity (Proof of Concept)

Competition Code: 1901_CRD_BEIS_BB2_POC

Total available funding is £327,563

Note: These proposals have succeeded in the assessment stage of this competition. All are subject to grant offer and conditions being met.

| Participant organisation names | Project title | Proposed project costs | Proposed project grant |
|--------------------------------|---|------------------------|------------------------|
| Leeds Beckett University | Investing in SME productivity growth by developing their performance management capability. | £38,001 | £38,001 |
| FLUERE LTD | | £31,000 | £21,700 |
| KIRK NEWSHOLME LTD | | £0 | £0 |
| LLOYDS BANK PLC | | £0 | £0 |

Note: you can see all Innovate UK-funded projects here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/innovate-uk-funded-projects>
Use the Competition Code given above to search for this competition's results

Funders Panel Date: 19/06/2019

Project description - provided by applicants

This proof of concept project will test an innovative intervention to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to boost their productivity through the adoption of performance management methods and high performance working practices. Working with key stakeholders in the local eco-system this is collaborative pilot project in the West Yorkshire region between a University, commercial bank, accountancy professionals and management consultants, all of whom have wide but overlapping areas of expertise in relation to productivity measurement and improvement. The intervention will help manufacturing SMEs develop their performance management capability, with the overall aim of developing their long term productivity. The collaboration merges expertise from a range of stakeholders who are a typical part of regional economic systems, so theoretical, practical and commercial perspectives will improve the suitability, feasibility and confidence for the SME participants.

The project is targeted at manufacturing businesses containing a large proportion of domestically owned family businesses and will be free at the point of use, and these will be recruited from the client networks of the collaborators.

Key elements of the programme include helping SMEs assess and benchmark their current total productivity, identify which of their key business process affect overall productivity, and ensuring they can access and analyse data from their current systems to assess performance. The outcomes of the project are that each SME will be assisted to develop their own strategic productivity improvement plan, which will be validated for feasibility.

The project will utilise and evaluate three key tools for helping SMEs to manage their performance and improve productivity. These are: 1) a digital web based (overall) Productivity calculation tool for benchmarking and baseline setting; 2) a mapping framework which allows SME to link key processes and measurements opportunities to their overall productivity calculation; and 3) a criterion based scorecard for evaluating their improvement plans for suitability, feasibility and validity.

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Innovate UK

Results of Competition: Business Basics 2 - SME Productivity (Proof of Concept)

Competition Code: 1901_CRD_BEIS_BB2_POC

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| Participant organisation names | Project title | Proposed project costs | Proposed project grant |
|--------------------------------|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| YAGRO LTD | Accelerating the adoption of productivity systems for farming businesses | £58,809 | £58,809 |

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Funders Panel Date: 19/06/2019

Project description - provided by applicants

England is on the cusp of the Fourth Agricultural Revolution, where digital technology promises a productivity boost unseen since the Green Revolution of the post-war era.

Driving this revolution are a wide range of technological innovations, offering benefits to farms across their SME businesses, from operations management, to compliance, to accounting.

Agriculture offers acute barriers to entry to innovation. Access to farm decision makers is difficult, cost of customer acquisition remains stubbornly high, and conversion rates are low. The resulting business case for innovation is challenging.

Yet the landscape is rapidly changing. A younger generation of decision makers is coming onto farm, with native expectations of digital support. Connectivity in rural areas has boomed, making technology solutions viable at scale for the first time. Finally, challenging farm economics relentlessly demand a step change in productivity, if farming is to continue as a viable business in its own right.

Yagro is a team of farmers, entrepreneurs and technologists, with a mission to connect agriculture to drive a more financially sustainable farming sector. Our story began in 2015 and, since then, we've been travelling all over the UK to meet farmers and their suppliers to learn more about the challenges they face.

We propose to offer a 'Technology Assessment and Recommendation' (TAR) service for farms. In this, we would conduct an audit of the technology tools currently used across the farm business, considering 13 key areas where technology can bring significant productivity gains. From this assessment, we would then help the farm discover, understand, and adopt possible solutions to improve their productivity.

By testing different, innovative approaches to this TAR service, we aim to prove effective and sustainable dissemination of technology tools to farming SMEs at scale. As an outcome, this research will help us scale up our reach of activities on a sustainable commercial model, with the most efficient impact on farming productivity.

