



Department for  
Digital, Culture,  
Media & Sport

# The UK Government's International Business Events Action Plan

2019-2025

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# Foreword by Rebecca Pow

Minister for Arts, Heritage and Tourism

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The UK is a great place to hold business events. The UK has exceptional meeting venues including the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, the International Convention Centre in Belfast, the Scottish Event Campus in Glasgow, and the new International Convention Centre in Newport. It also boasts unique heritage venues and hotels that are second to none.

Business events bring in considerable economic and social benefits to the UK. Business visitors made up almost a quarter of all international visits in 2018 – amounting to 8.4 million visits – with delegates spending £4.5bn whilst here. Almost half of those who come here on business return as leisure visitors at a later date – often bringing family and friends along with them.

The UK Government is committed to maximising the opportunities presented to the UK by business events. It is a vital part of the UK's tourism industry. We also view conferences and exhibitions as significant opportunities to expand the UK's trade, exports and knowledge economy and attract inward investment.

That is why in 2015 we published our Business Visits and Events Strategy, which outlined how the UK Government would bring a more coordinated and targeted approach to supporting business events. We set up the Events Industry Board to advise us on the best way forward. We created the GREAT Business Events Growth Programme, which VisitBritain use to provide financial support to destinations in attracting bids and growing international delegate numbers. And, we work in consultation with the Devolved Administrations to support business events activity in all regions of the UK.

But as we leave the European Union, there is an opportunity to take our support to the next level to remain competitive and make clear that we remain fully open for business.

This Action Plan sets out what further steps the UK Government will take to create, attract, grow and retain international business events. By creating this strong, coordinated, cross-Government approach, with backing and support from the industry, the UK can maintain its position as a leading European nation for hosting events.

**Rebecca Pow**

Minister for Arts, Heritage and Tourism

# Foreword from the Events Industry Board

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## **A global opportunity to host GREAT business events across the UK.**

The Events Industry Board welcomes the publication of this Action Plan. It is a strong endorsement by the UK Government of the power of business events. Such events showcase the UK's key economic sectors, its creativity and innovation and its international reputation for enabling and disseminating medical and scientific research and advanced education. This in turn increases trade, exports and inward investment and provides a heightened profile for the country on the international stage.

The UK has always been a world-class destination for business events. It has a global footprint and is easily accessible. It possesses unrivalled professional expertise in staging and organising. It has a rich diversity of event venues, many unique in character, with significant additional investment currently being made in new and existing properties.

The competition to attract international business events has never been more intense. This Action Plan follows a detailed review of the UK's competitive position. It proposes initiatives that will enable the UK to maintain its position as a leading European country for hosting business events, conferences, congresses and exhibitions.

The key to this Action Plan is collaboration – between the industry, other UK Government departments, VisitBritain, the Devolved Administrations, destinations and event industry organisations – to ensure that the UK wins new business and augments existing activities, whilst providing a more competitive environment for those who already hold their events here.

We are fortunate to be backed by the GREAT programme, which promotes the UK's intrinsic values as a leading destination for tourism, trade, investment and education.

Gaining all round support for these plans will be part of the work of the Events Industry Board. Not only by raising the profile of business events within the UK Government's Industrial Strategy, but by promoting the value derived from them to all communities. We will also ensure the message of the UK's enhanced strengths in welcoming international business event is taken to a world marketplace.

These are exciting times for growing business events in the UK. We have a global opportunity to host more GREAT business events for many years to come. The Board looks forward to meeting this challenge.

