

[Press release: Government calls on technology firms to help tackle the UK's biggest challenges](#)

Today Minister for Implementation, Oliver Dowden, will announce the first round of competitions for tech specialists to tackle social challenges at the government's flagship digital conference, Sprint 18.

The competitions will be delivered using the £20m GovTech fund launched by the Prime Minister in November 2017.

Contributing to each of the government's [Grand Challenges](#) – the data economy; clean growth; healthy ageing and the future of mobility – the competition is designed to incentivise Britain's tech firms to come up with innovative solutions to improve public services.

The Government Digital Service is challenging tech experts to find solutions for specific issues including tackling loneliness and how to reduce plastic waste.

The first of these competitions opens on Monday 14 May and runs for six weeks, with the remaining competitions being launched in subsequent months.

Tech firms bidding to the fund will have free rein to create truly innovative fixes. Winning companies will be awarded up to £50,000 to develop their ideas.

The companies providing the best potential solutions will then be awarded research and development contracts of up to £500,000 to build prototypes. These solutions will then be available to the public sector to purchase.

Minister for Implementation, Oliver Dowden, in the Cabinet Office said:

Our modern Industrial Strategy will cement Britain's position as a world-leader in digital innovation and this Government is committed to providing more opportunities for tech businesses – including small firms – to access public procurement contracts. The GovTech fund encourages firms to find innovative ways to fix the big social problems we all face – loneliness, plastic pollution and national security.

Through emerging technologies, this fund will elevate British companies onto a global market while helping to deliver outstanding public services and improving lives for people.

The first GovTech competition opens on Monday 14 May for six weeks – see more here. It will be overseen by a dedicated GovTech team which will operate at

the heart of Government and oversee the £20 million fund.

The GovTech assessment panel is made up of representatives from Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), The Government Digital Service (GDS), Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), HM Treasury, the Innovate UK (the UK's innovation agency), and the devolved Northern Ireland administration.

Sprint 18 will bring together digital and technology leaders to hear about the work taking place across the public sector to make government work better through the themes of Transformation, Collaboration and Innovation. Discussions will include how the UK is using its status as a world leader in digital government to help other countries, through the recently announced Global Digital Marketplace, and how departments are using Government as a Platform, which uses digital services to make government work better for citizens.

The challenges, which will all be launched in coming months, are:

Identifying terrorist still imagery (Home Office). Home Office research shows that more than two-thirds of terrorist propaganda disseminated online is still imagery. This project will support both Government analysis of, and broader efforts to remove, this harmful material.

Tracking waste through the waste chain, submitted by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). A new technological approach could help record, check and track waste, helping boost productivity, reduce costs, and protect both human health and the environment.

Tackling loneliness and rural isolation, submitted by Monmouthshire Council. The government recognises that rural transport is vital to local communities, and businesses. A technological solution, exploiting vehicles with spare capacity could support rural economies.

Cutting traffic congestion, submitted by Department for Transport (DfT). Greater collection and new analysis of data could help target interventions to cut congestion.

Local authorities have large numbers of council vehicles crossing their areas every day. If they can be equipped with innovative data capture systems, they could understand potholes, litter, recycling, parking, air quality and more in real-time, every day, for no added cost. This could mean reduced service delivery costs and better local services.

[Speech: Where credit's due: helping](#)

our creators and innovators export

Thank you, Mark.

And thank you all for coming here today.

I'm here because we, as a country, have a challenge. But it's a good challenge!

Yes, we've had 5 consecutive years of economic growth.

Yes, unemployment is at its lowest for 40 years.

Yes, exports increased 10% last year.

We exported well over £600 billion last year – on the latest figures, these small islands are the 4th largest exporters in the entire world, and the second-largest exporter of services.

So what's the challenge?

You see, when it comes to exports we punch above our weight.

But we punch below our potential.

We are a great trading nation. Exporting is one of our strengths.

If we want to sustain jobs and prosperity across the country we must play to our strengths.

But with exporting we're not playing at full strength.

Exports make up 30% of UK GDP, compared to 46% Germany.

Less than 10% of our businesses export. Now, not all those should – it's not the government's job to tell people what's best for their own business.

But so many more of them could.

If we could get those businesses selling internationally, imagine the difference it would make!

