

# Business visits and events strategy



**EVENTS  
ARE  
GREAT**  
BRITAIN

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## Ministerial foreword

The UK is a world leader in the events industry. It is clear from the success of the Olympics and Paralympics in 2012 and, more recently, the Commonwealth Games, that the UK can deliver successful sporting events on the world stage. Our expertise is not just in sporting events, or their cultural and entertainment equivalents. Exhibitions, trade fairs, conferences and corporate hospitality form the backbone of the business visits and events industry, and contributed £39.1 billion<sup>1</sup> to the UK economy in 2013.

The industry employs over half a million people – primarily in small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) - and the top 10 leading event agencies in the UK have a turnover of more than £2billion, much of which is generated outside of the UK<sup>2</sup>. The events industry here is a world leader, but we recognise that it could be even better. It has become clear that there is a need for a more strategic, national approach and we want to seize the opportunity to present the UK as a competitive destination. For example, some of the top global fairs are held outside of the UK, despite our pre-eminent position in event management.

Hosting events matters but not simply because of the money spent in the local economy whilst the event is taking place. Major events focus the world's attention on one location – increasing people's interest in visiting, studying or investing there. Whether it's the Queen's Diamond Jubilee or the NATO summit in Newport, the publicity off the back of an event can reap dividends long after its end.

Gathering together industry figures for an event also forms a powerful association between that industry and the host location. No one questions the importance of the Farnborough air show to local and national jobs, growth and pride of place. Major business events are able to showcase those sectors in which the UK has a competitive advantage so I want to see that success replicated. Whether that is promoting

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<sup>1</sup> Business Visits and Events Partnership report 'Events are Great'

<sup>2</sup> Business Visits and Events Partnership report 'Events are Great'.



**Sajid Javid**

**Secretary of State  
for Culture, Media  
and Sport**

Cambridge and life sciences or Dundee and biotech, the UK can secure new competitive advantages in industry with targeted support and investment generated by hosting the right events.

Of course, events don't have to be big or in the public eye to support inward investment; nor will events that start small necessarily stay small – take Glastonbury, or the Edinburgh or Hay Festivals. Accordingly there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the support that Government can and should provide. We need to take a tailored approach.

There is already a significant amount of work to support the business visits and events industry: UKTI, FCO, the devolved administrations and others support specific events. However, there has never been an overarching strategic approach business events before. This strategy sets out how we will build on existing work by taking a more co-ordinated and targeted approach to the support we provide. Through this new approach we will showcase our industrial strengths, bolster exports, stimulate inward investment and boost tourism.

This strategy is the starting point for a programme of work; it does not offer all the solutions but I am clear that with the right support, and by working hand in hand with the industry, the UK's events industry can play a significant part in helping us increase exports by 2020, as part of the 2020 Export Drive.

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## Priorities for Growth

1. The business visits and events sector is incredibly diverse, covering trade fairs, conferences and congresses, outdoor and entertainment events as well as business tourism. Events range from the international to local; tens of attendees to hundreds of thousands. The UK events industry is world class and the industry is blossoming. Yet, despite this, there is a significant opportunity for the industry to grow further. The majority of the top global fairs are held outside of the UK and it is clear that there is a great opportunity for the UK Government to provide strategic support to bolster the reach of the industry. With careful targeting, there is an opportunity to widen our ambitions.
2. This strategy therefore focuses on supporting the growth of the UK business visits and events sector, particularly in helping to support this Government's aim to increase exports by 2020.
3. Alongside the 2020 Export Drive, Government is also working to deliver its industrial strategy. This is a long-term, whole-of-government approach to support economic growth. By working in partnership with key sectors, like automotive and professional and business services, Government is giving business the confidence to invest and create more opportunities, more jobs and make the UK more competitive in the global market. This strategy aims to complement and join up with industrial strategy work when identifying priority business visits and events to target in the future.