**Michael Hirst OBE**

Chairman – Events Industry Board

# 1. Executive Summary

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- 1.1 The UK Government wants to maintain its position as a leading European country for hosting business events, conferences and congresses. To do this, we want to help create new international business events, attract more existing events to the UK, grow our already successful events and retain those that might be thinking about leaving.
- 1.2 In 2015, the UK Government published the Business Visits and Events Strategy<sup>1</sup>, which outlined how it intended to help grow the Business Events Industry within the UK. This Action Plan serves as an update to that strategy, setting out in greater detail a UK Government offer of support to the industry. This offer has been informed by our experience of implementing the strategy so far, in particular the advice of experts sitting on the Events Industry Board and research by VisitBritain on what motivates international event organisers to choose a destination for their event. The UK Government's support offer applies to locations across the UK, and it is designed to complement ongoing work within the Devolved Administrations.
- 1.3 The Action Plan lists a set of criteria that events will need to meet in order to qualify for the UK Government's support. This includes criteria on the minimum number of delegates and the proportion of those travelling from overseas. It then outlines the UK Government's support offer across a number of areas. Key actions include:
  - a. Government advocacy – A comprehensive advocacy package will be offered – ranging from Ministers being available to write letters of support in order to help with bidding for events to offers of hosting delegates in historical Government property;
  - b. Financial support – We will continue funding the VisitBritain led Business Events Growth Programme,<sup>2</sup> and look at opportunities for expanding it, especially where business events are identified as critical to meeting the UK's key economic sector objectives; and,
  - c. Arrivals and welcome – The Border Force and UK Visas and Immigration will offer a relevant support offer to delegates.
- 1.4 By implementing this Action Plan, the UK Government hopes to achieve a step change in its support for the industry, so that it is better able to attract international business events to the UK. This Action Plan is not set in stone, however. As we proceed, we will continually evaluate the impact we are having, in order to refine our approach and make the most efficient use of our resources.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/business-visits-and-events-strategy>

<sup>2</sup> The Business Events Growth Programme is available to organisations from across the UK and is funded by the Department for International Trade's GREAT campaign.

## 2. The UK Government's Vision for Business Events

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### Background

- 2.1 The UK already has a thriving business events sector. The industry estimates that it currently brings around £32.6 billion a year into the UK economy.<sup>3</sup> In 2017 the UK welcomed 8.8 million business visits and held 592 international association meetings, with visitors spending a combined £5.3 billion.<sup>4</sup> Family and friends who accompany delegates and exhibitors of events are estimated to spend an additional £7.7 billion a year during their stay and the trade transacted and facilitated at exhibitions and business events is conservatively estimated to be worth over £150 billion annually.<sup>5</sup>
- 2.2 There is more, however, that we can do. At present only 44% of venues in the UK target international conferences, but nearly two thirds of those who do not target international conferences have indicated they are interested in doing so in the future.<sup>6</sup> And currently, only 38% of visits to conferences and exhibitions in 2016 took place outside of London.<sup>7</sup>
- 2.3 A greater number of global destinations are recognising the value of the sector. Between 2011 and 2017, for example, 1.62 million square meters of exhibition space were built in the Asia-Pacific, an increase of 24.4%.<sup>8</sup> The competition is fierce and the UK needs to keep pace.
- 2.4 Business events contribute to a number of existing government policy priorities and strategic objectives. For example, business events support the Industrial Strategy by encouraging trade and inward investment, cultivating world leading sectors and supporting business to start and grow. They support the UK Government's trade objectives by linking in with key sectors identified by the Department for International Trade.
- 2.5 The UK Government wants to maintain its position as a leading European country for hosting business events, conferences and congresses. The UK Government wants to help **create** new international business events, **attract** more existing events to the UK, **grow** our already successful events and **retain** those that might be thinking about leaving.
- 2.6 Achieving this vision will help generate growth and prosperity through:
- The direct economic impact of international business visitors spending money during their stay;
  - Repeat visits from business visitors who decide to return to the UK at a later date with friends and families, or who extend their visit to spend time with their friends/families in the location<sup>9</sup>;
  - Attracting key industry decision makers, academics and innovators to the UK;

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<sup>3</sup> Opportunities for Global Growth in the UK Events Sector, Business Visits and Events Partnership 2016

<sup>4</sup> International Passenger Survey 2017

<sup>5</sup> Opportunities for Global Growth in the UK Events Sector, Business Visits and Events Partnership 2016

<sup>6</sup> UKCAMS Conference and Meetings Survey 2018, pg 20

<sup>7</sup> Understanding Business Visits, Foresight issue 153, VisitBritain 2016