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| Participant organisation names | Project title | Proposed project costs | Proposed project grant |
|------------------------------------|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| EDGE DIGITAL MANUFACTURING LIMITED | Accelerating digital adoption and productivity for suppliers, makers and their customers in the South East | £59,799 | £59,799 |

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Project description - provided by applicants

EDGE Digital Manufacturing Limited is working with network partners in the South East to boost the productivity of small companies using digital technologies.

The long-term aim of our project, currently at proof-of-concept stage, is to overcome organisational, cultural and management barriers to adoption of digital technologies that are right for suppliers, makers and their customers. Relevant digital technologies include those identified in the Made Smarter Review and in British Standard PAS 1040 on Digital Readiness, including artificial intelligence, automation, robotics, virtual and augmented reality, industrial internet of things, data management and analytics.

These technologies are tried and tested, and existing support programmes are promoting their use. However our experience in working closely with smaller manufacturers and their suppliers and customers clearly demonstrates the range of barriers resulting in slow take-up of digital technologies by smaller companies in particular. These barriers include lack of awareness of how emerging technologies can help, perceived complexities and high costs in integrating digital with existing technologies, lack of management capacity to investigate the business case for adoption, lack of digital skills within the business, and simply not knowing where to start in a confused landscape of support programmes and vendors.

We are testing three approaches for supporting companies to overcome these barriers, to adopt the right digital technologies, and to accelerate productivity improvements. Our approaches are: (1) Webinar series; (2) Interactive face-to-face Workshops; (3) Online roundtable Forums. All three approaches will start with using the existing Digital Readiness Level Tool (<https://drl-tool.org>) and a comprehensive briefing to make sure that companies understand the relevance and opportunities afforded by digital technologies. The DRL-Tool is a secure online resource run by a not-for-profit Community Interest Company involving Digital Catapult, High Value Manufacturing Catapult, Knowledge Transfer Network, HSSMI and EDGE. All companies will have the opportunity to engage peer-to-peer and with the project team through a secure online community.

The underlying scope of each approach is similar, covering the core themes of leadership, technology and business value. Each approach is designed to address organisational, cultural and management barriers to digital adoption in different ways, each aiming to make it clear how the right digital technologies are essential for future success. Finally, all participating companies will receive recommendations for further support from qualified organisations, helping them to continue forward and make their planned productivity gains happen.

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| Participant organisation names | Project title | Proposed project costs | Proposed project grant |
|--|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| WINNING MOVES LIMITED | Digital Benchmark Index | £31,751 | £22,226 |
| Aston University | | £15,284 | £15,284 |
| Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield Combined Authority | | £18,000 | £0 |
| North East Local Enterprise Partnership | | £8,621 | £0 |
| THE GREATER BIRMINGHAM AND SOLIHULL LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP LIMITED | | £9,546 | £4,773 |

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Funders Panel Date: 19/06/2019

Project description - provided by applicants

Benchmarking has a long standing, positive reputation for driving improvement in a variety of areas. Globally it has year on year been recognised as the number one management tool utilised by businesses across the world. Its reputation is based on driving positive change in many areas, including productivity improvement.

For over two decades, this powerful approach has been harnessed in the Benchmark Index service that has benefitted many thousands of SMEs. It is this platform we will use to create a next generation benchmarking tool designed to encourage businesses towards technology adoption.

This will be achieved through a process that assists SMEs to measure their current position, compare how they stack up against others, and then create impactful action plans to integrate digital products and methodologies into their everyday operations.

Why is this a good thing? Independent research has shown that businesses embracing digital achieve significant productivity benefits. Examples of the tools adopted that make such a difference are Cloud based computing, CRMs, e-commerce, web based accounting software, and computer aided design.

This project focuses on 3 questions:

1. Can benchmarking motivate businesses to adopt new to firm digital technology?
2. Does demonstrating the potential benefit of digital adoption (e.g. impact on turnover per employee/profitability) increase adoption?
3. Does demonstrating the potential and tangible 'loss' (e.g. lost profitability, turnover growth etc) of not keeping pace with peers motivate the adoption of digital technology?

Our approach to finding answers will be to design and create a Digital Benchmark Index. This will be founded on contemporary research, but will be shaped to be jargon free and user friendly. It will help participants to understand best practice, find out what financial gains they could make from adopting technology, help them find suitable tools/solutions, and, most importantly, guide them how to do it.