I've seen that difference myself: before I went into politics, I spent a decade in the publishing industry as CEO of the Financial Times Group and CFO of Pearson.

Publishing is one of the most export-driven industries in the UK.

And I can tell you first-hand – I found that exporting and operating internationally didn't just raise our profits and let us access new customers.

It also made us more competitive at home, letting us spread risk and achieve economies of scale, and exposing us to new ideas and practices from other countries.

That's backed by evidence – exporters are more profitable, more productive and more enduring.

So we need to get those non-exporters exporting – and get our existing exporters to sell more things to more markets.

If we do that, it will be a genuine step change for our economy.

And that's why our new Export Strategy will be so important.

It's not enough to just do more of what we're already doing.

We need to take a strategic look at our export support, starting from first principles; and we need to take an evidence-based approach, to allow us to solve our challenge.

That's what our Export Strategy is for.

Firstly, it will give us the rigorous analysis, so we know why we aren't exporting more, where our strengths and weaknesses lie, and where government intervention can make the most difference.

And secondly – it is a strategy. That might sound trivial, but it really is important – it allows us to look across the piece, to see the challenge, and solution, as a whole. That's the only way we'll get the step-change in exporting we need.

That means being strategic about how we work as a government, too.

Businesses shouldn't have to know how government works to get help from the government.

Most of you here today are from business – you wouldn't expect your customers to be familiar with your own internal structure. If your customers contact the wrong part of the business – you just redirect them.

Government shouldn't be any different. So one key principle of the Export Strategy will be a “no wrong door” policy – we will work better together as government, so we can work better with you, not the other way round.

It'll be joined up with the Industrial Strategy, and our drive for a more prosperous Britain – all targeted at creating the right environment and the best base for exporters.

And that leads us on to the second principle, which is that our Export Strategy must be business-led.

We need a strategy run for exporters. The government doesn't export. Businesses export. Our job is simply to facilitate you exporting – so our

export strategy must be designed around you.

It needs to be a strategy designed with exporters. We're using the Export Strategy is to give us the hard analysis and data to do that better.

We must focus on doing what only government can do – our USPs, if you like – rather than trying to replicate what business already does.

For example, the government has a role providing advice to exporters. But that should complement and not usurp the role of private-sector business advice services.

And the government has a role providing export finance – but that should complement the role of banks and insurers providing cashflow and managing risk.

And when the government does take action, we can work with and through the private sector. That's why, as of last year, SMEs can now get Export Finance directly from their bank.

We'll be publishing in the coming months, so let me give you a flavour.

We'll be focusing on key areas:

Firstly, we will inspire and catalyse companies to export.

Surveys suggest there's between three and four hundred thousand businesses who could export but aren't.

Many businesses that do export sell to just one market.

We need to persuade those businesses to look further afield, because people do want to buy British.

As a trade minister I regularly travel abroad – there is no question of the regard in which the UK is held. People are impressed by the quality of our goods and the professionalism of our services.

According to research by Barclays, 61% of people in China, for example, would actually pay more money for a product if it had a Union Jack on it – that's some reputation for quality.

This underpins our award-winning GREAT campaign, who advertise the benefits exporting can have for businesses across a range of sectors, from education to science to sport. To paraphrase: "if we can, you can".

And we will promote peer-to-peer learning, so potential exporters can learn from existing ones – as I said, this is about business first and foremost.

Secondly, it means supporting and guiding businesses to export.

Specific advice on our website.

Our network of regional trade advisers is already helping businesses across

the country to export; and our network of trade advisers in 108 countries across the world can help companies navigate local markets.

Thirdly, it means working with private providers, using the Connecting power of government to connect businesses with opportunities.

We are appointing 9 Trade Commissioners to promote trade.

But export finance is at the heart.

Almost 1/5th of businesses report concerns about finance or getting paid as being their main barrier to exporting.

And research shows that exporters that have access to trade finance have export volumes as much as 60% higher.

We start from a strong base here – and that's our best kept secret. As you'll have heard today, UK Export Finance has the capacity to provide over £50 billion worth of support, in over 60 currencies.

This year, UK Export Finance (UKEF) has been named best export credit agency by both the Global Trade Review and Trade Finance.

We whisper: but we need to shout!

