

UK Export Finance receives major budget boost to enhance export support

Press release

UKEF's resource budget has increased after the latest government Spending Review.



The Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced that UK Export Finance (UKEF) will receive an £18 million increase to its resource budget in the government's latest Spending Review.

This boost, a 32% increase from 2019-20, will greatly enhance UKEF's ability to support UK companies with an international focus. It will be spent on:

- strengthening UKEF's COVID-19 response
- enhancing its climate change and renewable energy teams
- expanding its domestic team and international network
- increasing engagement with UK businesses
- improving internal operations

The increase will be funded out of the premium income that UKEF generates for the taxpayer, which last year totalled £177 million, and is underpinned by strong risk management.

Louis Taylor, CEO of UK Export Finance said:

Throughout the pandemic, UKEF has remained resolute in its focus on the needs of UK exporters and their businesses. This budget increase will allow us to continue delivering for UK exporters, and ensure we have the right resources in place to deliver on the government's priorities.

UKEF is growing rapidly and has issued record levels of support for exporters since its operating budget was last increased by 29% in the 2019 Spending Review. In this time, UKEF has supported thousands of UK jobs and contributed

an estimated £2.8 billion of gross value added to the UK economy each year by helping businesses win, fulfil and get paid for exports.

Since the start of the pandemic, UKEF has provided over £2 billion in extra financing for customers affected by the economic disruption caused by COVID-19, protecting an estimated 100,000 UK jobs. It has also seen a doubling in demand for export credit insurance, helping UK exporters to continue selling internationally.

UK Export Finance is the UK's export credit agency. It exists to ensure that no viable UK export lacks for finance or insurance from the private market, providing finance and insurance to help exporters win, fulfil and get paid for export contracts.

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[New UK Government Covid testing site opens in Elgin](#)

The UK Government has today, Friday 4 December, opened a new walk-through coronavirus testing centre at Lossie Green Car Park in Elgin (IV30 1UF). The centre is easily accessible for people without a car.

The test centre is part of the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities created in British history. In Scotland, this comprises of six drive through sites, 18 walk-through sites, 24 mobile units, plus the Glasgow Lighthouse Lab which is working round the clock to process samples.

In Scotland, the UK Government is providing all Covid testing and test processing outside of the NHS. Around two thirds of all daily tests are provided by the UK Government, in support of Scotland's health services.

Tests must be booked in advance at [NHS Inform](#) or by calling 0800 028 2816. People should only book at test if they have coronavirus symptoms (a high temperature, a new and continuous cough, or a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste).

Health Minister, Lord Bethell, said:

To respond to the coronavirus, we have built a major testing and tracing system from scratch. We are constantly working to expand and improve it with new technologies and innovations so everyone with symptoms can get a test.

New walk-in sites like this one makes it even easier to get a test

no matter where you live. If you have symptoms of coronavirus, I urge you to book a test today and follow the advice of NHS Test and Protect if you are contacted to protect others and stop the spread of the virus.

Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection, Baroness Dido Harding, said:

Walk through sites offer communities better access to coronavirus testing, so everyone with symptoms can get a test. This new site is part of our ongoing work to expand our testing network across the UK which now has the capacity to process more than 500,000 tests a day. We will continue to expand capacity to improve test turnaround times and push forward testing innovations to make sure anyone who needs a test can get one.

Please book a test if you have coronavirus symptoms: a new continuous cough, a high temperature and a loss or change in sense of smell or taste, and follow the advice of NHS Test and Protect if you are contacted.

UK Government Minister for Scotland, Iain Stewart, said:

The UK Government is helping all parts of the UK fight the coronavirus pandemic.

Testing is vital, helping to manage local outbreaks and protecting people's livelihoods. The UK Government is providing the bulk of Covid testing in Scotland, and this new walk-through centre is just the latest in our extensive testing network.

We are pleased to be working with local and commercial partners. These sites are not possible without the hard work of many people. I would like to thank everyone involved for their incredible efforts for the good of the country at this difficult time.

Mitie Chief Government & Strategy Officer, Simon Venn, said:

Our priority during the pandemic is to support the nation's efforts to fight COVID-19 and help keep the country running. Testing is a critical part of the UK's strategy to combat coronavirus and we're proud to support the UK Government with this vital task. A big thank you to all the NHS staff, Mitie employees and other frontline heroes in Elgin, who are working tirelessly to keep us all safe.

Former prison officer jailed for longer

Press release

Hannah Gaves has had her sentence increased following an intervention by the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.



A prison officer who was caught smuggling drugs into a prison she worked in has had her sentence increased following an intervention by the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.

Hannah Gaves, 27, was a prison officer at HMP Erlestoke in January 2019. After receiving information that Gaves was smuggling illicit items into the prison, she was searched and found to be in possession of some cannabis, cigarettes and 6.05g of crack cocaine.

Gaves admitted possession of the cigarettes and cannabis but denied knowledge of the cocaine. In a police interview, she stated that she felt under pressure from an individual who would harm her if she did not smuggle in the contraband. She refused to name the individual concerned.