<sup>8</sup> World Map of Conference Venues, UFI: The Global Association of the Exhibitions Industry, 2017, pg 7

<sup>9</sup> Delegates who extend their trip for leisure spend £1,942 on average per trip. Without the extension the same delegates would spend £991 on average. Extending can therefore double expenditure. Source: [https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/England-documents/report\\_business\\_events\\_research\\_modules\\_1\\_3\\_final.pdf](https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/England-documents/report_business_events_research_modules_1_3_final.pdf)

- d. Facilitating more dissemination of knowledge and research outputs and showcasing British products and services;
- e. Increasing opportunities for exports and inward investment for UK businesses as well as for business to be conducted on an international scale; and,
- f. Enhancing regional prosperity and sense of place by creating an approach that takes into account all the regions and nations of the UK.

## Working with the Devolved Administrations

- 2.7 This is a UK Government plan. The UK Government has designed the Action Plan to complement the work of each Devolved Administration, where appropriate, and will continue to consult the Devolved Administrations on future work, where appropriate. This includes participation in the Events Industry Board, on which each Devolved Administration has a representative. Each of the Devolved Administrations are currently undertaking major work on business events.
- 2.8 In Northern Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland works closely with partners to promote Northern Ireland as an attractive destination for business events, through the provision of support at the bidding stage, marketing support, and the coordination of in-kind support. Activity includes market research, industry and product development, public relations, digital marketing, attendance at trade shows, and on the ground support of site visits. Belfast and Northern Ireland also have a well-established Ambassador Programme, aligned to their priority sectors, and a conference subvention fund. Business events present an important opportunity for Northern Ireland, and the support contained in the action plan is therefore most welcome.
- 2.9 In Scotland, VisitScotland Business Events (VSBE) is the lead agency for the marketing, positioning and promotion of Scotland as a destination for Business Events. It assists Scottish industry and academia to win business events that are aligned to Scotland's credentials and ambitions, with a focus on peripatetic events coming from outside Scotland, including the rest of the UK. Activities include sales missions, desk-side appointments, sales and PR representation in the major markets of the USA, Canada, Germany, France and Spain, access to Ministers, presence under the Scotland brand at major trade shows and soft or hard support on an ad-hoc basis. VSBE's work is designed to add value to existing activity undertaken at city, regional and venue levels.
- 2.10 In Wales, Visit Wales have a team developing and promoting the country in the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE)/Association/Corporate markets, and are the lead agency for facilitating and supporting Welsh industry and academia to win business events. The focus is on presenting Wales as a viable, challenger destination for business events. Both national and international events which align to Visit Wales priority markets are in-scope. Activities include sales missions, public relations representation, one to one meetings and appointments, organised familiarisation visits for buyers, presence under the Wales brand at key trade shows, industry engagement and product development. The work aligns strategically with the Welsh Government's inward investment targets.

## Developing our strategy

- 2.11 In 2015, the UK Government published<sup>10</sup> the Business Visits and Events Strategy<sup>10</sup>, which outlined how the UK Government intended to help grow the Business Events industry within the UK. The strategy recognised that whilst the UK Government provided discrete support to business events, it had not done so on a strategic, overarching basis. The original strategy recognised that it was only the 'beginning of a programme of work to ensure that the UK is better placed to attract, secure and develop business visits and events.'

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/business-visits-and-events-strategy>

- 2.12 This Action Plan serves as an update to that strategy, by setting out in greater detail a concrete UK Government offer of support to the Business Events Industry. This offer has been informed by our experience of the strategy so far, in particular the advice of experts sitting on the Events Industry Board and through research by VisitBritain on what motivates event organisers to choose a destination.<sup>11</sup> In developing this work, officials and Ministers have also engaged with the Tourism Industry Council, the Business Visits and Events Partnership and attended roundtables with exhibition organisers, congress organisers, hoteliers and international buyers.
- 2.13 The Action Plan will be delivered by the UK Government, led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and other relevant UK Government Departments. It will be supported by VisitBritain and the Events Industry Board. We will continue to consult the Devolved Administrations, other UK Government departments and wider industry, where appropriate.

