



Celebrating 10 years of empowering small business success



Preface

Lord Karan Bilimoria of Chelsea, CBE, DL, Patron, Small Business Charter



Small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy, with the power to positively transform society through wealth creation and innovation.

They are run by people looking to make a difference in the world around them - whether that's providing services to their local economies or creating game-changing products for a global market.

As your business grows, you realise you're not only striving to sell your product or service, but also to be the best at how you do it.

This is the point where the Small Business Charter can help.

The Small Business Charter is an accreditation celebrating world-class business schools across the UK and Ireland. It revolves around three core pillars: the support for small businesses, student entrepreneurship, and local economic development.

Introduced in 2014 as a way to address the UK's long-standing productivity gap, it was developed by the late Lord David Young, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and the Chartered Association of Business Schools.

The Small Business Charter has become a signpost for entrepreneurs, small businesses, and other local economic stakeholders. It connects them to business schools in their region with the expertise to help them thrive.

Driving growth across UK and Ireland

Today the Small Business Charter is recognised on all sides of the political spectrum and by the business community for its world-class expertise in business support, underpinned by academic rigour, and its ability to connect business schools, government and SMEs.

In 10 years it has delivered various government programmes including Leading to Grow, the Small Business Leadership Programme and the Help to Grow: Management Course.

This report charts the progress of the Small Business Charter, illustrating the broad scope of its work and the impact it is having on the UK's thriving business economy today.

To have the chance to learn from experts, be inspired by fellow entrepreneurs and give the next generation of business leaders the value of your experience is a virtuous circle for every part of society. The Small Business Charter was a bold strategy that will continue to reap rewards in the decades to come.

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Lord Karan Bilimoria of Chelsea, CBE, DL

Foreword

Michael Hayman MBE DL, Chair, Small Business Charter



When I started my own business almost 15 years ago, the playbook for growth was the one we developed along the way, through trial, error and determination.

From day one, I looked for ways to learn. And I soon realised there were many other business owners searching, just like me.

Since then, the Small Business Charter and our network of accredited business schools have developed a unique role in quenching founders' thirst. We work with thousands of SMEs to take the best of that 'can do', learn-on-the-job spirit and combine it with the depth of knowledge and expertise in our business schools, to prepare our economy for a new entrepreneurial age.

To mark our 10th anniversary, the Small Business Charter is adopting a new mission statement: *empowering small business success through our network of expert business schools.*

This encapsulates the work we do now, the work we will do into the future, and the values we are known for – expert, connected and trusted.

I am truly privileged to see these values in action in my role at the Small Business Charter. It gives me the chance to visit our highly respected, accredited business schools, and witness the positivity and passion among their cohorts, as they take exponential strides forward.

We have proven the Small Business Charter has the power to impact thousands of small businesses. So, where next?

The seeds we have planted over the past decade are set to flourish, in the bright, bracing conditions of this new entrepreneurial age. The Small Business Charter has a critical role to play, because it is tailor-made to support the largest proportion of businesses in the UK.

With the right structures and strategies in place, the opportunity is there to utilise our connectivity with SMEs and local economies to produce the next generation of high-performance firms. The knowledge and expertise in our business schools can supercharge this – whether it's about AI, sustainability or tomorrow's leaders.

We are beacons of the UK's entrepreneurial ecosystem, empowering the leaders of an enterprise economy that will be pivotal to the growth ambitions of our whole country, through the next decade and beyond.

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Michael Hayman MBE DL

A decade of empowering small business success

The Small Business Charter has become the key organisation to connect SMEs, government, and world-class business schools over the past decade.

The impact of this can be seen on many levels.



Embracing cloud-based technology

COMPANY: Hyble

LOCATION: Edinburgh

Since attending Strathclyde Business School's Growth Advantage Programme, Hyble CEO **Craig Letton has led the martech firm through two rounds of investment, securing a total of £5.1m** from growth capital investment group BGF. This is helping the business to capitalise on recent launches and wins in new sectors and territories.