Winning Moves is proud to be leading a stellar group of partners in this project. Aston University will provide academic and intellectual rigour. North East LEP, Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP and Sheffield City Region Growth Hub will identify 90 businesses to receive support. This will be delivered through their experienced business advisers who will look to ensure that businesses participating gain maximum benefit. This is essential as interventions should have a positive and long lasting effect. In addition, the data captured will help to inform the future roll out of this service so the approach can benefit many other SMEs.

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| Participant organisation names | Project title | Proposed project costs | Proposed project grant |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| TENSHI CONSULTING LTD | Design Thinking Training for SME's | £41,352 | £41,352 |
| COAST TO CAPITAL | | £0 | £0 |
| Imperial College London | | £17,722 | £17,722 |
| LLOYD'S REGISTER FOUNDATION | | £0 | £0 |

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Funders Panel Date: 19/06/2019

Project description - provided by applicants

Boosting Productivity is broadly about doing more with less, and nothing achieves this more sustainably and repeatedly like Design Thinking. And it doesn't mean becoming a designer, just learning to think like one. Harnessing design capability has been proven to be critical to improving productivity, innovation and performance indicators.

The Design Economy 2018 is the Design Council's report, and headline findings include:

\^ "More than two-fifths of survey respondents agreed that the use of design within their organisation has contributed to an increase in sales turnover, increased business competitiveness and increased awareness and recognition of the brand and/or raised brand loyalty

\^ ... When firms invest in design, they are more likely to invest in other intangible assets such as R&D and get them working in synergy to generate new innovations and create additional value

\^ ...When firms invest in design, they are more likely to generate innovations, resulting in improvements to levels of productivity."

Our project will explore, through both a small randomised pilot and qualitative research:

- * The challenges and requirements from the findings of previous Design Foundations SMEs tasked with a Design Thinking project
- * The best ways to engage mid/ low productivity SMEs in order to achieve adoption of programme content and the skills required to practice Design Thinking.
- * The potential challenges and appropriate evaluation and test methodology for a future funded statistically valid RCT.

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| Participant organisation names | Project title | Proposed project costs | Proposed project grant |
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| Sheffield Hallam University | Feasibility of 1-hour and 30-minute lifestyle behaviour change interventions designed to improve employee health and productivity in SME's | £47,897 | £47,897 |

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Project description - provided by applicants

Work-related ill health accounts for some 28 million working days lost a year in Great Britain (HSE, 2006). There is a larger impact than purely absence and this is the effect of presenteeism. This can be defined as 'health-related impairment in productivity while at work' or 'reduced productivity while at work' (Prasad et al, 2004). Presenteeism due to workers' being in work and ill can cut individual productivity by one third or more (CIPD's guide for SME's sickness absence). SME's in particular suffer greater negative effects on their productivity due to their size and it is therefore recognised that a healthy and well workforce will be more productive. UK workplaces are considered important settings for promoting wellbeing. A number of approaches have been implemented in an attempt to support employees in initiating positive lifestyle changes such as increasing physical activity, modifying diet and reducing smoking and excessive alcohol intake. However, many of these interventions focus on passive approaches such as information exchange and pay scant attention to the need for employee engagement toward both the initiation and maintenance of lifestyle behaviour changes. They also often fail to use interventions underpinned by scientific evidence and in managing relapses. Wellness programmes need to offer tailored interventions which support those ambivalent to change as well as action-orientated employees, which include baseline and follow-up conversations about change and assessments of their current health status.

The proposed project will be based on a successful workplace wellness programme already delivered by SHU through both NHS and medium sized private sector partners. These are evidence-based approaches underpinned by behaviour change theory delivered by trained practitioners. This approach allows for high quality monitoring and evaluation to ensure reporting of the impact of the intervention using validated and widely recognised measures including logic modelling. We want to test the feasibility of adapting this successful model to the SME sector in a sustainable and cost effective way.

The project will test our 1-hour lifestyle behaviour change intervention and a 30-minute streamlined version against an information only control group. Both interventions will be delivered using Motivational Interviewing (MI) techniques and will consist of baseline measurements with goal setting and strategies for self-monitoring, follow-up email support and a repeat follow-up session after 6-months. This person-centered, bespoke approach is widely accepted in health psychology literature to be effective in developing autonomous change. Ultimately this should have a lasting positive effect on productivity.

