

Government announces £20 million SME Brexit Support Fund

- Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster announces £20 million SME Brexit Support Fund to help small businesses with changes to trade rules with the EU;
- Traders will be able to apply for a grant of up to £2,000 to pay for practical support for importing and exporting;
- Fund will help businesses to prepare for the implementation of import controls which come into force from April and July.

Today (Thursday 11 February), the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Michael Gove has announced a £20 million SME Brexit Support Fund to support small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) adjust to new customs, rules of origin, and VAT rules when trading with the EU.

SMEs who trade only with the EU and are therefore new to importing and exporting processes will be encouraged to apply for grants of up to £2,000 for each trader to pay for practical support including training and professional advice to ensure they can continue trading effectively with the EU.

This announcement follows extensive engagement with individual businesses, leading business organisations and trade associations from across all parts of the UK, including through the Brexit Business Taskforce. Chaired by Michael Gove the weekly meetings provided an opportunity to identify challenges and find solutions to outstanding issues. To provide SMEs with additional support, the fund will be administered through the pre-existing Customs Grant Scheme and will open for applications next month.

It has been set up to support businesses prepare for the new import controls coming into force from April and July, as set out in the [Border Operating Model](#). Having taken back control of our borders, we made the pragmatic decision to introduce new import controls in three stages up to 1 July 2021 to allow traders and hauliers time to adjust to new processes. This means businesses do not have to complete new import declarations for up to six months, unless they are moving controlled goods.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said:

The Government has listened carefully to the issues raised by the business community through the Brexit Business Taskforce and that's why we are bringing forward this financial support to help small businesses adapt to the changes to our trading relationship with the EU.

This new targeted funding will see small businesses get more of the practical support they need to adjust to the new processes and

prepare for further changes as we implement our own import controls in April and July.

Together we will seize new opportunities available to a fully independent global trading United Kingdom.

Members of the Brexit Business Taskforce have welcomed the additional support.

Mike Cherry, National Chair at the Federation of Small Businesses, said:

Today's announcement is very significant. Small businesses, often with few cash reserves, are for the first time facing complex new customs processes, VAT requirements and rules of origin. While many have come to FSB for help, we have been asking for proper financial assistance of this scale, so that a cash-strapped small business can afford to buy-in expertise, training and practical support. The new fund will make a significant difference, and we are pleased that Ministers have really engaged with us on this, and come up with an excellent response.

Allie Rennison, Head of Trade Policy at the Institute of Directors said:

This support package delivers on the IoD's longstanding campaign to help SMEs access the professional advice needed in managing a suite of changes arising from Brexit.

Smaller firms simply cannot manage many of the processes themselves and require experts across a range of areas to assist with trade continuity, and we commend this government for responding to our call.

The government is also announcing that Logistics UK will be joining the Brexit Business Taskforce as standing members from today. Logistics UK's constructive engagement and advocacy in tackling issues relating to the end of the transition period has been vital in supporting hauliers, traders and their supply chains adjust to our new relationship with the EU.

David Wells, Chief Executive of Logistics UK said:

Logistics UK welcomes the additional support that is being put in place to help SMEs make sure they can adapt and succeed in the new trading environment. These issues directly impact the operations and livelihoods of our members who carry their produce into the EU and have to be confident that the correct paperwork is in place.

I'm delighted that the government has recognised the importance of Logistics to our economy, and the critical role it plays in our

future trading relationships with the EU, by inviting Logistics UK to represent the sector on the Brexit Business Taskforce, alongside the other major business groups in the UK. Logistics UK has been at the forefront of helping government to keep Britain trading and I look forward to continuing our challenging and constructive dialogue focused on securing the best possible outcome for the whole sector and the economy.

In the last week we have seen overall freight flows between GB and the EU reach 98% when compared to the same time last year. There is still no disruption at ports and compliance with new rules remains high thanks to the continued efforts of hauliers and UK traders.