Supplying cloud-based design and print services to the drinks and hospitality industry, the company operates in over 50 countries and is trusted by some of the world's largest brands to deliver high impact, customisable point of sale materials that maintain brand integrity and reduce waste. The new investment is a significant milestone for the established family business on its transformation journey from traditional print services to cloud-based innovator.

A toolkit for transformation

COMPANY: Roller Girl Gang

LOCATION: Leeds

Founder Melissa Blackwood joined the Help to Grow: Management Course at Leeds Business School to help take her roller-skating business to the next level. After completing the course, **Melissa saw turnover increase by 74% and reshaped the company to give her employees more responsibility.** She also hired six part-time employees, enabling her to focus on growing the business.

By expanding her leadership skills and supporting growth, Melissa's company has since achieved a major goal – securing funding and finding space for a dedicated Skate Sanctuary to support the city's growing community of customers.





Putting processes in place

COMPANY: **MacMartin**

LOCATION: **Derby**

Sisters Claire MacDonald and Anna Hutton combined their expertise in behavioural science and creative marketing to start branding and marketing agency MacMartin.

The company grew rapidly over a period of 12 months, which left the two directors feeling they were no longer involved in every part of every project.

Claire joined Help to Grow: Management course at Derby Business School to learn how to establish processes to ensure quality and accountability.

Since completing the course, turnover has tripled, and headcount grown by 60%.



We now know exactly where we need to be before employing more staff and how much capacity we need to hit our financial targets.



Claire MacDonald, Managing Director, MacMartin

Turning learning into opportunity

COMPANY: **Breakspeare Energy**

LOCATION: **Loughborough**

Economics student **Fin Dearsly** launched and ran a **£3m turnover company** as part of **Loughborough University Business School's Year in Enterprise** scheme. The scheme operates as an alternative to a more traditional study abroad or industry work placement on a typical degree.

Students apply for a place with a business idea and, if selected, are given full support from the business school to turn their ideas into reality.

Breakspeare set out to improve the energy efficiency of UK housing by installing solutions which are part- or fully-funded by a government scheme.

At its peak, the business employed 15 people, and was completing around 50 installations per week.



Celebrating excellence in supporting small businesses

The Small Business Charter empowers small businesses through its accredited network of expert business schools.

Their expertise is underpinned by academic research and insight on business and management.



A cutting-edge platform for east London fashion from London College of Fashion's Fashion Business School

The Fashion Business School used technology, business and education to nurture new talent, create a network of affordable workspaces, support business and job growth, and showcase innovative new products at its Fashion District initiative in east London.

With a mission to build a global identity for east London fashion and its SMEs, the Fashion District has since kickstarted a number of spin-off initiatives.

A taste of entrepreneurial life from Dublin City University Business School

Proving that entrepreneurialism is a skill that can be learnt is the idea behind Dublin City University Business School's Learning Innovation for Enterprise (LIFE) module.

Every undergraduate student takes the module in their first year to learn the A-Z of business in all its forms.

Course attendees come away with practical insights and skills to help them prepare for a rapidly-changing workplace.





Diversifying business support in Birmingham from Aston Business School

With Birmingham being one of the most multicultural cities in the UK, Aston Business School is focused on reaching as many stakeholders as possible within its diverse local entrepreneur community.

The school is helping its local businesses increase the contribution of ethnic minority companies to the UK economy from £25 billion to £100 billion.

Core to this mission is the school's own Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship, offering access to growth programmes like the Help to Grow: Management Course and other practical business support for entrepreneurs, SMEs, business leaders, and students across the community.

Helping SMEs combat global climate change at Cranfield School of Management

The School of Management is leading a university-wide, three-stage funding funnel programme supporting SMEs that are positively impacting the global climate through technological innovation. In collaboration with Green Future Investments, the programme ranges from grants for test concepts, through to seed funding for more developed businesses seeking investment to grow.

