

[News story: £2 million investment to help small businesses to grow](#)

Britain is one of the best places in the world to start and grow a business, [according to a government review](#). However, a productivity gap exists between the UK and international competitors, which means our businesses are not reaping all the benefits that they could be.

Adopting leading technologies, practices and support services – such as cloud computing, mobile technology and e-purchasing – can improve the productivity and earning power of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and in turn grow the wider economy.

The [Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy](#) (BEIS) and Innovate UK have up to £2 million to prove and test ideas that enable small businesses to become more productive.

The Business Basics Fund

Investment is through the Business Basics Fund, part of the government's [Business Basics Programme](#) to encourage SMEs to implement proven technologies and practices.

Yesterday, UK government announced the projects to be awarded £2 million through the first funding competition.

This includes a project with the retail and hospitality sectors to use AI technologies such as chatbots to improve customer experiences, and another to support greater digitisation in dairy farming.

Small Business Minister, Kelly Tolhurst said:

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy. As part of our modern Industrial Strategy, we are supporting them with new investments to boost their productivity and ensure they can continue to thrive in the future.

Different parts to the competition

There are different competitions to apply into, depending on your organisation and the type of research and development being carried out. These are for:

- proof of concept projects
- trials that are either:
 - led by a business
 - led by another type of organisation that isn't a business

Projects across all opportunities should look at how SMEs can become more productive through one or more of the following:

- adopting tried-and tested technologies, such as accountancy, CRM, HR and payment systems
- adopting modern business practices
- improving the use of technologies and practices already active within the business

Specific considerations might also include:

- addressing information failures and improving awareness of relevant technologies and practices
- building the confidence of SMEs on the application of these technologies and practices
- offering advice services through trusted advisors, supply chains and informal peer-to-peer networks
- exploring how using complementary technologies and practices can affect adoption
- comparing lower cost, scalable interventions with more intensive types of support
- exploring specific characteristics and issues SMEs may face, such as within family-run firms

Proving a concept

Proof of concept awards are for ideas that are in early development.

Projects should encourage SMEs to adopt proven technologies or management practices that can boost their productivity.

Competition information

- the competition is open, and the deadline for applications is at midday on 17 April 2019
- UK-based businesses of any size, public sector, university or research and technology organisations, charities and not-for-profit companies are eligible to lead a project
- organisations could get up to £60,000 each to run a proof of concept project
- projects must start by 1 September 2019 and can last up to 12 months
- there will be webinar briefings on [14 February 2019](#) and [7 March 2019](#) for applicants to find out more about the competition, and an [online evaluation masterclass on 5 March 2019](#) to help assess and analyse the results of a project

Taking an idea to trial

The aim of trial projects is to test different approaches for encouraging SMEs and supporting adoption.

Projects should generate robust evidence about the most effective approaches

to improving the productivity of SMEs. They should also build understanding of the short, medium and long-term impacts of such approaches.

Trials should plan to use a control group for testing and, if successful in the application process, register a trial protocol.

Competition information

- the 2 trial competition are open, and the deadline for applications is at midday on 17 April 2019
- in the business-led competition, UK-based businesses of any size are eligible to lead a project, working alone or with others
- in the non-business-led competition, UK-based public sector organisations, universities, research and technology organisations, charities and not-for-profit companies can be the lead, working alone or with others
- organisations could get up to £400,000 to run a trial
- the best projects at the written applications stage will be invited to attend an interview panel on 5 June 2019 to present their ideas
- projects must start by 1 September 2019 and can last up to 12 months
- there will be webinar briefings on [14 February 2019](#) and [7 March 2019](#) for applicants to find out more about the competition, and an [online evaluation masterclass on 5 March 2019](#) to help assess and analyse the results of a project

If you are a business and wish to lead a project, apply in the business-led trial competition.

[Find out more.](#)

If you are not a business but another type of organisation and wish to lead a project, apply in the non-business-led trial competition.

[Find out more.](#)

[Speech: Launch of the Independent Review into the Persecution of Christians across the Globe: Foreign Secretary's Speech](#)

Archbishop, bishop, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, a very warm welcome this morning to this very important occasion and very significant launch.

Last Sunday, many people here will have been going to church, as indeed was the case in the Philippines at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the Southern Philippines. And in the middle of that service, a bomb exploded and 20 people were killed and the perpetrators then issued a hate-filled statement labelling the Cathedral as a 'crusader temple'.

And this was a very vivid reminder of the terrible truth that freedom of worship is something that cannot only not be taken for granted, but is a growing concern all over the world.