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## Background

1. In late 2014, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport began an informal consultation process with the industry, other government departments and the devolved administrations to identify where further support could be provided to grow the industry and capitalise on the existing good work that is already underway.
2. Both the Business Visits and Events Partnership and the All Party Parliamentary Group on the UK events industry have already produced extensive information about the current state of the industry and what more might be needed<sup>3</sup>. This strategy aims to build on that work and provide a clear position of how this Government aims to further support the industry.
3. The All Party Parliamentary Group on the UK Events Industry, chaired by Nick de Bois MP, issued a report in August 2013 on the 'International Competitiveness of the UK Events Industry'. It took evidence from a wide range of partners and we have taken that report into consideration in the development of this strategy. The key findings in the report were that:
  - a. The industry recognised it could be a key driver of the Government's growth agenda;
  - b. The majority of support requested was not financial, but a reduction of interventions that decrease the industry's international competitiveness;
  - c. Barriers to growth were exacerbated by the poor position of the business events industry within many sectors of government and the industry still on the whole operated in silos;
  - d. The UK 'product' is strong and attractive to event organisers and the UK continues to win major business despite competitor destinations offering subvention funding.

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<sup>3</sup> All Party Parliamentary Group UK Events Industry report on 'International Competitiveness of the UK Events Industry' May-August 2013. Business Visits and Events Partnership report 'Events are GREAT'.

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## **Current picture**

4. Individual government departments, each of the devolved administrations, UKTI and each of the Visits are already doing a significant amount of work to support the industry. In addition, the Business Visits and Events Partnership co-ordinates the key representative organisations within the industry to better support it and enable growth.
5. We are clear that this strategy aims to provide added value to this on-going, existing work. We are not seeking to duplicate or hinder any of the existing successes.

## **UK's global position:**

6. The UK events industry is a world leader in staging events across the world. As a sector, it is currently worth £39.1 billion<sup>4</sup> to the UK economy. However, despite having leading event organising companies based in the UK, a substantial amount of their business is currently conducted overseas.
7. It is clear that this is a highly competitive market. The UK is currently 5<sup>th</sup> in the world based on the number of events held in the country and London is the only UK city in the top 10. A full breakdown is overleaf:

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<sup>4</sup> Events Are GREAT

*Top international meeting countries and cities in 2013, according to the International Congress and Convention Association<sup>5</sup>:*

Country	Number of meetings
1. USA	829
2. Germany	722
3. Spain	562
4. France	527
5. UK	525
6. Italy	447
7. Japan	342
8. China	340
9. Brazil	315
10. Netherlands	302

City	Number of meetings
1. Paris	204
2. Madrid	186
3. Vienna	182
4. Barcelona	179
5. Berlin	178
6. Singapore	175
7. London	166
8. Istanbul	146
9. Lisbon	125
9. Seoul	125

<sup>1</sup> The meetings referred to in this data are international meetings as defined by the ICCA and is not as broad as the range of business visits and events dealt with by this strategy – 2013 ICCA Statistics Report

8. As this demonstrates, there is a clear opportunity to help this sector expand and to help boost the events industry within the UK. This can only be achieved through a co-ordinated approach across both industry and government.

### **UK Government**

9. Each UK Government department currently takes their own approach to supporting relevant industry events. There is no cross Government, co-ordinated approach to identifying and supporting the business events which are of most value to our economy. These could be events that are already held in the UK events that are currently held overseas that the UK could bid for and hold in the future or new events which showcase UK sector expertise. It was clear from discussions and feedback that Government support for a bidding process and during the event itself can be critical in securing a successful bid and would be welcomed for targeted business events by the industry.

10. Current activity includes:

- a. UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) supports UK businesses to succeed internationally. Events – trade shows, conferences and missions in the UK and overseas - are a major focus of that support activity. Through event programmes UKTI helps companies to begin exporting, diversify into new markets and meet the right business partners, while the events themselves can provide a platform for showcasing UK sector capability and enhancing the UK's global reputation. UKTI believes that, working with partners, more can and should be done to attract events to the UK; build up the international profile of UK events; and promote the UK as a business tourism destination.