Examples across the programme include Petit Pli, which observed a productivity increase and 10x reduction in energy usage in its garment manufacture, and Patrick Verdin from Cranfield University with a novel blade design for a vertical axis wind turbine designed to improve performance in low wind urban areas. The new design contributed to an 18% efficiency compared to a standard design.



Small Business Charter SME programmes

The Small Business Charter and our accredited business schools have a history of collaborating with government to deliver nationwide flagship growth programmes to thousands of SME businesses, which address critical factors facing small businesses – productivity and leadership development.

HELP TO GROW. MANAGEMENT COURSE

The UK has a long-standing productivity gap compared to other G7 countries, and since nine out of ten private UK businesses are SMEs, this affects most of the UK's economy. Studies show that low productivity can be driven by poor leadership and slow adoption of modern business practices.

The Help to Grow: Management Course tackles this issue on two fronts:

- develops the leadership capabilities required to stimulate growth and productivity;
- creates a culture of SME investment in management training.

Each participant is funded by a 90% government subsidy and provided with a toolkit of practical learning.

To March 2024 more than 9,140 business leaders have enrolled on the 12-week course at accredited business schools across the UK.

Nine out of ten business leaders have reported positive improvements in their capabilities.

A shorter online introductory version of the course for microbusinesses and start-ups, Help to Grow: Management Essentials, launched in 2024.

What participants said:

93%

reported greater confidence in leading and managing their business

90%

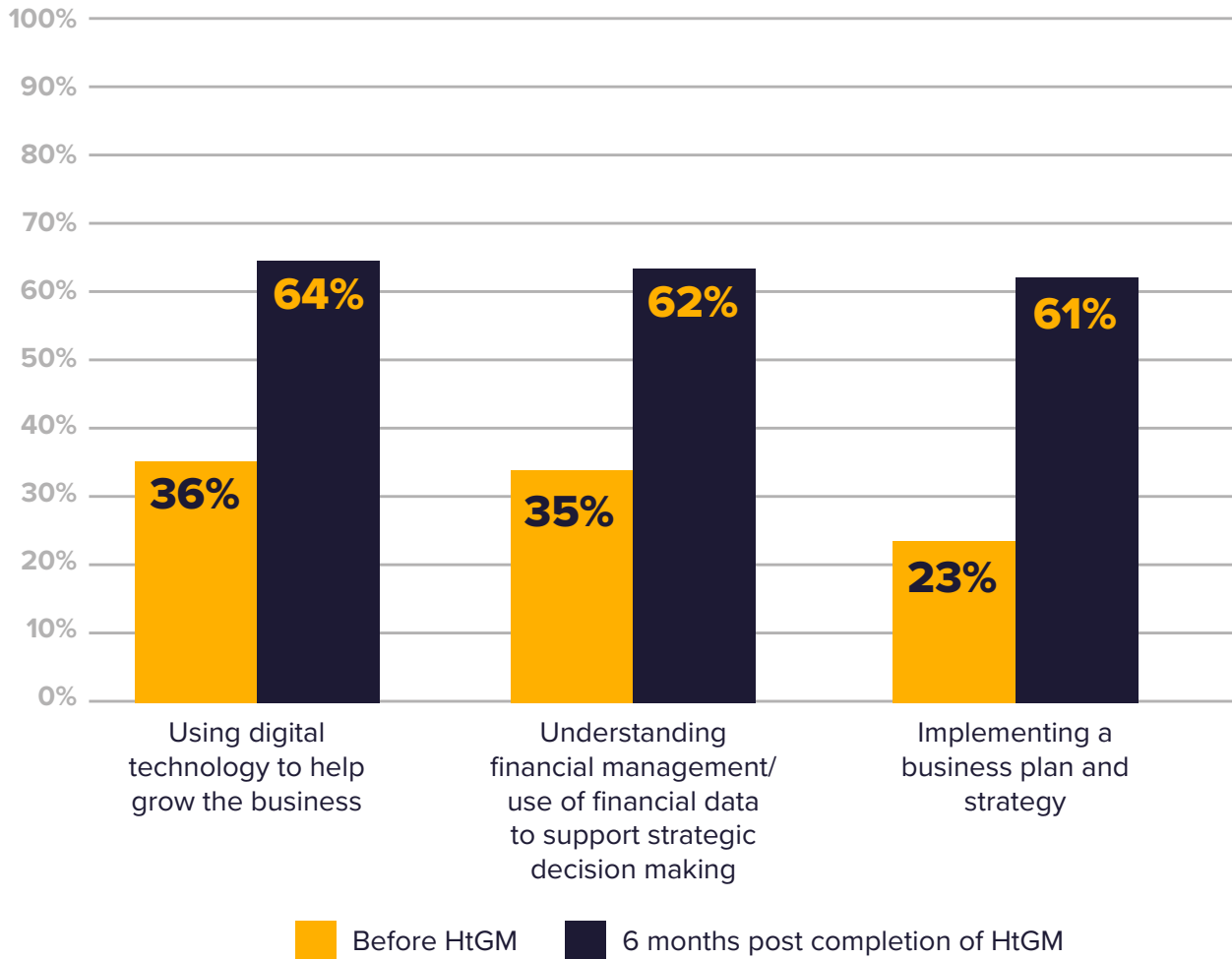
shared what they had learned or gained from participating in the programme with others in their business