In addition to this new support, the government is:

- Meeting businesses from specific sectors across all parts of the UK weekly through the Brexit Business Taskforce chaired by Michael Gove. The latest meeting focussed specifically on businesses in Wales;
- Establishing the Seafood Exports Working Group, meeting twice a week to troubleshoot issues raised by the industry; and a newly established Scottish Seafood Exports Task Force;
- Offering support to businesses moving goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland through its Trader Support Service;
- Providing numerous [helplines](#) which businesses can contact if they need further information;
- This includes managing dedicated HMRC exporting telephone and online helplines; The number is 0300 322 9434 and businesses can also speak to an adviser online at tax.service.gov.uk;
- Running regular [webinars](#) with policy specialists;
- Providing the [Brexit Checker Tool](#) on GOV.UK which gives businesses a personalised list of actions that they need to take;
- Offering face-to-face support for exporters in delivered via a network of around 300 International Trade Advisers (ITAs);
- Leading a specific taskforce working with businesses across Northern Ireland and Great Britain on issues related to the Northern Ireland Protocol; and
- Operating a range of other support schemes including a guarantee scheme aimed at SMEs which means the government can provide an 80% guarantee on financial support from lenders to help with general exporting costs, up to the value of £25 million.

[Change of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Tajikistan: Tim Jones](#)

Mr Tim Jones has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Republic of Tajikistan in succession to Mr Matthew Lawson.



Mr Tim Jones has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Republic of Tajikistan in succession to Mr Matthew Lawson who will be transferring to another Diplomatic Service appointment. Mr Jones will take up his appointment during September 2021.

Full name: Timothy Aidan Marschall Jones

Married to: Dr Christin Marschall Jones

Children: Two

Dates	Role
2013 to 2020	Berlin, First Secretary Economics, later Senior Economic Policy Advisor
2008 to 2013	Brussels, Principal Advisor, EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, later Global Issues and Counter-Terrorism, European External Action Service
2006 to 2008	Lille, Consul General
2003 to 2006	FCO, Head of Operations, IT Strategy Unit
2003	FCO, Rapid Deployment Team Coordinator, Consular Division
1999 to 2002	Yerevan, Her Majesty's Ambassador
1996 to 1999	Tehran, Deputy Head of Mission, later Chargé d'Affaires
1994 to 1995	Mostar, Press and Liaison Officer, WEU Police Mission, EU Administration
1992 to 1994	FCO, Permanent Under Secretary's Department
1988 to 1992	The Hague, Second Secretary
1987 to 1988	Vienna, Member of the British Delegation to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
1984 to 1986	FCO, Assistant Desk Officer, Western Europe Department

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Government sets out new plans to help build trust in use of digital identities

- Public invited to contribute to draft rules around data protection, security and inclusivity
- Part of work to help people prove who they are without the need for physical documents
- Aim is to make people's lives easier and boost the country's £149 billion digital economy

The government has today published its draft rules of the road for governing the future use of digital identities. It is part of plans to make it quicker and easier for people to verify themselves using modern technology and create a process as trusted as using passports or bank statements.

Digital identity products allow people to prove who they are, where they live or how old they are. They are set to revolutionise transactions such as buying a house, when people are often required to prove their identity multiple times to a bank, conveyancer or estate agent, and buying age-restricted goods online or in person.

The new '[trust framework](#)' lays out the draft rules of the road organisations should follow. It includes the principles, policies, procedures and standards governing the use of digital identity to allow for the sharing of information to check people's identities or personal details, such as a user's address or age, in a trusted and consistent way. This will enable interoperability and increase public confidence.

The framework, once finalised, is expected to be brought into law. It has specific standards and requirements for organisations which provide or use digital identity services including:

- Having a data management policy which explains how they create, obtain, disclose, protect, and delete data;
- Following industry standards and best practice for information security and encryption;
- Telling the user if any changes, for example an update to their address, have been made to their digital identity;
- Where appropriate, having a detailed account recovery process and notifying users if organisations suspect someone has fraudulently accessed their account or used their digital identity;
- Following guidance on how to choose secure authenticators for their service.

Organisations will be required to publish a yearly report explaining which demographics have been, or are likely to have been, excluded from their service and why. The move will help make firms aware if there are inclusivity

problems in their products while also boosting transparency.