## VisitBritain's research

- 2.14 VisitBritain's research outlines the factors that event organisers rate as important in the decision making process. In the research, 300 participants were asked to rate five cities on three decision-making factors that are most important to them when deciding on which location to bring their event to. These participants were then asked to compare UK and EU cities in these decision making categories. The research highlighted significant differences in attractiveness between major UK cities, its regions, and other European cities.
- 2.15 As seen from the table below, London scores highly in a number of areas (e.g. destination appeal, ease of access) whereas other UK cities (e.g. Birmingham and Cardiff) score less well against European competitors, showing low awareness and overall appeal. Cities across the UK perform less well on value for money than other European destinations.

**Table 1: Rating (mean score out of 5) of British Cities and Competitors for Conferences & Meetings**

Destination	Ease of access	Suitability of venues	Value for money	Destination appeal	Quality of accommodation
London	4.7	4.5	2.6	4.5	4.4
Edinburgh	3.6	4.1	3.3	4.1	4.2
Glasgow	3.2	*	*	3.8	*
Manchester	4.0	4.1	3.6	3.1	*
Birmingham	3.9	4.4	*	3.3	3.5
Paris	4.6	4.5	3.0	4.3	4.2
Barcelona	4.3	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.3
Berlin	4.4	4.4	4.1	3.8	4.3
Dublin	4.0	3.8	3.7	3.9	4.2

\*sample size insufficient

<sup>11</sup> *Destination Decision-Making, Motivations and Barriers*, Strategic Research and Insight, 2017

## 3. What Events will the UK Government Support?

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- 3.1 The UK hosts thousands of events, conferences, meetings, conventions, exhibitions, congresses, shows, festivals each year, with varying levels of delegate numbers and economic impact. The UK Government cannot provide direct support to them all but we can target our support in areas where the biggest difference can be made.
- 3.2 The UK Government has created a set of criteria for identifying existing business events that the Government might support. We have produced separate criteria for **attracting** events to the UK, **growing** existing events and **creating** new ones. These are set out below. The UK Government may decide to support events which do not meet the criteria on a case-by-case basis. For **retaining** events, we will try and retain all those that are thinking of leaving.

### Attracting events to the UK

- 3.3 In order to be eligible for the UK Government's support offer, an event should ideally:
- Draw at least 50% of delegates from overseas;
  - Attract a minimum of 300 delegates;
  - Not displace existing international events in the UK;
  - Have potential opportunities to create fringe events in addition to the main event, so as to extend the length of time that delegates stay;
  - Be one of the sectors identified by the Department for International Trade and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport as key to the development of the Business Events Industry;<sup>12</sup>
  - Link closely to one or more of the four Grand Challenges identified in the Industrial Strategy;<sup>13</sup> and
  - Have the ability to attract inward investment to UK businesses.
- 3.4 Events should also demonstrate the active involvement and support of local, national and regional partners including, but not limited to, Destination Management Organisations, venues/conference centres, the Local Authority and/or other sub-regional economic delivery partner, and the Devolved Administrations where appropriate. Appropriate due diligence must be made on the event, to ensure the organisers are acting fairly and transparently.
- 3.5 The UK Government is particularly keen on events which enhance the reputation or impact of UK academia, encourage knowledge sharing and bring key opinion leaders from their fields to the UK.

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<sup>12</sup> The current list of priority sectors for the UK Government includes: Advanced Manufacturing, Aerospace, Automotive, BioEconomy, Consumer, Creative, Education, Energy, Engineering, Financial Services, Food and Drink, Health and Life Sciences, Infrastructure, Marine, Space, Sport, Smart Cities and Technology. Also relevant are the Industrial Strategy policy priorities (e.g. research and development) and Grand Challenges (e.g. the ageing society).

<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-strategy-the-grand-challenges/industrial-strategy-the-grand-challenges>. The Grand Challenges are Artificial Intelligence and data, the ageing society, clean growth and the future of mobility.

