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Accountants invited to receive free digital tech training and advice, in Sage and Northumbria University joint venture

Northumbria University, Newcastle, and Sage welcome accountants across England to take part in a free training and advice course in digital skills. The training will arm accountants with better knowledge of digital technology that can drive SME productivity, and in turn economic growth.

There remains a significant challenge in the UK economy to help more SMEs embrace the digital tools needed for them to be successful. Sage research shows that UK SMEs lost 5.6% of their business time to admin, a productivity

loss of £40 billion in the last 12 months alone, an increase of 0.9% compared to the year before.

SMEs are still burdened by paper-based admin and currently spend an average of 120 days a year on admin. However 50% of UK businesses currently use, or intend to use technology for admin functions by 2022, meaning greater commitment is required to remove the obstacles that prevent companies from accessing digital tools and skills. As a trusted advisor to SMEs, accountants are perfectly placed to help drive SME digital adoption, and this government-backed project will be a trial to demonstrate this unique relationship.

Academics from Northumbria's Newcastle Business School will work from October 2019 with experts at Sage over the next 12 months to undertake the trial, which will include 400 accountants and their SME clients across England. The training, which will be delivered face-to-face in several city locations for four hours, will arm accountants with better digital skills in app advisory, business data analytics, CRM and include free materials to share with their clients.

Claire Bennison, Head of ACCA UK concludes: 'We're pleased to be partnering with Northumbria University and Sage as the end results should offer valuable insights on how SMEs can be better supported for national and international success. Accountants are a crucial business partner to SMEs, helping them to grow their business and better understand the environment in which they operate, which is increasingly reliant on digital technologies. This project is surely a win-win for all involved.'

Dr Matt Sutherland, Senior Lecturer at Northumbria's Newcastle Business School, believes receiving the funding is significant. He said: "Together with Sage we were one of only six applications from over 170 to be successful. It reflects the quality of the University's research and the leading position Sage holds in the accountancy software market – and it represents an exciting opportunity for accountants and accountancy firms to work with us on a high-profile project. Deploying digital technologies can boost productivity considerably, but many SMEs are failing to harness the potential and are being held back. As trusted advisors to SMEs, accountants could be powerful advocates for digitisation, and through this trial and evaluation we will be able to demonstrate just how effective this could be.

“Newcastle Business School already has record of successful collaboration with Sage, and we are confident this latest project will open up further opportunities to deepen the partnership even further.”

Sabby Gill, MD for Sage UK & Ireland said: “As small businesses scale up, hire more staff and contribute further to the economy, even greater value can be unlocked by digitising business admin. The technology that currently has the highest productivity and value-add to businesses is now increasingly cloud and service based. As the role of the accountant continues to expand, we envisage the training will help accountants strengthen their counsel to clients and demonstrate the opportunities that digital technologies bring.”

This is a limited opportunity and is on a first come first served basis. All accountants must include five SME clients as part of the trial.

You can find out more information on the project and register at the Northumbria University [website](#).

This is a study, which means that if an accountant participates they will be allocated into one of 3 groups with different types of training (and a group with no training) so that we can test the effectiveness of each type of training.

Participants will be given a survey every quarter, which will include a request to supply quarterly productivity data for 3 SME clients.

The study will run for 12 months

Once the optimal training has been identified, all participants will have the option to receive that training.

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