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Innovate UK

Results of Competition: Business Basics 2 - SME Productivity (Non-Business Led Trials)

Competition Code: 1901_CRD_BEIS_BB2_NBL

Total available funding is £1,652,309

Note: These proposals have succeeded in the assessment stage of this competition. All are subject to grant offer and conditions being met.

| Participant organisation names | Project title | Proposed project costs | Proposed project grant |
|--------------------------------|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| University of Cambridge | Developing management system to boost productivity via online and peer-to-peer learning among SMEs in manufacturing sectors. | £275,752 | £275,752 |
| TECH NATION GROUP LIMITED | | £73,836 | £73,836 |

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Funders Panel Date: 19/06/2019

Project description - provided by applicants

Despite their pivotal role to the economy, most SMEs suffer from low productivity. This problem is more pronounced in the manufacturing sector, where production tends to be more capital intensive and returns on the scales (i.e. economies of scale) is pivotal to achieve higher productivity and consequently profitability. One important determinant of productivity is the presence of management system in the companies. Management system defines the ways in which the CEO and other top management team (TMT) members organize their managerial work at the helm of the company. Lack of management system results in managerial inefficiencies and consequently lower productivity. The TMT of SMEs are usually small and poorly specialized with ill-defined division of tasks. Often, there is a single person or small team involved in all decisions from daily operations to corporate strategies. As top managers have limited capacity and attention that must be spread across a vast range of tasks, they are more susceptible to lengthier decision-making process and poorer decisions, which all could have been avoided at the presence of management system. The top managers of SMEs lack the skills to develop management systems and therefore managerial training is the first step to overcome the managerial inefficiencies and improve the productivity. Unfortunately, the available traditional managerial training programmes are often expensive and require physical proximity to the premises of the educational institutes. This situation creates a hurdle for many top managers of SMEs to access to these programmes, particularly those operating in manufacturing sectors that are naturally located in areas with lower availability of such programmes. Thus, this project explores the efficacy of digital training, as an alternative solution, for the top managers of SMEs to improve their skills, and to develop management system in their companies to elevate the productivity. The digital training in this project is a free three-month programme which provides digital contents, online mentorship, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities about management systems to a population of randomly selected SMEs operating in manufacturing sectors in the UK. This trail allows to examine the scalability of managerial digital training as an alternative solution to improve the capability of top managers of SMEs to adopt best business practices to boot their companies' productivity.

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Innovate UK

Results of Competition: Business Basics 2 - SME Productivity (Non-Business Led Trials)

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| Participant organisation names | Project title | Proposed project costs | Proposed project grant |
|---|---|------------------------|------------------------|
| THE CHARTERED ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS SCHOOLS | Small Business Charter schools - Driving Productivity in Micro-businesses | £605,403 | £399,566 |

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Project description - provided by applicants

Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) lead a consortium of 16 Business Schools, who all hold the Small Business Charter, to conduct a trial designed to improve productivity in micro-businesses. This national trial will include a range of regions (London and the South East; East and West Midlands; South Yorkshire; Greater Manchester and the North East) and a diverse set of business owners within the general population of micro-businesses (e.g., non-UK-born entrepreneurs, ethnic minority entrepreneurs, women-led businesses).

The RCT trial is aimed at 800 micro-businesses employing between 1 and 9 persons that have been trading for at least 3 years that may not have formalised systems for innovating, developing and improving management practices and employee engagement as well as low levels of adoption of digital and new technologies.

The underlying theory of change for this trial is that the learning, knowledge transfer, and 'consciousness-raising' within the micro-business that is initiated from a Business School intervention (peer-to-peer workshops and individual mentoring by Entrepreneurs in Residence) can address the limiting deficits with the operating behaviour of the firms. As a result, this is anticipated to lead to rapid behavioural change, the adoption of digital and new technologies and effective management practices, and hence an uplift of productivity.

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Innovate UK

Results of Competition: Business Basics 2 - SME Productivity (Non-Business Led Trials)

Competition Code: 1901_CRD_BEIS_BB2_NBL

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| Participant organisation names | Project title | Proposed project costs | Proposed project grant |
|--------------------------------|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| BCP Council | Scalable Cyber Interventions Accelerating Productivity Practice for SMEs | £223,077 | £223,077 |

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Funders Panel Date: 19/06/2019

Project description - provided by applicants

Micro, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are a vital part of the UK economy, but the share of high-productivity UK SMEs remains substantially lower than other G8 countries. There is growing evidence that a barrier to SME productivity is poor data management and lack of cyber security awareness. This programme will address the organisational behaviours that create these challenges.

