

Business Guidance from Regulators and Government Agencies

Business Information Factsheet
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Introduction

UK Government agencies and regulators provide online tools, information and guidance to help anyone starting up, running or advising a business. Their resources include interactive websites that help users complete specific tasks, and information 'hubs' offering advice and guidance across their areas of expertise.

This factsheet lists the main UK Government and regulatory websites aimed at business owners, and highlights the principal features of each.

In addition to the agencies covered in this factsheet, country-specific information is available from the Welsh Government (<http://gov.wales/?skip=1&lang=en>), the Scottish Government (www.mygov.scot/business) and Invest Northern Ireland (www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk).

Health and Safety Executive

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE, www.hse.gov.uk) is an independent regulator, set up to reduce and prevent work-related deaths, injuries and illness across the UK. Its comprehensive website provides extensive guidance for business owners and employers, but also includes information of interest to employees. The homepage features news items, as well as details of proposed changes to health and safety rules and procedures.

To help users find what they need quickly and easily, topics are listed by industry sector and by aspects of health and safety management. HSE guidance covers subjects such as risk assessment, reporting of injuries (RIDDOR), work-related stress, workplace temperature, and the control of hazardous substances (COSHH).

A dedicated section covering office health and safety (www.hse.gov.uk/office) provides information and tools specifically relating to an office environment. These include health and safety statistics, an office risk assessment tool, and a health and safety toolbox with advice about how to manage risks in the workplace. Other resources include information for employers about managing the health and safety of homeworkers, guidance on working with visual display units (VDUs) and news about the latest health and safety campaigns.

In Northern Ireland, equivalent information relating to health and safety is provided by HSENI (www.hseni.gov.uk).

HM Revenue & Customs

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC, www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs) is responsible for ensuring the correct payment of taxes and benefits, both by and to individuals

and business organisations. It provides online tools and calculators, rates, tables and forms, as well as detailed information for all types of business.

For anyone starting a business, there is a dedicated section combining 'how to' information, support and a link to self-employment factsheets (www.gov.uk/topic/business-tax/self-employed), which include practical guidance about tasks such as registering as self-employed, completing a tax return and registering for VAT.

HMRC also has dedicated sections covering PAYE (www.gov.uk/business-tax/payee) and VAT (www.gov.uk/business-tax/vat).

The HMRC Employer Bulletin can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmrcs-employer-bulletin. It includes up-to-date information about payroll and other relevant topics. Employers can sign up for e-mail alerts notifying them when new information is published (www.hmrc.gov.uk/gds/payerti/forms-updates/forms-publications/register.htm).

HMRC provides many useful resources for business owners, including an 'employment status indicator' tool, which enables users to determine whether a worker is classed as employed or self-employed for tax and National Insurance purposes (www.gov.uk/guidance/employment-status-indicator). HMRC also provides live and pre-recorded webinars for both employers and the self-employed (www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-webinars-email-alerts-and-videos).

Companies House

Companies House (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/companies-house) is the office of the Registrar of Companies, which incorporates and dissolves limited companies, and examines, stores and publishes company information lodged with it. The website enables users to complete tasks quickly and easily. For example, users can register a company online and register for corporation tax at the same time.

The website encourages the online filing of confirmation statements (which replace annual returns from 30 June 2016), company accounts and company details, including information about 'People with Significant Control' (PSC) of a company that must be kept in a PSC Register and updated regularly. Users can also search for company information, check whether a business name is available and access guidance documents on topics related to running companies and limited liability partnerships (www.gov.uk/government/collections/companies-house-guidance-for-limited-companies-partnerships-and-other-company-types). In addition, users can sign up for e-reminders of filing deadlines, access company details via a free app and learn about free events taking place throughout the UK (www.gov.uk/government/publications/companies-house-events-calendar).

Information Commissioner's Office

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO, <https://ico.org.uk>) is the independent public authority responsible for upholding information rights in the UK. It enforces legislation on data protection in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The ICO keeps a public record of data controllers and advises organisations on how to improve the processing of personal data. Its website provides a clear explanation of data protection legislation, along with practical guidance, checklists and free materials to help business owners

and organisations comply with the law. Information for business owners can be found on the 'For organisations' pages.

The website provides specific guidance for ten sectors, including small firms, charities and financial organisations. The small business guide (<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/business>) has a practical checklist, a guide to 'getting it right' and a training checklist. In addition, the ICO's 'Think Privacy' toolkit (<https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/think-privacy/2693/ico-think-privacy-toolkit.pdf>) contains free downloadable posters, stickers and postcards that employers can use to remind their staff about data protection issues.

The ICO also monitors compliance with freedom of information legislation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, the Scottish Information Commissioner has responsibility for enforcing equivalent Scottish legislation. (www.itspublicknowledge.info/home/ScottishInformationCommissioner.aspx).