And what happened in the Philippines has happened in Egypt. We know now from the excellent Open Doors report that a quarter of a billion Christians are suffering some sort of persecution all over the world, and we know that a number of the countries where this happens are countries that we don't necessarily talk about.

Countries like Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, North Korea, but also in some of the bigger countries.

We know that there are serious and growing issues in China. And also in countries where we might have hoped there wouldn't be a serious issue, like India, we know that this is becoming a much bigger issue.

And as me and my team at the Foreign Office reflected on this, we wanted to ask ourselves a question as to whether the FCO, which has one of the best global networks of any diplomatic service – we basically after the Americans and the Chinese have the third biggest diplomatic network of any country alongside the French – and we wanted to ask ourselves a question as to whether we really are doing as much as we possibly could.

And we wanted to do this not just because freedom of worship is a fundamental human right, but because also freedom of worship is the invisible line between open societies and closed societies.

Where freedom of worship is hampered or prevented, then usually that's a sign of lots of other things going wrong, and we wanted to make sure that the UK is doing everything to champion the values that we all believe in.

I am a Johnny-come-lately to this, because we have in the Foreign Office a fantastic minister, Lord Ahmad, who has been championing religious freedom since before I became Foreign Secretary, and himself comes from a Muslim minority faith – the Ahmadiyya community that have effectively been banished from Pakistan because it's not safe for them to be in Pakistan, and have had to move away. And many of them are based in the UK, but actually all over the world, so this is someone who knows from his own life the dangers.

But very much on his advice, we particularly want to look at the issue of Christian persecution.

Because the evidence is that 80 per cent of all the people who are suffering religious persecution are Christian.

And we want to, if I can put it this way, banish any hesitation to look into

this issue without fear or favour that may exist because of our imperial history, because of the concerns that some people might have in linking the activities of missionaries in the nineteenth century to misguided imperialism. And all those concerns may have led to a hesitation to really look at this issue properly, and we don't want that to happen.

And in order to keep us on the straight and narrow I've asked the Bishop of Truro, Bishop Philip Mounstephen, to do an independent review, and to work with all of you, to work with the FCO, and to tell us how we should approach this and what more we can do.

And what I want to do is, what I'm hoping the outcome of this will be is, first of all in practical terms, I want to make absolutely sure when I am meeting a foreign minister, a prime minister or a president in another country, and there's an issue concerning religious freedom, and in particular the rights of Christians, I want to make sure that it is absolutely on my list of things that I need to raise.

Sometimes you do these things publically, sometimes you do them privately, but we should always be doing them if they need to be done and I want to make sure that happens and I don't think it does at the moment.

But secondly, I want to see what we can do to build an international coalition of countries that are concerned about this so that we can play, I think the role that Britain has played for many years, which is whilst recognising that we're not a superpower, at the same time, not underestimating the power and influence that we have as a very well-connected country to bring together other countries that share our values and give a voice to people who don't have a voice.

And I think the final point I want to make which everyone in this room will be well aware of, but I'm not sure necessarily that the public outside are: we are a wealthy country and we sometimes think that when it comes to the rights of Christians this is really about wealthy people.

It isn't.

The people who are suffering are some of the poorest people on the planet and they happen to have the faith that I have, that many people here have, and they happen to be suffering very badly for it.

There is sometimes good news.

I think the news about Asia Bibi this week is extremely encouraging, but the truth is that unless we make a real effort and unless the world knows that we are making a real effort, those bits of good news will become the exception and not the rule. And that's what we don't want to allow to happen.

So thank you very much for your support.

I'm sure, I say this in advance as a bit of expectation-setting, I'm sure we won't be able to do absolutely everything you want, Philip, but we are very, very serious about doing what we can and we're incredibly grateful for the

support of many people here and many people outside as we in the Foreign Office go on a journey and think really hard about what we could do better.

Thank you very much.

[News story: Douglas Gurr appointed to the National Gallery Board](#)



Doug is Country Manager of Amazon UK. He joined Amazon in December 2011 and was President of Amazon China from 2014 to 2016. His previous roles included teaching mathematics and computing at the University of Aarhus in Denmark, working for the UK Government, partner at consultancy firm McKinsey, founder and CEO of internet start-up Blueheath and 5 years on the Board of Asda-Walmart. Doug has two degrees in Mathematics from the University of Cambridge, and PhD in Computing from the University of Edinburgh. Outside work, Doug is Chairman of the British Heart Foundation, and a Trustee of the Landmark Trust, non-executive Director of the Land Registry and was until 2014 Chairman of the Science Museum Group of national museums. He is a former Scottish international triathlete, 12 times Ironman, keen ski mountaineer with over 20 first ascents, and an enthusiastic mountain runner, recently completing the Bob Graham 24hr Round, the Ultra-Trail du Mont Blanc, and the Spine Challenger. Doug was born in the UK but his parents were New Zealanders and he grew up mostly in Africa before returning to the UK to attend high school and college. He is married with two children.