The framework will also help promote the use of 'vouching', where [trusted people](#) within the community such as doctors or teachers 'vouch for' or confirm a person's identity, as a useful alternative for those without traditional documents, such as passports and driving licences.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman said:

Establishing trust online is absolutely essential if we are to unleash the future potential of our digital economy.

Today we are publishing draft rules of the road to guide organisations using new digital identity technology and we want industry, civil society groups and the public to make their voices heard.

Our aim is to help people confidently verify themselves while safeguarding their privacy so we can build back better and fairer from the pandemic.

[Economists](#) have estimated the cost of manual offline identity proofing could be as high as £3.3 billion per year. The new plans will not only make people's lives easier but also give a boost to the country's £149 billion digital economy by creating new opportunities for innovation, enabling smoother, cheaper and more secure online transactions, and saving businesses time and money.

The move has been welcomed by industry and civil society groups which have praised the government's open and collaborative approach, as it works to develop a final trust framework that meets the needs of all users.

Stuart Young, Managing Director at Etime Technologies, said:

"This framework is key to developing a trusted digital identity market that will make people's lives easier and save businesses time and money.

We look forward to contributing further to these plans to help make sure the final framework works for everyone in the home buying and selling sector.

Emma Lindley, Co-founder of Women In Identity, said:

We believe that digital identity systems should be inclusive and accessible for anyone that chooses to use them.

This collaborative approach by the government in designing the trust framework is a step in the right direction towards

accountability across all stakeholders who are involved, and ensures no one is left behind.

The 'trust framework' forms part of the government's commitment to taking a leading role in developing the digital identity market without the need for national identity cards. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) will work with the digital identity community to develop the framework and aims to publish the next iteration in the summer. DCMS continues its work on proposals on laws that will underpin the digital identity market and will consult on these later this year.

Cabinet Office Minister Julia Lopez said:

Products that help digitally to verify a person's identity are becoming increasingly important as more areas of our work and home lives move online. Creating a common trust framework will give greater clarity and certainty to organisations who want to work in this field about what is expected of them. More importantly, however, it will help to deepen users' trust and confidence in digital identities and the standards we expect in the safeguarding of their personal data and privacy.

GDS is working closely with DCMS and across Government to develop guidance and products in support of the trust framework. We believe building users' confidence will be fundamental to delivering our overall ambition to make it much easier and simpler for citizens to access government services online.

Notes to editors

- The full [UK Digital Identity and Attributes Trust Framework](#) is available online, along with details of how to provide comments and feedback.
 - The new proposals, drawn up by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), will help restrict opportunities for criminals and allow organisations who choose to sign up know they are meeting the necessary requirements. This will help give people confidence that particular service protects their data and privacy.
 - Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman chaired a series of roundtable sessions with industry and civil society groups in the autumn to hear first hand their perspectives on the opportunities and challenges involved in the government's trust framework ambitions.
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Apprenticeship route to work pays dividends for two leading managers

Two of LLWR's most senior personnel are fine adverts for what can be achieved by going down the apprenticeship route after leaving school.

CEO Designate Martin Walkingshaw and Becky Ruddy, Head of Infrastructure, were both given a solid grounding in the nuclear industry as Sellafield apprentices.

Martin, currently Deputy CEO, hailed his apprenticeship with British Nuclear Fuels as a "great foundation" for his subsequent career.

He said: "I occasionally tease people who went down the university route that when they were contemplating a gap year, I was working with spent fuel and radioactive waste, and learning my trade, instrumentation and control, in some of the most advanced nuclear plants in the world, as well as some of the earliest!

"It isn't an easy route, working full time and also studying (for me that meant day release/two-night classes a week) is hard, but the friendships I made during my apprenticeship have lasted a lifetime. An apprenticeship gave me confidence to seek more responsibility and encouraged me to be professionally curious.

"It also taught me about the fundamental importance of safety and quality in our industry. These things allowed me to advance through engineering, operations, business management and commercial roles. And even though my trade skills are a bit rusty I reckon I could still calibrate a gamma monitor. And you never know when that will come in handy."