## Growing existing events

- 3.6 While aiming to win existing events with a track record of success is a prudent approach, there are a finite number of events that can feasibly come to the UK each year due to capacity constraints and the fact that many events are not peripatetic and do not move from their chosen host destination once established. The UK Government's support offer therefore will also apply to growing existing UK events in order to attract greater amounts of international businesses and delegates. This is where the Events Industry Board considers there are the biggest opportunities.
- 3.7 For growing events, we will largely use the same criteria as for attracting events, although the 300 delegate minimum and 50% international targets will need to be realistic ambitions for the bidder rather than existing figures.
- 3.8 To optimise these opportunities we will need to adopt a highly proactive approach, identifying the existing events which meet our criteria and then approaching organisers to discuss ways of supporting them to grow. These could be domestic only events with the potential for attracting an international audience or international events held in Britain that can further grow their international profile.

## Creating new events

- 3.9 Key UK Government objectives, such as those laid out in the Industrial Strategy could be met or enhanced by the creation of new business events. The UK Government will therefore work across government, with the Devolved Administrations and in partnership with other public and private stakeholders, to support the creation of new business events. This includes UK Government sponsored/organised events such as the International Business Festival or the Global Disability Summit.
- 3.10 Creating new events is however, a significant investment for the UK Government and each event would need to be considered against its own business case.

## 4. The UK Government's Support Offer

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- 4.1 This section outlines the UK Government's support offer to business events which meet the criteria outlined above. This offer is based on findings from existing research and extensive stakeholder engagement by the UK Government and the Events Industry Board. The exact mix of support on offer will vary depending on the specific needs of the event. Support with visas, for example, will not be needed for events where delegates come from countries that do not need visas for entry into the UK. The offer is split into six different types of support:
- a. UK Government Advocacy;
  - b. Financial Support;
  - c. Destination Marketing;
  - d. Arrivals and Welcome;
  - e. Capacity and Connectivity;
  - f. Government Coordination.

### UK Government Advocacy

- 4.2 A 2011 report on Subvention Practices identifies UK Government advocacy as one of the ways in which the UK could increase its success in bidding for international events, especially when the overall offers are similar.<sup>14</sup> Advocacy is seen by many decision makers as an indication of the commitment of the relevant government to supporting the delivery of their event. Developing a more systematic approach to government advocacy and political support could secure more major events. Advocacy support can be given at all stages of an event's life cycle – from bidding to hosting.

### What we will do

- 4.3 For events that meet the criteria, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, working with VisitBritain and where appropriate with Devolved Administration and regional bodies, will offer:
- a. Ministerial letters or videos of support to accompany bids or to welcome organisers to the UK;
  - b. Ministers or senior officials attending site visits;
  - c. Where appropriate, Ministers or senior officials speaking at, or attending, events;
  - d. Assistance with bringing in influential speakers to events; and,
  - e. Hosting delegations where appropriate, including in historical government buildings, and using Government owned property for receptions/meetings/dinners where appropriate and possible.
- 4.4 The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will work with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, as well as VisitBritain's overseas offices and the British Council, to assess what use can be made of the UK's overseas network in enhancing the advocacy offer.
- 4.5 VisitBritain and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will assess, on an ongoing basis, the impact of Government advocacy in order to refine the offer over time.

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<sup>14</sup> Subvention and Bid Support Practices for International Conferences and Events in Britain 2011 pg 10

