



**RESPONSIBLE
SMP
PACEMAKERS**

Small and medium-sized accounting practices (SMPs) are a powerful force for public and social good. In their support for the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector they are helping this vital part of the economy operate more effectively, powering economic growth, employment and individual prosperity.

But they also play a huge part in supporting individuals and organisations in their local communities: promoting financial literacy and social cohesion, reaching out to schools and colleges, supporting charities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and offering employment and training to underrepresented groups.

SMPs' vital role supporting small businesses reconfirmed in COVID-19 crisis

The COVID-19 crisis has brought to light the vital role SMP accountants play in supporting SMEs. When the crisis hit, SMPs became the emergency service for their clients. But as well as working tirelessly to help them weather the immediate storm, SMPs have been able to demonstrate to their clients their value as advisers, and help them to build businesses that are sustainable for the long term.

SMEs and SMPs now have a mutual realisation not just of the value that SMPs bring to the SME sector but of the enormous potential that is still to be unlocked. SMPs provide the link between the SME sector and the ecosystem that they have to navigate: government, regulators and banks, and play a key role not just in guiding SME clients to the support they need but also in articulating their needs to these diverse stakeholders.

Supporting the charity and NGO sector

Like many other organisations, SMPs make donations, fund-raise and volunteer for charities. But their biggest contribution is as accountants and business advisers: not just producing accounts pro bono but also serving on boards and promoting good governance, financial accountability and best practice. This work also serves as a powerful development tool for accountancy leaders and their staff.

Promoting the accountancy profession

SMP leaders spend a lot of time working with schools and colleges to promote accountancy as a progressive and rewarding profession and back this up by offering training and apprenticeship opportunities, often to underprivileged or excluded groups. In doing so they are creating genuinely diverse practices, with a clear sense of mission and values.

Financial inclusion and financial literacy

SMPs play a valuable role in fostering financial literacy among both individuals and organisations in their communities, promoting both entrepreneurship and personal responsibility. The adoption of digital technologies, in particular, is leading to a new era of engagement between SMP accountants and their clients, and enhanced financial competence among small business owners.

Social inclusion

One way that SMP accountants have helped make their practices more inclusive is by using digital technology to promote flexible working practices and better work-life balance, opening the profession to both young people and returnees by offering internships and part-time roles.

Remote working and flexible hours were well established in SMP accountancy even before the COVID-19 crisis and make it possible for people to combine a career in accountancy with family life, or to overcome mobility issues. Many SMP accountants are also experimenting with different ownership models, paving the way for employees to gain equity in their firms.

Sustainability and ethics

As 'sustainability trailblazers', SMP accountants are playing a leading role in transforming the SME universe into one of robust businesses behaving ethically and responsibly. As trusted advisers they can guide clients through the maze of emerging reporting frameworks, carbon accounting, and waste reduction schemes and help them become both economically and environmentally sustainable.

Call to arms

Many SMPs are already making huge contributions, whether of money, time or expertise. But there is more to be done, and clients' and employees' expectations will continue to grow.

SMPs can live up to those expectations and express their values through their recruitment and employment policies, adopting and encouraging environmental responsibility, engaging with schools and universities and supporting charities and their local communities.

What is in it for the SMPs?

- ✓ Strengthening the SMP client brand and expanding the client base
- ✓ Supporting the recruitment brand – candidates are increasingly looking for purposeful careers
- ✓ Developing talent and acquiring new skills through community work.