This role is not remunerated. This reappointment has been made in accordance with the [Cabinet Office's Governance Code on Public Appointments](#). The process is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The Government's Governance Code requires that any significant political activity undertaken by an appointee in the last five years is declared. This is defined as including holding office, public speaking, making a recordable donation or candidature for election. Doug has made no such declaration.

Published 30 January 2019

Press release: Change of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Somalia: February 2019



Mr Ben Fender OBE has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Somalia.

Mr Ben Fender OBE has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Somalia in succession to Mr David Concar, who will be transferring to another Diplomatic Service appointment. Mr Fender will take up his appointment in February 2019.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Full name: Benjamin James Fender

2016 to 2019 FCO, Head, Security Policy Department
2015 to 2016 Tehran, Chargé then Deputy Head of Mission
2015 FCO, Deputy Head, Iran Department
2014 to 2015 Freetown, Deputy Head, UK Ebola Response
2012 to 2014 Kabul, Counsellor (Political)
2008 to 2011 Paris, First Secretary (Political/Military)
2007 to 2008 Seconded to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs
2003 to 2007 FCO, Head, Iran team
1999 to 2003 Beijing, Second then First Secretary (Political)
1997 to 1999 FCO, Language training (Chinese)
1996 to 1997 FCO, Desk Officer for Palestine, Arab/Israel team

Further information

Published 30 January 2019

[Press release: Regulator restricts bank and fundraising platform transactions as it launches inquiry into health charity](#)

The Charity Commission, the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales, has opened a statutory inquiry into J.E.L.A Foundation ([1137349](#)). The inquiry was opened on 14 January 2018.

The London-based charity has objects to improve the lives of people particularly, but not exclusively, living in Haiti and those of Haitian descent residing in the UK through the advancement of education and training and the promotion of good health.

Following scrutiny of the charity's financial accounts, the Commission found a number of irregularities which raised serious concerns. After obtaining bank statements under section 52 of the Charities Act 2011, the Commission identified a discrepancy in excess of £200,000 between what was declared in the charity's annual returns for the last five years, and the bank transactions carried out during the same period.

In addition the Commission found repeated payments, several times a month over a number of years to a charity trustee, and also identified a pattern of donation payments totalling over £700,000 from individuals to the charity, including two trustees and a potentially connected party. This raises concern that there may have been misapplication of charity funds and possible personal benefit.

In order to protect the charity's assets, the Commission issued an order under section 76(3)(d) of the Charities Act restricting the charity's access to its bank accounts and prohibited three major online fundraising platforms used by the charity from parting with funds without prior approval from the Commission. The Commission issued an additional order under section 76(3)(f) of the Charities Act preventing trustees from undertaking further fundraising with alternative online platforms until further notice.

The Commission is also concerned that there are insufficient trustees to be compliant with the charity's rules of governance; only four individuals are listed in the accounts, whilst the charity's governing document requires a minimum of five trustees.

The inquiry will therefore examine whether:

- the charity has been operating for exclusively charitable purposes for the public benefit in furtherance of its charitable objects;

- the financial controls of the charity are adequate and its funds have been properly expended and can be accounted for;
- the trustees have complied with legal duties in respect of their administration, governance and management of the charity;
- the trustees compliance with legal obligations for the content and preparation of the charity's accounts and other information or returns is in line with the statutory requirements;
- the trustees may have knowingly or recklessly provided the Commission with information which is false or misleading.

It is the Commission's policy, after it has concluded an inquiry, to publish a report detailing what issues the inquiry looked at, what actions were undertaken as part of the inquiry and what the outcomes were. Reports of previous inquiries by the Commission are available on [GOV.UK](#).

Ends

Notes to Editors

1. The Charity Commission is the regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work see the [about us](#) page on GOV.UK.
2. Search for charities on our [check charity](#) tool.
3. Section 46 of the Charities Act 2011 gives the Commission the power to institute inquiries. The opening of an inquiry gives the Commission access to a range of investigative, protective and remedial legal powers.
4. Section 76(3)(d) of the Charities Act 2011 gives the Commission the power to order any person who holds any property on behalf of a charity, or of any trustee for a charity, not to part with property without the approval of the Commission.
5. Section 76(3)(f) of the Act give the Commission the power to restrict the transactions which may be entered into in the administration of a charity without the approval of the Commission.