BCP Council, in partnership with Dorset Cyber Alliance (DCA), proposes the 'Scalable Cyber Interventions Accelerating Productivity Practice for SMEs' programme (SCI>APPS). This trial of prototype SCI>APPS products and services will identify and measure the impact on the productivity of Dorset's SMEs through better digital management and cyber security accreditation. This trial will run from July 2019 to June 2020.

SCI>APPS is an integrated training and self-support programme building on the four recently completed Proof of Concept studies in Dorset. The studies proved that SMEs' growth and productivity can suffer directly from poor digital data management and careless cyber security behaviour. Furthermore, evidence shows that SMEs are unlikely to win new business contracts that increasingly require national security and data management accreditation. Conversely, those that have good practices through a combination of new contracts, compliance certification and organisational behaviour change increase productivity.

This SCI>APPS trial will ascertain the best way to teach SMEs, who are often time-poor and assume their growth is not really linked to cyber and data compliance, the benefits of better digital management and cyber security awareness and accreditation. SCI>APPS is two effective and scalable behavioural change interventions which can be delivered flexibly:

- * Intervention 1 - Cyber and data management webinars and 'nudge' tool
- * Intervention 2 - The Accreditation Challenge Game online + phone app + 5 minute video case studies

In the research trial a baseline control group will be set up providing SMEs with only basic information on data management and cyber security (no interventions).

SCI>APPS will engage with 300 micro/small businesses across Dorset's Creative and Digital and Engineering and Manufacturing sectors - Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership key sectors.

The Evaluation Plan will appraise the number of SMEs that adopt better data management and become cyber essential accredited (and associated increased productivity) as a direct result of each of the two interventions. Once proven, SCI>APPS could effectively be scaled up nationally.

DCA will help oversee the programme. DCA is a consortium of large and small businesses working with Dorset Police, Bournemouth University, Local Authorities and DLEP.

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Results of Competition: Business Basics 2 - SME Productivity (Non-Business Led Trials)

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| Participant organisation names | Project title | Proposed project costs | Proposed project grant |
|--------------------------------|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| Devon County Council | Engaging Rural Micros for increased productivity Trial | £399,957 | £399,957 |

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Project description - provided by applicants

This trial aims to stimulate 'growth mindsets' with traditionally 'hard to engage' rural micros using a supportive approach to overcome their tendencies towards stagnation and overworking, and increase time working on the business rather than in the business. The focus will be on 'productivity for a purpose' rather than productivity for its own sake. We will evaluate subsequent increase in adoption of new practices and technologies and ultimately, productivity.

This is the second stage of our research; the first stage asked businesses what they felt are their barriers to engagement and how future business support programmes could overcome these and encourage engagement. This trial uses the information gathered to design and test different methods of engagement and explores the best methods of encouraging rural micro businesses to adopt modern technologies and business practices.

The trial is based on two research questions:

∨ What are the most effective methods of engagement with rural micro businesses in Devon?

∨ What is the most appropriate method to increase adoption of existing technologies and business practices to boost levels of productivity among rural micro businesses?

Additional questions to explore in this study include 'why' these methods are effective, and whether subsequent benefits result.

Micro businesses and sole traders (less than 10 employees) make up 90.1 % of Devon's rural economy (excluding Exeter). Evidence shows they are hard to engage and need a more basic level of 'person-centred' support to increase productivity via adoption of modern technology and management practices. Helping these businesses to embrace new technologies and modern ways of working by supporting the person, could have a significant impact on our rural economy as well as mental health and wellbeing. This Trial will identify how this can best be achieved, and how future Business Support Programmes can be designed to engage and support rural micro businesses.

The Trial will be based in settlements with a population < 10,000 across Devon and the Exmoor and Blackdown Hills areas of Somerset, in four overrepresented sectors: Tourism; Health and Social Care; Trades; and Manufacturers.

Outcomes of this research include a robust, evidence based academic evaluation that will scientifically measure the success of the interventions and methods. This intelligence will be utilised by existing and future Business Support Programmes to design effective rural micro engagement and support. If interventions are successful, the resulting micro growth mindset could stimulate future support uptake and be scaled-up.