To give some recent examples, UKEF is providing a 270 million Euro loan to support the construction by Colas UK of a new international airport in Kabaale, Uganda.

And UKEF is helping secure at least \$250 million of UK exports for two power projects in Iraq, running a supplier fair with lead contractors Enka UK and GE to source suppliers for their projects.

So it's clear that in UK Export Finance, the UK's exporters, or would-be exporters, have a truly world-class export credit agency at their disposal.

But we recognise that we have more to do. 75% of SMEs report that they don't know how to access trade finance – we clearly need to fix this.

So in last year's Autumn Budget the Chancellor allocated funding to enhance marketing of UKEF services, putting export finance at the heart of trade promotion.

And our new Export Strategy will do even more.

We will encourage these smaller businesses to access UKEF support directly from their banks, giving them fast access to government backing to grow their international business.

We will also capture the value of UKEF's highly successful supplier fairs, as a draw to international companies to deepen their investment and engagement with the UK supply chain.

We want to use this to make it easier for SMEs to export, by providing a

'safe' channel for them to find and bid for contracts on major international projects that are backed by UK Export Finance.

And we are conducting a full review of our product suite – to ensure we can provide the best possible support even as market conditions change.

Step-by-step, we are making sure companies can access the finance they need to sell abroad – so no viable project fails for lack of finance.

This is not a straightforward task – but it is one that, if addressed, will reap invaluable benefits.

Remember – the reason this government prioritises trade and exports isn't because we start from a low base.

It's precisely because we start from a high base – exports are 30% of our GDP.

That inevitably makes the challenge more difficult – but it also makes it a challenge worth undertaking.

That's what the Export Strategy is for.

I can promise you that export finance will be front and centre of our Export Strategy.

But that will only work if you as businesses are front and centre of the Strategy, and if you help in creating the export strategy you need.

That's my call to you today.

We want to build our Export Strategy with you; and together with you, we can build a nation of exporters.

Thank you.

Consultation outcome: Open access restriction at Lymington Yacht Haven (marina): consultation outcome

Updated: Link to consultation outcome added.

Natural England is seeking views on proposals that will restrict public access to open access land at this site.

Speech: Ensuring those who commit human rights abuses in Libya do not evade justice for their crimes

Madam President,

I thank the Prosecutor for her very clear and concise fifteenth report and her briefing to the Security Council today. The work and focus of the International Criminal Court on Libya is extremely important in tackling impunity and making accountable those responsible for serious crimes of international concern, and the Court's work has the full support of the United Kingdom.

The Prosecutor's latest report makes clear why the situation in Libya remains deeply troubling. The continued political divisions in Libya have only benefitted certain armed groups intent on criminality, groups which have created an environment of lawlessness, intimidation and fear. This situation underscores the urgent need to break the political deadlock and to bring peace to Libya and its people. It is vital that all parties engage in good faith with the United Nations-led political process.

Madam President,

We must ensure that those who have committed, and are still committing, human rights violations and abuses in Libya, including unlawful killings, do not evade justice for their crimes. The UK has strongly supported resolutions at the Human Rights Council aimed at increasing accountability, and we fully endorse the ICC's efforts in parallel. The UK also reiterates our call for all parties to cooperate with the ICC in relation to the arrest warrant for Mahmoud al-Werfalli, and for all those committing acts amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity to be investigated and held accountable, no matter which side they are on.

The current cycle of violence and impunity must be stopped.

The recent Mission by the Office of the Prosecutor to Libya is an important step, strengthening the focus of scrutiny on those who have acted with impunity. In this regard, we welcome the co-operation of UNSMIL and the Office of the Prosecutor-General in Tripoli with the visiting OTP Mission. We also welcome the Office of the Prosecutor's work with Member States, national authorities and judiciaries, interested European institutions and the Libyan Prosecutor-General's Office, following the reports of the appalling mistreatment – and even enslavement – of migrants, to investigate and prosecute these crimes. At the same time, we appreciate the resource constraints under which they are operating in relation to these investigations.

We are grateful for the Prosecutor's update on the cases against Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, Abdullah Al-Senussi and Al-Tuhamy Mohamed Khaled. We fully support the Court's call for cooperation from members of the Council, Libya and all states, on the individuals who remain at large for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Libya in 2011.