Intellectual Property Office

The Intellectual Property Office (IPO, www.gov.uk/government/organisations/intellectual-property-office) is the official government body responsible for regulating and registering intellectual property (IP) rights, such as patents, trade marks and design rights in the UK.

The website includes information about the importance of IP in business, the different types of IP and enforcement procedures. The IPO's 'IP for business' web page (www.gov.uk/government/collections/ip-for-business-events-guidance-tools-and-case-studies) has an IPO events calendar, interactive business tools, business guidance and case studies.

Search facilities enable users to check for existing UK trade marks (www.gov.uk/search-for-trademark), patents (www.gov.uk/search-for-patent) and registered designs (www.gov.uk/search-registered-design). Website users can also file a patent application, or apply to register a trade mark or design online, although applications to register a repeating surface pattern, such as wallpaper, must be sent by post.

Acas (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)

Acas (www.acas.org.uk) is an independent public body that promotes good employment relations and provides information, training, advice and conciliation services for employers and employees in England, Wales and Scotland. In Northern Ireland, the Labour Relations Agency (www.lra.org.uk) fulfils a similar role.

The Acas website provides a wealth of information relevant to employers, covering topics such as contracts and hours, equality, parents and carers, health and wellbeing, and redundancy. Go to www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2949 for guidance for new employers.

The website also includes useful tools and template documents. The 'Acas Model Workplace' tool (<https://obs.acas.org.uk/modelworkplace/Landing.aspx>) allows users to check how well their workplace is performing in ten key areas of employment practice, and provides resources that are tailored to the ratings they receive. The 'Acas Helpline Online' tool (www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4489) enables users to raise questions about disputes or other problems in their workplace.

In addition, Acas provides a free e-learning package for anyone who manages or supervises staff (www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2113). Acas also runs face-to-face training courses in

England, Wales and Scotland (<https://obs.acas.org.uk>). In Northern Ireland, equivalent training is provided by the Labour Relations Agency (www.lra.org.uk/seminars-workshops-briefings).

Department for International Trade

The Department for International Trade (DIT, www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-trade) provides support to UK-based firms to help them develop sales in international markets, and encourages overseas companies to invest in the UK. DIT is a joint (non-ministerial) operation between the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO).

DIT's services for UK exporters are listed online at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-trade/about/about-our-services. This web page links to other online resources that allow users to:

- Register for international business opportunities published on the Exporting is Great website (www.exportingisgreat.gov.uk).
- Learn about exporting events, trade missions and webinars (www.events.ukti.gov.uk).
- Get finance and insurance support from UK Export Finance (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-export-finance).
- Register with Open to Export (<http://opentoexport.com>), a free online advice, discussion and networking community that allows users to put questions directly to expert advisers. It also has country-by-country guides for exporters, and many other resources.
- Arrange a meeting with a DIT international trade adviser (www.greatbusiness.gov.uk/ukti).
- Search for contact details for local DIT teams (www.uktiofficefinder.ukti.gov.uk).

Environment Agency

The Environment Agency (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency) is a non-departmental public body responsible for protecting the environment and promoting sustainable development in England. Its remit includes water quality, fisheries, waterways, regulating the environmental impact of industry and waste, and managing the risk of flooding from rivers, reservoirs, estuaries and the sea.

Online resources that are most relevant for business include:

- Information on how to check whether a business needs an environmental permit for the management or production of potentially harmful waste or emissions.
- Application tools to register as a waste producer, carrier, broker or dealer.
- Guidance on how to protect a business against the risk of flooding (www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-your-business-for-flooding).
- Information about the enforcement actions that the Environment Agency can take against offenders.
- News items about enforcement decisions, forthcoming legislation, consultations and events. (Users can also register for regular e-mail updates from the Environment Agency.)

Natural Resources Wales (www.naturalresources.wales/?lang=en) is the Welsh Government-sponsored body with responsibility for managing natural resources in Wales.

In Scotland and Northern Ireland, environmental issues are regulated by the **Scottish Environment Protection Agency** (SEPA, www.sepa.org.uk) and the **Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs** (DAERA, www.daera-ni.gov.uk), respectively.

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra, www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs) is the UK Government department with responsibility for regulation and policy relating to environmental, food and rural matters. It also has a brief to promote growth and competitiveness in rural business, invest in tourism and support rural micro-industries.

Defra's policy documents are available online and cover issues such as:

- How the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms affect farmers (www.gov.uk/government/collections/common-agricultural-policy-reform).
- Encouraging firms to manage their impact on the environment (www.gov.uk/government/policies/encouraging-businesses-to-manage-their-impact-on-the-environment).
- Stimulating economic growth in rural areas (www.gov.uk/government/policies/stimulating-economic-growth-in-rural-areas).
- Making the food and farming industry more competitive, while protecting the environment (www.gov.uk/government/policies/making-the-food-and-farming-industry-more-competitive-while-protecting-the-environment).
- Simplifying farming regulations (www.gov.uk/government/policies/simplifying-farming-regulations).

