

[News story: Minister Alan Duncan announces an additional £7m in funding for the Colombian peace process](#)

As part of the UK's continuing commitment to a lasting peace in Colombia, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister for the Americas Sir Alan Duncan has announced an increase in financial support for Colombia's Peace Agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Over £7m of additional funding from the Government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) will support the peace agreement at a critical stage. This includes a new £5m contribution to the UN's Trust Fund, which will help reintegrate former combatants and support recovery in post conflict areas.

Sir Alan Duncan, Minister for Europe and the Americas, said:

I am delighted to announce that the UK is increasing support to Colombia's Peace Process with over £7m of additional funding, bringing our total support in 2017/18 to almost £12m.

There has been significant progress since the signing of the peace agreement in November 2016. The FARC have laid down their arms and become a political party. But there is more work ahead. The implementation of the peace agreement is now entering a critical and complex stage, which is why we are increasing our support.

The new funding has enabled the UK to contribute an extra £5m to the UN Trust Fund, which will support projects that help stabilisation in post-conflict areas, and the reintegration of former combatants back into normal life.

The funding will also provide additional support to the Organisation of American States Peace Monitoring Mission in Colombia, and to the work of the UN Office for Human Rights. We remain committed to helping Colombia implement the peace agreement as swiftly and comprehensively as possible.

[News story: Accelerator Innovation](#)

[Network Event: Regenerative medicine at the front line](#)

Suppliers who attend the event will hear presentations about the [regenerative medicine at the front line themed competition](#) which seeks to make a real difference by saving lives and reducing disabilities.

The competition is looking for proposals for regenerative technologies that can be applied very early after severe, traumatic injury resulting from combat or acts of terrorism.

Recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan saw step changes in trauma care that led to great improvements in survival following blast or ballistic trauma. This has meant, however, that people survive with increasingly life-changing injuries.

Our belief is that the very early use of approaches in regenerative medicine, one of the [UK Government's 8 great technologies](#), has the potential to further revolutionise front line trauma care to save lives and to improve the quality of life for survivors.

This competition has 2 challenges:

1. bioengineered blood and blood components
2. the preservation and regeneration of soft tissue using biophysical approaches

The outputs from this work would be developed for use by the UK's Defence Medical Services and other organisations who deliver trauma care in challenging environments. These approaches should also reduce the burden on later care supplied by both MOD and the NHS.

Up to £500,000 is available for Phase 1 of this themed competition and at least a further £500,000 will be available for Phase 2.

This competition closes at midday on 11 April 2018.

[News story: Changes imminent to how ARSAC licenses research](#)

The Administration of Radioactive Substances Advisory Committee (ARSAC) is urging researchers who administer radioactive substances to read up on imminent changes to the way that approvals are granted.

New regulations under The Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2018 (IR(ME)R), due to come into force on 6 February 2018, will replace the current process for the administration of radioactive substances with a new licensing system for practitioners and employers.

Public Health England will manage all applications for licences. Fees may be charged depending on the type of licence applications for employers and research approval. There will be no fees for practitioner licences.

ARSAC will still need to approve research studies involving the use of radioactive substances. There will be no change for research sponsors, such as a pharmaceutical company or university, who should continue to apply to ARSAC for authorisation.

Submit all applications for site-specific research certificates by 16 January 2018.

Nasreen Parkar, Scientific Adviser to ARSAC said:

When the new regulations come into force early next year, any valid research certificates will be considered to be a licence for both the practitioner and the employer at the identified installation. This will allow administrations of radioactive substances to continue in line with the research study protocol.

New or uncertificated research studies will require both the employer and practitioner to have an appropriate licence that includes the procedures within the research protocol.

Currently each research study requires a research ARSAC site certificate. Under the new system, this will no longer be the case.

Once an employer has a licence in place and there are licensed practitioners entitled under the employer's procedures, administrations can be performed under the procedures detailed in any ARSAC-approved research study within the scope of the licences.

Installations that currently submit more than one research certificate application a month may need to apply early for employer licences and practitioner licences. There is nothing in the new regulations to stop employers or practitioners applying for licences any time after the new regulations come into force.

At present 80% of research studies involve the use of bone scans, MUGA scans, GFR studies and FDG tumour imaging. Once these and any other routine procedures have been included on employer and practitioner licenses, no further amendment is required to take part in a research. Researchers will need to notify practitioners about the research protocol and the employer will need to confirm that each installation has the capacity to perform the

procedures.

Louise Fraser said:

It's really important that research sponsors and sites understand how these changes will affect their local processes. We encourage everyone to look into what the changes will mean for them so that they are aware of what, if anything, they will need to do.

For further information please [subscribe to our bulletin](#).

Press release: Self-employed on Universal Credit to get business support

This is part of the government's commitment to small businesses. Initial mentoring can last for up to 12 weeks and includes workshops on topics including financial planning and marketing support, as well as help in creating a business development and growth plan. If the plan is viable, people can receive a further year of support and mentoring.

