



SPECIAL ISSUE: *Business Support for Entrepreneurs and Small Firms: Access, Design, and Impacts.*

Guest editors:

Gary Chapman, University of Nottingham, gary.chapman@nottingham.ac.uk

Robert Wapshott, University of Nottingham, robert.wapshott@nottingham.ac.uk

Annalisa Caloffi, University of Florence, annalisa.caloffi@unifi.it

Hanna Hottenrott, Technical University of Munich & ZEW, hanna.hottenrott@tum.de

Oliver Mallett, University of Stirling, oliver.mallett@stir.ac.uk

Introduction Background and Focus of the Special Issue:

In supporting small firms to innovate, grow and succeed, governments – and other actors – around the globe have long provided a range of business support (Chapman and Hottenrott, 2024; Mallett and Wapshott, 2020; Jurado and Battisti, 2019). The support on offer is wide-ranging and multi-faceted, including access to finance (Cowling and Dvouletý, 2023), innovation subsidies and grants (Caloffi et al., 2022; Chapman and Hewitt-Dundas, 2018; Hottenrott and Richstein, 2020) and a range of business advice services (Antcliff et al. 2021; Arshed et al., 2021; Bennett and Robson, 1999). The actors providing the support are increasingly wide-ranging (Hunt and Kiefer, 2017), including national, local, regional, and international government agencies, universities, large businesses, independent consultants, social enterprises and venture capitalists.

Despite the substantial public and private resources devoted to business support across the globe, important unanswered questions and long-standing concerns surrounding its *accessibility*, *design*, and *effectiveness* remain. For example, Hamilton et al., (2024) highlight that differences, on the basis of gender, persist in access to resources and networks. From a historical perspective, Mallett et al., (2024) illustrate the difficulties in implementing innovative solutions to design more effective and inclusive forms of support. More widely, scholars including Curran (2000) and Fotopoulos and Storey (2019) have questioned the overall effectiveness of support interventions.

For this special issue, we invite contributions that advance these ongoing and crucial debates surrounding the *accessibility*, *design*, and *effectiveness* of different types of business support for entrepreneurs and small firms. These debates include the centrality of business support to the context in which entrepreneurs operate and to prominent debates around research and development, productivity, place-based interventions, inclusivity and practitioner-oriented enterprise education. The audience will include researchers in these areas but also policymakers -

and other actors – who are seeking to design, change and deliver more effective, inclusive and accessible business support.

Themes and Questions to be Addressed:

The special issue aims to advance understanding of the *accessibility, design and effectiveness of different types of business support*. An indicative list of questions that could be explored in the special issue may include:

Accessibility: Who accesses different forms of business support and who does not? For what reasons and with what implications for business support effectiveness? How does accessibility vary across the types of business support and actors involved in its provision? How can the accessibility of business support be improved?

Design: What business support is available and what forms does it take across a variety of contexts? How has business support developed over time, and with what implications for support provision today? How can governments and other actors design more inclusive, accessible and effective forms of business support? What factors inhibit the implementation of effective business support?

Effectiveness: How effective are different forms of business support for supporting smaller firms' growth, performance, behaviour, survival, innovation and other outcomes? Under what conditions are different forms of business support effective? How do the impacts vary when smaller firms receive multiple forms of business support simultaneously? How do the impacts vary across the different actors involved in the provision of different forms of business support?

Contributions could feature detailed quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods analyses of how different support interventions are associated with outcomes, detailed empirical or theoretical evaluations of programmes and lessons learned, fresh theoretical perspectives on the field, critical analyses of how practices may exclude, and more.

Key dates:

The deadline for submission of papers is June 27, 2025. The Special Issue is scheduled to be published in December 2026. Papers must be original and comply with ISBJ submission guidelines. Please refer <http://isb.sagepub.com/> for submission guidelines and a link to the on-line submission system. In the online system please ensure you submit your paper within Manuscript Type: "Special Issue: Business Support for Entrepreneurs and Small Firms: Access, Design, and Impacts".

Questions and informal enquiries should be directed to: **Dr. Robert Wapshott**
robert.wapshott@nottingham.ac.uk