Gaves pleaded guilty to possession with intent to supply Class A and B drugs, as well as attempting to bring List C prohibited articles into a prison. She was sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment on 28 August 2020 at Salisbury Crown Court.

The sentence was referred to the Court of Appeal by the Solicitor General under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme. On 4 December the sentence was found to be unduly lenient and increased to 4 years' and 8 months' imprisonment.

After the hearing at the Court of Appeal the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP, said:

Gaves intentionally smuggled contraband into prison with the intention of supplying dangerous drugs. She betrayed the trust inherent in her office. The decision by the Court of Appeal to increase her sentence today was the right one.

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[UK secures key services agreement with Switzerland](#)

The UK and Switzerland have secured a far-reaching agreement on services that maintains high quality access for UK service suppliers to the Swiss market.

The deal is part of the government's strategy to place the UK at the centre of a network of modern free trade agreements with dynamic economies, and to enhance our status as a global services hub.

The UK-Switzerland Services Mobility Agreement will allow UK professionals and other service workers to continue travelling freely to Switzerland and work visa-free for up to 90 days a year.

This deal will support trade in vital industries of the UK economy, including finance, consultancy, legal services, the tech sector and the creative industries.

When travelling to Switzerland, UK professionals will be able to do business as they do now and will not face economic interest tests, work permits or lengthy processing times for the first 90 days.

The agreement builds on the existing UK-Switzerland trade deal and will enter into force from 1 January 2021. Together, these deals will support over £37 billion worth of trade, ensuring low or zero tariffs access for thousands of products including cars, medicines and watches.

The initial agreement will last for two years to ensure continuity immediately after the transition period. It will help lay the groundwork for an enhanced UK Switzerland trading relationship in the future.

The UK and Switzerland have also committed to work together on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications in each other's country. This will make it easier for British professionals – from accountants to architects – to practise in Switzerland.

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said:

We have a golden opportunity to lead the world in modern areas like tech and services, and to push new frontiers in trade. Ultimately, we want to create a cat's cradle of deals with dynamic economies that share our values and commitment to rules-based free trade.

This deal – with a fellow services powerhouse – is an important part of that vision. It provides vital continuity for businesses and paves the way for a more advanced deal with Switzerland in the future.

Antony Walker, Deputy CEO techUK said:

This is an excellent outcome for the UK tech sector which serves and collaborates with many of Switzerland's most innovative businesses in key growth sectors like Financial Services and Pharmaceuticals.

The agreement delivers on the key asks that techUK members called for ahead of the negotiations. It ensures continuity in existing business arrangements and provides a strong basis for what we hope will be an equally ambitious future FTA.

Miles Celic, Chief Executive Officer, TheCityUK said:

Businesses in both the UK and Switzerland will welcome this agreement. Mobility is a vital foundation for successful trade relations and this exceeds the expectations of what many people thought could be achieved in the time available.

The commitment to working together on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications is also a positive outcome. Given Switzerland's place as one of the UK's largest trading partners in services, we hope that this will be a further important step towards an ambitious and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between the two countries in the future.

Sally Jones, EY's Trade Strategy and Brexit Lead, said:

Today's announcement is enormously important and significant, in terms of both the breadth and depth of services access it represents. The freedom for UK service providers to work in Switzerland for 90 days visa- and permit-free, with just a

straightforward notification process, is vital – not just for the service providers ourselves but also for the companies we support.

Whether pharmaceutical giants, specialist robot manufacturers or boutique chocolatiers, our clients will hopefully feel reassured in the knowledge that their UK advisers are still able to support them in exactly the same way as before.

Policy Chair at the City of London Corporation Catherine McGuinness said:

Switzerland and the UK are natural partners and world leaders when it comes to financial services exports, so it is vital that we deepen our relationship in the years to come. I therefore warmly welcome the Services Mobility Agreement reached between our two countries, which will set out a pathway towards deep mutual cooperation for financial services trade between our two countries.

This sends out a signal that we are an open trading nation, willing to work with like-minded partners in order to eradicate cross-border trading barriers and connect the world to capital. Continuity of services trade will ultimately benefit businesses and consumers in both of our countries and across the world.

Human Rights Council Interactive Dialogue on Belarus: UK statement

Thank you,

We welcome the High Commissioner's report, which provides an opportunity to act with resolve on the human rights situation in Belarus.

The United Kingdom is gravely concerned about the fraudulent presidential elections and appalling violations, particularly the targeting of peaceful protesters and restrictions on freedom of expression.

We condemn the excessive use of force by the authorities. The Belarusian people face increasing repression by authorities acting with impunity. We are very concerned that two British diplomats were expelled for observing peaceful protests.

The UK imposed sanctions against Alexander Lukashenko and others responsible for violations.

The UK is engaging with all actors: the authorities, the opposition and civil society. We are doubling financial support to independent media and human rights organisations, with an extra £1.5 million over two years. Our Canada-UK Media Freedom Award was won by the Belarusian Association of Journalists, who bravely defend media freedom.

We repeat our call on Belarus to implement the recommendations of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism report, in particular the recommendation that new elections, held in accordance with international standards, are required.

Madame High Commissioner, what steps should the authorities take for a genuine dialogue with the people of Belarus?

Thank you.