The Defra website provides links to useful documents, such as the Agricultural Wages Order 2012, and publishes statistics that may be used for business planning (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs/about/statistics).

Chartered Trading Standards Institute

The Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI, www.tradingstandards.uk/home.cfm) is a professional membership organisation representing trading standards professionals in local authorities, business and consumer sectors, and central Government.

While the CTSI's main website focuses primarily on training and support for trading standards professionals, it also provides a government-backed Business Companion website (www.businesscompanion.info) with free information for business owners about trading standards and consumer protection legislation.

Users in need of more specific guidance should go to www.tradingstandards.uk/advice/index.cfm#postcodesearchform and search for their local authority trading standards service using the postcode search tool.

Food Standards Agency

The Food Standards Agency (FSA, www.food.gov.uk) is a government body responsible for food safety and hygiene in the UK. It works with local authorities to enforce food safety regulations and it commissions research related to food safety.

The FSA website has a large 'Business & Industry' section divided into 13 sub-sections, each dealing with a particular sector of the food industry (for example, catering and retail, farming, manufacture) or a particular topic (for example, food allergy, meat, imports and exports, food incidents).

Each section provides detailed information about regulation and good practice. A section called 'Food law inspections and your business' (www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/caterers/food-law-inspections) explains the inspections process for catering and retail business premises, and outlines what enforcement action can be taken against food business operators and establishments. Go to www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/how-to-make-an-appeal for information about how to make an appeal against an inspection decision.

A search facility on the Business & Industry page (www.food.gov.uk/business-industry) enables users to search for information by topic or business type and to filter results by country (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales).

Financial Conduct Authority

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA, www.the-fca.org.uk) regulates the financial services industry in the UK to protect consumers, promote healthy competition between financial service providers, and ensure that markets and financial systems are 'sound, stable and resilient'. It is accountable to the Treasury, but operationally independent.

The FCA's website has two major sections providing information and resources: a section for consumers and a corporate section for firms or individuals carrying out regulated financial service activities in the UK.

The website also publishes regular news items, consultation papers and policy statements.

Competition & Markets Authority

The Competition & Markets Authority (CMA, www.gov.uk/government/organisations/competition-and-markets-authority) is a non-ministerial government department that promotes competition and ensures that markets work well for business, consumers and the economy.

The CMA's web pages are available on the gov.uk website and provide useful information for business owners on topics such as:

- **Consumer protection** (www.gov.uk/competition/consumer-protection) - including news, research and guidance for traders on how to comply with consumer protection legislation.
- **Competition** (www.gov.uk/competition/competition-act-cartels) - including information about how a small business can comply with competition law.
- **Mergers** (www.gov.uk/competition/mergers) - including guidance on mergers and details of how to notify the CMA of a merger.

Website users can also find out about the CMA's market investigations, the rules on regulatory appeals and the progress of cases that have been referred to the CMA.

Further information

BIF 329 A Guide to Mandatory Contacts for Business Startups

BIF 341 An Introduction to Business Regulations When Starting Up

Useful contacts

Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

Website: www.hse.gov.uk

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)

Tel: 0300 200 3300 (Individuals - general tax enquiries)

Tel: 0300 200 3200 (Employer helpline - general enquiries)

Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs

Companies House

Tel: 0303 123 4500

Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/companies-house

Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)

Tel: 0303 123 1113

Website: www.ico.org.uk

Scottish Information Commissioner

Tel: (01334) 464610

Website: www.itspublicknowledge.info/home/ScottishInformationCommissioner.aspx

Intellectual Property Office (IPO)

Tel: 0300 300 2000

Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/intellectual-property-office

Acas (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)

Tel: 0300 123 1100

Website: www.acas.org.uk

Labour Relations Agency (Northern Ireland)

Tel: (028) 9032 1442

Website: www.lra.org.uk

Department for International Trade (DIT)

Tel: (020) 7215 5000

Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-trade

Environment Agency

Tel: 0370 850 6506

Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency

Natural Resources Wales

Tel: 0300 065 3000

Website: www.naturalresources.wales/?lang=en

Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)

Tel: 0300 099 6699

Website: www.sepa.org.uk

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

Tel: 0300 200 7842

Website: www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)

Tel: 0345 933 5577

Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs

Trading Standards offices (Chartered Trading Standards Institute)

Website: www.tradingstandards.uk/advice/index.cfm#postcodesearchform

Food Standards Agency (FSA)

Tel: (020) 7276 8829

Website: www.food.gov.uk

Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)

Tel: (020) 7066 1000

Website: www.the-fca.org.uk

Competition & Markets Authority (CMA)

Tel: (020) 3738 6000

Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/competition-and-markets-authority

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