Becky went into her apprenticeship at 18 and has not regretted it for a moment.

"I had an interest in biology and chemistry at A level and applied for a Gen2 Scientific Apprenticeship," she said. "I hadn't felt ready to leave home and go to university so an apprentice was an ideal compromise. After spending a few weeks in the training centre we went straight into the workplace, at Sellafield, in the labs at THORP.

"An apprenticeship gave me the chance to learn about a subject I enjoyed, but also gave me an opportunity to put it into practice whilst getting paid.

"I learned about being part of a team and also about being accountable for my own work. It instilled a really good discipline in me early on I've been able to progress through my career after starting on the shop floor, where I got a really good grounding."

Becky went on to complete her three year apprenticeship in just over two and moved into a staff job as an Analytical Chemist at Sellafield.

She added: "An apprenticeship can open so many doors and gives you the opportunity to do many different things. Mine was in quite a technical subject, but I am doing something totally different now, and there have been lots of things in between."

Apprentice Chloe Glaister has been working as part of Becky's team and receiving a thorough grounding in all aspects of the department. Chloe has also recently been successful in securing a permanent role following her apprenticeship.

"Chloe is doing a real job that is of value to LLWR whilst gaining experience and qualifications, and she is being supported in a 'safe' environment where she can learn," Becky said. "She is gaining experience in different areas of Infrastructure under the direction of her mentor Megan who is doing a fantastic job supporting Chloe."

Becky leaves LLWR at the end of this week after 11 years to take up a new role at Dounreay as Head of Decommissioning of the Fuel Cycle Areas. Where, no doubt, she will continue to take a keen interest in the development of her apprentices.

[£70 million Argyll & Bute Rural Growth Deal agreed](#)

A landmark investment deal to boost economic growth across Argyll and Bute was agreed at a virtual signing event today (11 Feb 2021).

UK Government Minister for Scotland, Iain Stewart, joined Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, Michael Matheson, and Argyll and Bute Council Leader, Councillor Robin Currie, to sign the [Heads of Terms](#) for the £70 million Rural Growth Deal.

The deal comprises £25 million each from the Scottish and UK governments, and at least £20 million from Argyll and Bute Council and partners. This will be used to create opportunities for people living in the region and attract further investment.

The [Heads of Terms document](#) sets out the themes for the 10 – 15 year programme of investment. Aquaculture, tourism, housing, digital connectivity and skills for a rural economy are among the sectors set for development.

UK Government Minister Iain Stewart said:

This is an important milestone for the Argyll and Bute Rural Growth Deal which will play a vital role in building back better from

COVID-19.

These innovative and ambitious plans will unlock jobs, opportunities and sustainable growth for communities throughout the region.

The UK Government has committed more than £1.5 billion to growth deals across Scotland to secure our future prosperity.

The proposals, all of which are subject to approval of full business cases, will take advantage of existing regional strengths in tourism, food and farming, distilling and defence, and invest up to £70 million in:

- Aquaculture: to develop the area as an international centre for excellence and create a marine industry training centre to support the growth of marine sectors
- Tourism: to develop the area as a West of Scotland “must visit” location for the maritime leisure market
- Low carbon economy: to deliver more sustainable local energy systems on Islay
- Skills: to support growth and work opportunities for rural communities
- Housing: to attract economic growth and provide affordable housing
- Clyde engineering and innovation cluster: to address the lack of commercial accommodation for supply services to Ministry of Defence facilities
- Unmanned Aerial Vehicles hub at Oban Airport: to deliver the UK’s first dedicated drone training centre with indoor facilities
- Digital connectivity

These will also build on the opportunities represented by other UK Government investments in the region, including:

- The consolidation of the submarine fleet at HMNB Clyde by spreading the economic benefits across the region
- The UK Government’s Green Distilling Fund by supporting green energy solutions for Islay
- The UK Government’s existing City Region Deal investment at the National Aquaculture Centre at Stirling University by supporting further facilities at Machrihanish

The next stage is for the council and its partners to develop outline business cases that will set out the details of the projects for delivery.