## Financial Support

- 4.6 VisitBritain have run an Events Support Programme since 2016.<sup>15</sup> This is now called the Business Events Growth Programme and is funded through an annual grant from the GREAT programme via the Department for International Trade. The programme supports the attraction and growth of international business events which align with UK priority sectors by providing:
- a. Financial support – which involves giving grants to help support the development of a bid (e.g. marketing and digital activity) and increasing an event's appeal to overseas attendees. The fund will generally offer successful applicants up to £20,000; and,
  - b. Government advocacy / soft support – which involves working with partners across Whitehall to leverage Ministerial support for the event, as set out in the government advocacy section above.
- 4.7 The Business Events Growth Programme awarded nearly £755,000 in its first three years across 38 events, many of which reported valuable rises in international attendees. For example, the programme supported the UK Security Expo 2017 in London, leading to a 53% increase in international attendees.<sup>16</sup>
- 4.8 The Programme does not currently fund 'subvention' activities. Subvention is most commonly understood as providing direct financial assistance to help win and deliver events. The most common forms of subvention provided by national and regional government include direct financial subsidy, discounted venue hire costs and hosting events as part of the wider programme.
- 4.9 A report commissioned by the Business Visits and Events Partnership identified that the UK has, in the past, provided very limited funding and in-kind support in order to win events. Approximately half of the 85 destinations surveyed (both UK and international) stated they had lost bids to other destinations because of a lack of subvention funding. Only 13% of destinations stated that this was not an issue.<sup>17</sup>
- 4.10 Encouraging a collaborative approach between partners involved in bidding and hosting events ensures that the destination can offer a more compelling, structured 'package' to the organisers when bidding for events and allows bidders to articulate more effectively the overall in-kind and direct support package. This should include collaboration between the local and regional government, destination management organisations, transport and accommodation providers as well as Mayoral support (where relevant). Glasgow in particular is well-known for their collaborative approach. 'Team Glasgow' comprises the Scottish Event Campus (SEC), the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau, universities, venues, hotels, restaurants, services, transport providers, local and national government all pulling together in a coordinated way to deliver the best possible experience to event organisers and visitors. This approach has encouraged events such as the European Association of International Education to be held at the SEC.

### What we will do

- 4.11 VisitBritain have secured funding from GREAT for the Business Events Growth Programme in 2019–2020.
- 4.12 The Business Events Growth Programme will consider the size and scope of the fund, as well as potentially moving away from the annual funding cycle to a longer time horizon that better aligns with the lead-in times for business events.
- 4.13 The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport commissioned external research on the issue of subvention funding to cover the costs of hosting an event and its relative importance when compared with other factors. The scope of the research project was not exhaustive, and its purpose was to inform policy decision-making. The research has been published alongside this Action Plan and its findings will be incorporated into ongoing considerations around future UK Government subvention support.

<sup>15</sup> See: <https://www.visitbritain.org/business-events>

<sup>16</sup> A full list of successful applicants can be found here: <https://www.visitbritain.org/business-events-growth-programme-successful-applicants>

<sup>17</sup> *UK Subvention Policy and Bid Support Practices for International Conferences and Events*, pg 25 Sally Greenhill and Tony Rogers for the Business Visits and Events Partnership.

## Destination Marketing and Promotion

- 4.14 Research shows that awareness and knowledge of many UK destinations remains low amongst those looking for host cities for their business event.<sup>18</sup> The research also shows that many destinations do not have the resources to reach international decision-makers by themselves.
- 4.15 The UK government is also keen for destinations to maximise the opportunities around delegate trip extensions. Research conducted by VisitBritain found that delegates who extended their trip for leisure purposes spent almost £1000 more than if they had not extended.<sup>19</sup> Trip extensions also provide an opportunity for destinations who are not well known for their leisure tourism offer to encourage those visiting for events to stay for longer.

### What we will do

- 4.16 Destination and marketing support will continue to be delivered by VisitBritain through the Business Events Growth Programme and their core business events work. Aside from providing financial support, their core activities will include:
- a. Hosting workshops across the UK which will share best practice on collaborative bidding for events. These workshops will be focused on increasing the skills of smaller destinations who wish to grow their profile for hosting international business events and wish to develop collaborative relationships within and between destinations;
  - b. Developing tools for destinations to use in their bids, including conducting ad-hoc research into the business events market within the UK;
  - c. Continuing to host the annual MeetGB Conference, bringing together international buyers from across the world to meet UK destinations;
  - d. Providing advice and assistance to destinations on how to enhance a bid and destination offer for overseas delegates; and,
  - e. Working with destinations to help showcase their regional highlights, ease of travel, ease of access and accommodation offer – not just for delegates but also their families and travel companions.
- 4.17 The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, VisitBritain and the Events Industry Board will together promote the Business Events Growth Programme, especially to those smaller associations and buyers who are less likely to be familiar with the offer.