85%

were better able to innovate within their business



How business leaders rated their capabilities before and after attending the course.



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The course has allowed me to identify where improvements are needed in our operational efficiencies, and how to put plans in place to streamline processes and add value through digital adoption.

” **Nil Chohan**, Director, Instinct Hardware, Birmingham



Small Business Charter SME programmes



**SMALL
BUSINESS
LEADERSHIP
PROGRAMME**

Launched in 2020, the Small Business Leadership Programme was a business support programme available to SME leaders in England.

The course was delivered through SBC's network of accredited business schools and adapted to help businesses build resilience during and after the pandemic.

In a six-month period, 86% of the 3,000 participants who took part said their businesses took action to target longer-term benefits in productivity and/or business growth.

The scheme was a lifeline to many businesses during the pandemic period with nearly half of participants (44%) reporting at least a partial link between the course and their business's ability to survive the pandemic.

Actions taken by SME participants:*

38%

made strategic changes

28%

recruited new staff

27%

changed their personnel and approach to human resources

21%

invested in technology or acquired new software

18%

diversified their customer base or the products and services they offer



Participating firms were **48%** more likely to have seen growth in its total number of employees compared to a control group of SMEs.*

*Government evaluation 6 months post-completion

Our accredited business schools

At the heart of the Small Business Charter's success is our trusted network of accredited business schools.

These are best-in-class institutions which are hubs of innovation, productivity and growth in their communities.

There are 67 centres of excellence, each of them connected to their local SME networks in every region across the UK and Ireland.

Every accredited member undergoes a rigorous assessment to determine the effectiveness of their business support, entrepreneurship education, and engagement with its local economy.



A doorway to knowledge

For many SMEs and entrepreneurs, their local business school is a doorway to vital knowledge and learning.

The schools provide quality business support such as executive education, knowledge transfer partnerships, R&D collaboration, Master's programmes, short courses and apprenticeships.

In return, SMEs create opportunities for graduates and bring a valuable slice of life to the classroom – real-world examples of business challenges for students to experience and grapple with.

This extensive connectivity and knowledge of the local economy means the business schools are engines in their regional economies, promoting business relationships, innovation, employment opportunities and new markets.



**SMALL
BUSINESS
CHARTER**

10 YEARS
of empowering
small business
success

Find out more about our work: smallbusinesscharter.org