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| Participant organisation names | Project title | Proposed project costs | Proposed project grant |
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| Northumbria University | Optimising Trusted Advisor Accountants to Drive Digital Adoption | £261,586 | £261,586 |
| SAGE (UK) LTD | | £18,534 | £18,534 |

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There is a growing appreciation for the use of technology in UK SMEs to remain competitive. This is evident from the recent CBI report *"From Ostrich to Magpie"* that claims improving UK companies' adoption of existing technologies offers a unique opportunity to raise SMEs business productivity. The report highlights improving management best practice, innovation and diffusion, acknowledging the need for businesses to learn and apply new knowledge.

Given that 75% of SMEs use an external accountant (ICAEW, 2014), a programme which Optimising Trusted Advisor Accountants to Drive Digital Adoption (OTAADDA) could reach a high proportion of SMEs through existing channels. The accreditation bodies, as well as large firms, such as Sage (UK) Ltd are a route to engage, recruit, train and interact with a large proportion of accountants.

This is a non-business led trial designed by academics at Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University, in collaboration with Sage (UK) Ltd. Northumbria has developed the project infrastructure, will manage and drive the research and co-ordinate the dissemination of findings.

****The Project****

The project will focus on the provision of an intervention for accountants to better equip them to provide knowledge, skills support and confidence to their SME customers so that SMEs feel better able to harness the benefits of digital technology across several specific applications.

We will use a randomised controlled trial (RCT) to compare different intensities of advice provided by accountants to SMEs (as well as no advice at all: to the control group). Using mixed methods we will evaluate statistical measures of changes in productivity, as well as conducting a realist evaluation of how the transfer of knowledge to SMEs is diffused to drive digital adoption.

Sage (UK) Ltd will recruit N=400 accountants (not just those that use Sage products) who will in turn will identify n=1200 SMEs to participate in the trial. Both accountants and SMEs will be recruited from across the UK. We will focus on micro and small SMEs (that comprise 98% of the SME population) across different industry sectors, including manufacturing and services. This trial will demonstrate the optimal intensity and type of intervention for digital adoption to boost productivity with SMEs, and subject to roll-out, broader UK Plc.

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Innovate UK

Results of Competition: Business Basics 2 - SME Productivity (Business Led Trials)

Competition Code: 1901_CRD_BEIS_BB2_BL

Total available funding is £314,851

Note: These proposals have succeeded in the assessment stage of this competition. All are subject to grant offer and conditions being met.

| Participant organisation names | Project title | Proposed project costs | Proposed project grant |
|--------------------------------------|---|------------------------|------------------------|
| NOTION LIMITED | Adopting Operational Coaching as a Management Style to Drive SME Productivity | £472,731 | £212,729 |
| GROWTH HUB BUSINESS SOLUTIONS LTD | | £31,603 | £22,122 |
| London School of Economics & Pol Sci | | £79,999 | £79,999 |

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Funders Panel Date: 19/06/2019

Project description - provided by applicants

Notion, a business coaching consultancy, has partnered with Coventry and Warwickshire LEP (CWLEP) and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) to trial the use of a virtual blended learning programme as a means to increase the adoption and effectiveness of Operational Coaching as a management practice in SMEs to drive team engagement and increase firm-level productivity and commercial performance.

'Coaching' is a widely-accepted method for improving performance and productivity. As opposed to traditional coaching interventions that often only reach the top 5% of the organisation via Executive Coaching programmes for senior managers, Operational Coaching practices are those that are used throughout the working day at any given moment.

To leverage the productivity and performance benefits that coaching can deliver across the whole organisation, many large, corporate businesses have made Operational Coaching part of their wider change journey. By practising Operational Coaching, they have adopted an approach to leadership and management that is 'enquiry-led', rather than 'command and control' and used 'in the moment', rather than being confined to a performance review setting. This has been proven to unlock performance and productivity benefits for many large organisations.

This project will conduct a randomised control trial of the introduction of Operational Coaching practices into SMEs in the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) region by equipping managers and leaders within SMEs with Operational Coaching skills via the delivery of a blended learning programme, STAR(r) Manager. The evidence collected will establish whether the use of Operational Coaching practices in SMEs can impact positively on firm-level performance and productivity in the same way as it has been proven to in larger organisations.

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