



## ACS Submission – Government support for business inquiry

1. ACS (the Association of Convenience Stores) welcomes the opportunity to give evidence to the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee Inquiry on the Government support for businesses. ACS represents 33,500 local shops across the country including the Co-operative Group, Spar UK, Costcutter, Londis and thousands of independent retailers.
2. The convenience sector provides employment to around 386,000 people across the UK and remains a highly entrepreneurial sector with 75% of independent retailers as first time investors. Independent retailers work extensively long hours, with 23% working more than 70 hours per week and 20% taking no holiday per year<sup>1</sup>.
3. The value of the convenience sector is estimated at £37.4 billion, over a fifth of the total grocery market. Sales growth in the sector is predicted to continue at its current rate of 5.2%. The convenience sector is predominately made up of independent and symbol group retailers, accounting for 59% of total sales<sup>2</sup>.
4. There is currently limited engagement with programmes offered to business by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which include the Regional Growth Fund, Funding for Lending, the Manufacturing Advisory Service and government support for exports, within the convenience store sector.
5. This apparent lack of engagement can be due to the focus and purpose of the scheme not being targeted at the small retail sector. There are issues with the structures through which awareness and access to government support can seem incredibly complicated and remote. At local level Local Enterprise Partnerships are not proving to be effective ways to engage smallest businesses in government support either.
6. Above all there continue to be limitations to the way that the availability of support is communicated especially to small businesses. If Government wishes to get financial support into the hands of a broad base of small businesses linked to investment then it needs to be packaged in a way that is easy to understand and the application process has to be simple.
7. ACS believes that the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee's inquiry should recognise one innovation on business support that is already having significant impact on business support. The expansion and extension of Primary Authority schemes, delivered alongside effective support provided by the Better Regulation Delivery Office is delivering significant cost savings for businesses.

<sup>1</sup> ACS Local Shop Report 2014

<sup>2</sup> ACS Local Shop Report 2014

8. ACS has launched its own Primary Authority scheme that is accessible to the smallest retail businesses. The ACS Assured Advice scheme provides advice on regulatory compliance that will specifically affect convenience store retailers. Through ACS small retailers have access to the same expertise and certainty previously only available to the biggest companies with expensive in-house compliance departments.
9. ACS provides a range of advice in a variety of areas. However only certain areas are assured, specifically trading standards, environmental health and fire safety. Currently our Assured Advice scheme includes: '*Preventing Underage Sales*'; '*Managing Health and Safety*'; '*Selling Fireworks*'; '*Tobacco Display Ban*'; '*Fair Trading and Pricing*'; '*Waste Management*'; '*Food Safety*'; '*Weights and Measurements*'.
10. The scheme has been made possible firstly by the change in the law approved by Parliament in November 2013, and through the efforts of the Better Regulation Delivery Office which has a team of advisers and experts helping private and public sector to establish and grow primary authority.
11. We urge the Committee to acknowledge this important innovation in business support and recommend that it continues to be a government priority for the long term.

**For more information on this submission please contact Julie Byers, Public Affairs Assistant – [Julie.Byers@acs.org.uk](mailto:Julie.Byers@acs.org.uk) or 01252533008.**