## Arrivals and Welcome

- 4.18 An important factor in the decision making process for organisers choosing where to host their event is the quality of the welcome that they and their delegates might receive.<sup>20</sup> Welcome includes the process delegates have to go through before leaving their own country (including visa applications, if applicable), having a pleasant airport experience and their experience of the host town or city.<sup>21</sup> Welcome is particularly important in markets such as China, and it can have a significant impact on how the UK is perceived.<sup>22</sup>
- 4.19 This evidence suggests that the vast majority of business event delegates to the UK can enter without a visa. However the ease of getting a visa is important to the perception or view of a country's welcome.

<sup>18</sup> *Destination Decision-Making, Motivations and Barriers*, Strategic Research and Insight, 2017 pg 3

<sup>19</sup> Business Events Research: Delegate Spend and Trip Extensions, VisitBritain, pg 2

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.visitbritain.org/britains-welcome>

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/foresight\\_159\\_-\\_nbi\\_welcome.pdf](https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/foresight_159_-_nbi_welcome.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> *Destination Decision-Making, Motivations and Barriers*, Strategic Research and Insight, 2017 pg 11

Amongst a sample of respondents from 20 countries, 44% of those surveyed stated that ease of visa application was a very important element of welcome, and this figure was higher in some countries that need visas to come to the UK.<sup>23</sup>

### What we will do

- 4.20 UK Visas and Immigration will provide relevant appropriate visa support for applicable events that meet the criteria. Relevant support might include ensuring operational teams and/or Visa Application Centres are made aware of any anticipated peaks in demand, providing a point of contact for events managers to liaise with on visa issues and access to premium lounges in airports.
- 4.21 Border Force will work with Port Operators to provide appropriate support for events that meet the criteria. This could include the offer of a premium service, on a cost per-delegate basis, which could include a Fast Track service at airports and a targeted 'warm welcome' at ports of entry. The welcome might include banners, posters and event information desks.
- 4.22 As a result of recent changes, visitors from Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and the United States are now able to use ePassport gates at ports across the UK and juxtaposed controls in a move designed to have a transformational impact on their border experience. This change is a prime example of sending the message that the UK is open and welcoming.<sup>24</sup>

## Capacity and Connectivity

- 4.23 Ease of access is deemed one of the most important factors in destination choice with 77% of organisers placing it in their top three priorities.<sup>25</sup> London scores highly for 'ease of access', in part due to its availability of airports. Manchester and Birmingham also score relatively high, but other cities are often perceived as 'awkward' to get to, which is one of the main reasons they do not win more events.<sup>26</sup> Ease of access does not only relate to flights but how easy it is to get from the airport into the city and/or venue.<sup>27</sup>
- 4.24 Suitability of venues is the second most important factor when choosing a destination with 62% of organisers placing it in their top three priorities.<sup>28</sup> This includes assessing their overall capacity, number of breakout rooms and whether it fits the brand image of the event. The UK is well rated on this aspect of decision making by those who know about its cities, although there is a view that smaller cities do not have large enough or suitable venues.<sup>29</sup> Assessing the capacity of venues, however, is not as simple as counting the number and size of venues. One issue is seasonality, 52% of exhibitions take place within the months of March, September, October and November. Conversely, July, August and December combined had 8% of exhibitions.<sup>30</sup> This would indicate that there are a number of months where capacity is tight, but others where there is the space to host.

### What we will do

- 4.25 It is recognised that although the UK's connectivity to the rest of the world is high, the onward journey can be more complex. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will work with VisitBritain and the Rail Delivery Group, who will facilitate talks with train operating companies, to explore ways of improving connectivity to and from business events venues across the UK. This includes consulting with the Devolved Administrations, as appropriate. This will include liaising with travel providers to investigate whether the timing of target events is fed into timetable and maintenance decisions. It will also include raising awareness of existing connectivity.