It is crucial that Member States and relevant international organisations work to assist the Libyan authorities in their efforts to build the rule of law in Libya. We, along with our international partners, will continue to work with Libya to provide it with the support it needs to meet the challenges it faces. At the same time, the United Kingdom, as a strong principled supporter of the ICC, will continue to provide our full support to the Prosecutor and her team.

I thank you Madam President.

[Speech: Launch of Beyond the Ice: UK policy towards the Arctic](#)

Good morning everyone and thank you for joining us for the launch of the new iteration of UK policy towards the Arctic.

I'm sure it will be an absolute best seller.

This country's long history of exploration and endeavour in the Polar Regions is the stuff of legends.

With any luck that means you will not mind if I say a few words about ['Beyond the Ice'](#).

All of us understand that the Arctic region is of fundamental importance, not only to the people who live and work there but also to the health of the planet.

It is now 20 years since the UK became one of four original observers to the newly formed Arctic Council.

We remain as committed as ever to the Arctic States and the indigenous peoples of the Arctic and to securing a sustainable future for them that benefits us all.

That is what this new Policy Framework is all about.

It is five years since the last one, and as we are all too well aware, a great deal has changed in the Arctic region in that time – most significantly, the unprecedented decline in sea-ice cover and thickness, and the steady rise in average temperatures.

These rapid changes have drawn greater attention to the Arctic – in ways that can present both opportunities and challenges.

The UK takes seriously our responsibility to ensure the security and stability of the region and to work collaboratively to address them.

In 'Beyond the Ice', we set out the UK's three main commitments to the region.

The first is to bring our world-class science to bear in helping to understand the changing Arctic and to find solutions to the challenges that presents to us.

That means supporting our top scientists and their international collaboration on the Arctic – particularly as the new Agreement on Enhancing Scientific Cooperation in the Arctic is implemented.

Already, nearly two-thirds of the UK Arctic research papers have international co-authors. We think this is the right approach, and want to encourage more of it.

The UK Government is investing both manpower and finance in pioneering Arctic research.

Man and woman power in the form of our Science and Innovation Officers in our eight Arctic State Embassies and the Arctic Science Office.

Finance in the shape of £16 million in the 5-year Changing Arctic Ocean Programme and a further £2.3 million for UK-based scientists to take part in MOSAiC, which many of you will know, is a truly international study of the Arctic climate.

The second commitment we make in 'Beyond the Ice' is to help protect the fragile environment of the Arctic for the people who live and visit there.

The UK is already a global leader on addressing global climate change and tackling the accumulation of pollutants in the world's oceans.

Our commitment to the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals is underpinned by our Clean Growth Strategy and we have consistently been at the forefront of international regulatory changes to reduce global greenhouse emissions on land and at sea.

We are also taking great strides to reduce the accumulation of plastic waste in the world's oceans, including through our 25-year Environmental Plan, which commits us to achieve zero avoidable plastic waste by the end of 2042.

Given that the nearly all of the litter found in the Arctic comes from elsewhere, it is essential that we all take action to stop it.

We will gain further insights into the impacts of climate and environmental change on the Arctic when the report 'Polar Oceans: status and change' – which was jointly commissioned by the UK and Norway – is published later this

year.

Our third commitment in 'Beyond the Ice' is to support responsible and sustainable development of the region, and ensure that its people are the first to benefit from the increase in prosperity that a changing Arctic may bring.

Changes in the Arctic also present economic opportunities for the UK. Shrinking summer sea-ice could cut the travel time between Asia and Europe by 10 days, bringing benefits in terms of reduced costs, lower fuel consumption and less pollution.

However these potential benefits do not give us – or anyone else – the right to run roughshod over the needs of the region and its people.

That is why our priority will be to encourage development that is both sustainable and responsible.

To sum up, the UK remains a global leader in supporting environmental protection, international cooperation and the rules-based system. We are home to world-leading research scientists and cutting edge business investment. 'Beyond the Ice' demonstrates our continued determination to harness and share these assets and to work together to understand, protect and improve the Arctic, for the benefit of all, for generations to come.

Further information

- Follow Foreign Office Minister Sir Alan Duncan on Twitter [@AlanDuncanMP](https://twitter.com/AlanDuncanMP)