This programme of support for people who are already self-employed builds on the success of the New Enterprise Allowance (NEA) programme. The NEA offers mentoring, a weekly allowance for 6 months and access to a start-up loan to people who are out of work and would like to start their own business. Figures out today show that over 111,000 businesses have already been started with the support of the NEA.

The latest NEA figures show that the north-west had the highest number of start-ups (17,020) followed by London (13,410) and Yorkshire and the Humber (12,150).

Minister for Employment Damian Hinds said:

The NEA has been a huge success in supporting enterprising jobseekers turn their business dreams into a reality, and now we're offering mentoring to help people in receipt of Universal Credit who are already self-employed as they grow their businesses.

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and we want to do all we can to ensure people succeed.

The figures also show that of the people who have started up a business with NEA support:

- over two thirds were aged between 25 and 49, 24% were over the age of 50 and 7% were aged between 18 and 24
- 40% were women
- 22% have a self-declared disability
- 13% were from a black and minority ethnic (BME) background

111,540 businesses have been set up through the NEA scheme. The financial support is paid as a weekly allowance of £65 a week for 13 weeks and then £33 for the following 13 weeks (a total of £1,274 over 26 weeks)

More information

Mentoring is available to Universal Credit full service claimants whose business income fall below, or looks set to fall below, their Minimum Income Floor.

People who already own their own business are eligible for mentoring, but not for the financial support aspect of the scheme.

Successful applicants to the NEA start-up support get access to a business mentor, and those who start their business can receive financial support for up to 6 months, mentoring support for up to 12 months and may be able to apply for a loan of up to £25,000 to help with start-up costs.

Read more about NEA – www.gov.uk/new-enterprise-allowance

The full regional breakdown

Entries are rounded to the nearest 10.

Region	Individuals with an NEA business start
North-west	17,020
London	13,410
Yorkshire and Humberside	12,150
West Midlands	10,650
Scotland	10,250
South-east	8,450
South-west	7,680
East of England	7,610
North-east	7,500
Wales	6,580
East Midlands	6,400

Follow DWP on:

[Press release: HMRC issues Christmas warning about iTunes gift card scam](#)

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is today (20 December 2017) warning the public about a high-profile phone scam that is conning vulnerable and elderly people out of thousands of pounds.

The scammers are preying on victims by cold calling them and impersonating an HMRC member of staff. They tell them that they owe large amounts of tax which they can only pay off through digital vouchers and gift cards, including those used for Apple's iTunes Store.

Victims are told to go to a local shop, buy these vouchers, and then read out the redemption code to the scammer, who has kept them on the phone the whole time. The conmen then sell on the codes or purchase high-value products, all at the victim's expense.

The scammers frequently use intimidation to get what they want, threatening to seize the victim's property or involve the police. The use of vouchers is an attractive scam as they are easy to sell on and hard to trace once used.

HMRC would never request the settling of debt through such a method.

The scam continues to hit a large number of people. Figures from Action Fraud, the UK's national fraud reporting centre, show that between the beginning of 2016 and August this year there have been over 1,500 reports of this scam, with the numbers increasing in recent months. The vast majority of the victims are aged over 65 and suffered an average financial loss of £1,150 each.

HMRC is working closely with law enforcement agencies, Apple and campaign groups to make sure the public know how to spot the scam and who to report it to.

HMRC's Director General of Customer Services, Angela MacDonald, said:

These scammers are very confident, convincing and utterly ruthless. We don't want to see anyone fall victim to this scam just before Christmas. That's why we're working closely with crime fighters to ensure taxpayers know how to avoid it.

These scams often prey on vulnerable people. We urge people with elderly relatives to warn them about this scam and remind them that they should never trust anyone who phones them out of the blue and asks them to pay a tax bill. If you think you've been a victim you should contact Action Fraud immediately.

Temporary Detective Chief Inspector Lara Xenoudakis, City of London Police, said:

Fraudsters perceive the elderly and vulnerable as easy targets, so we are urging people to be wary of HMRC-related frauds to protect themselves, family members and friends.

We have received an increasing number of reports in which we have been told that people are being asked to pay fraudsters in iTunes vouchers. People should be cautious of unsolicited emails, calls or letters and always check directly with HMRC to ensure they are legitimate before responding.

Chief Executive of Tax Help for Older People, Gary Millner, said:

Tax Help for Older People fully supports HMRC in tackling this particularly wicked scam. We have taken too many calls from people who have fallen foul of it. The amounts of money lost are significant for some, and the feelings of helplessness, violation and embarrassment are immense.

Recognising and reporting a scam

If you suspect that you or a vulnerable or elderly relative has been the victim of this scam or a similar one, you should report it immediately to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or use their [online fraud reporting tool](#).

Check GOV.UK for information on [how to avoid and report scams](#) and [recognise genuine HMRC contact](#).

If you think you have received an HMRC-related phishing or bogus email or text message, you can check it against the examples shown in this [guide](#).

Apple provides a support page reminding customers that iTunes Gift Cards can be used only to purchase goods and services on the iTunes Store, App Store, iBooks Store, or for an Apple Music membership, and providing tips to avoid becoming the victim of a scam. More information is [available here](#).