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/foresight\\_159\\_-\\_nbi\\_welcome.pdf](https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/foresight_159_-_nbi_welcome.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/epassport-gates-eligibility-expansion-confirmed-for-june>

<sup>25</sup> *Destination Decision-Making, Motivations and Barriers*, Strategic Research and Insight, 2017 pg 9

<sup>26</sup> *Destination Decision-Making, Motivations and Barriers*, Strategic Research and Insight, 2017 pg 16 and 17

<sup>27</sup> *Destination Decision-Making, Motivations and Barriers*, Strategic Research and Insight, 2017 pg 9

<sup>28</sup> *Destination Decision-Making, Motivations and Barriers*, Strategic Research and Insight, 2017 pg 2

<sup>29</sup> *Destination Decision-Making, Motivations and Barriers*, Strategic Research and Insight, 2017 pg 17

<sup>30</sup> *The Size and Scale Index for Events in 2015 (SASiE)*, AEV, AEO and ESSA, 2017 pg 20

- 4.26 We will require those events seeking support from UK Government to have included the involvement of transport partners at the event bidding stage, with an emphasis on delivering improvements to the 'final mile'<sup>31</sup> where relevant.
- 4.27 VisitEngland will conduct a detailed exercise to assess all the venues that can accommodate a plenary for at least 400 people in England and will assess the availability of these venues over the coming years. This will help the UK Government understand existing capacity and feed into the 'attract, grow and create' decision making process.
- 4.28 We will assess how conference centres across the UK can be financially supported in developing their access to full fibre broadband and will review the opportunities for the adoption of 5G as this technology becomes more widely available. To support the sector's ability to attract international delegates, the UK Government will offer a new £250,000 scheme to improve broadband connectivity in conference centres. We expect the details and criteria to be announced in 2019.

## Government Coordination

- 4.29 In order to deliver the support offer identified in this Action Plan, the UK Government recognises the need for a coordinated, efficient, cross-Government approach. This includes a pipeline, which VisitBritain is developing, of international business events that represent key sectors and address economic impact, seasonality and regional spread. VisitBritain will work with The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and other UK Government Departments to identify a prioritised list.

### What we will do

- 4.30 The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and other relevant UK Government Departments will continue to work closely with the Events Industry Board, and its new chair Michael Hirst OBE, to help grow the business events industry across the UK. We have updated the Board's terms of reference to match the contents and delivery of this plan.
- 4.31 The UK Government agrees with the views expressed by the Events Industry Board that we need to have closer engagement with key players in the events industry on the ground, such as those responsible for conference venues and hotels. The Board will therefore set up a panel of Senior Industry Leaders to meet twice yearly and to be chaired by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and Tourism.
- 4.32 The Events Industry Board has set up two working groups which look at specific issues that the Board have identified as being important to the industry. These working groups will review issues across the UK and will consult with the Devolved Administrations on findings, as appropriate:
- a. **Capacity:** Chaired by Chris Skeith, CEO Association of Event Organisers, this group is assessing the infrastructure that we have in the UK to support the industry – including venue capacity, transport, digital and investment; and,
  - b. **Talent and skills:** Chaired by Sarah Wright, events consultant, this group is looking at how the events industry can remain competitive in staff recruitment and retention.

The working groups are due to submit their reports later this year (2019). They will be considered closely by the Events Industry Board and by the UK Government.

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<sup>31</sup> The 'final mile' refers to the connection between train station/airport and conference centre

## 5. Next steps

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- 5.1 Business events are a major part of our tourism sector and the UK Government is committed to supporting our business events industry. This Action Plan sets out a comprehensive offer, beginning immediately, for how the UK Government will step-up the support that it provides to the sector. We want to **create** more international business events, **attract** a greater number to the UK, **grow** what we currently have and **retain** events that are thinking about moving to other locations.
- 5.2 The Events Industry Board will help the UK Government deliver the plan by providing ongoing advice and support and by holding roundtables within the sector to gather information. As set out in its new terms of reference, the Board will submit an annual report to the Minister responsible for tourism, outlining its activities over the year, its assessment of how the Action Plan is being implemented and setting out any recommendations.
- 5.3 This Action Plan is not set in stone. As we proceed, we will continually evaluate the impact we are having, in order to refine our approach and make the most efficient use of our resources.





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