UKTI currently has three strands of event support: the Events & Missions programme covering UKTI-originated activity in the UK and overseas; the Events Alliance, a series of agreements with commercial event organisers to support activity in the UK and overseas; and the Tradeshow Access Programme (TAP), which provides grants for SMEs to exhibit at overseas trade fairs. UKTI is developing plans to bring all three together in a single



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programme with tailored support packages for different types of customers from 1 April 2016.

- b. As the national tourism agency, VisitBritain works to promote Britain worldwide and develop its visitor economy. Much of the work on business tourism has, in recent years, been carried out by the individual home nations - Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England. However, VisitBritain has a role to play in co-ordinating the delivery from a UK-wide perspective alongside UKTI in promoting the UK as an attractive business tourism destination. A Britain wide role is also needed due to the peripatetic nature of the events to ensure that cities across the UK regions are able to compete effectively for future iterations of events, without unnecessarily and damagingly competing against each other.

**Home nation and individual city support:**

- 11. VisitScotland, Tourism Northern Ireland and the Welsh Government all undertake their own work to encourage, secure and sustain bids. In addition, cities will generate bids themselves. There is a significant amount of work already underway in these organisations and we are clear that this strategy needs to build on this work, not hinder what is already working well.
- 12. Work includes:
  - a. Promotion of UK destinations as options for business tourism through presence at relevant overseas fairs;
  - b. Providing networking opportunities for destinations and industry and events leaders;
  - c. VisitScotland, for example, administers a conference bid fund for academic association conventions tied to key sectors, in line with a number of overseas cities and countries;
  - d. Obtaining market insights, intelligence, research and spreading good practice.
- 13. Individual cities also generate and organise their own bids, liaising with the relevant Visit organisations as appropriate. This is often in a competitive environment, with cities competing against each other within the home nation.

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### **England:**

14. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have individual strategies for events, which England does not. VisitEngland have undertaken similar, proactive work to the devolved nations in promoting cities and venues and facilitating contacts between relevant industry leads and cities so that successful bids can be developed.
15. The Ministerial Support Bid Initiative is also managed by VisitEngland. This was launched in 2013 as a mechanism through which event organisers could seek letters of support from UK Government Ministers for their events. The devolved administrations secure letters of support from their own Ministers. To date 24 letters of support have been issued and 6 of those events have subsequently been held in the UK. The benefit of these events are estimated to be £30.1m.

### **Industry:**

16. There are a number of umbrella, member organisations that work to represent and advise the UK events industry. The Business Visits & Events Partnership is one such organisation that represents leading trade and professional organisations, government agencies and other significant influencers in the business visits and events sector. It exists to garner the cohesive opinion of these stakeholders and to collectively influence and develop policies, practices and strategies that support and generate growth of business events and trade and creative enterprise through business visits and events.
17. As part of the consultation for this strategy, a questionnaire was sent out via BVEP to events organisers. We received information on specific events that the UK could bid for, events that the UK currently holds but we are at risk of losing and events that, with more support could become world class. We are grateful to all those that responded and the information provided a useful base from which the recommendations in this strategy have been developed. We will also use this information in development of priorities going forward.

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18. The Association of Event Organisers is a member organisation which aims to represent and promote the events industry and provides advice to member organisations on events in UK venues. In addition, the Events Industry Forum is an informal body which enables events industry trade associations and similar bodies to meet and discuss issues of common interest.
  19. “Britain for Events” is a promotional campaign for the UK events industry, operated directly and supported by the industry. It represents all aspects of the industry including live music, cultural meetings, conferences, trade shows etc. The campaign contributed to the APPG’s inquiry into the events industry and has developed a ‘National Events Month’ in October each year.
  20. As the UK’s biggest business festival, the International Festival of Business that was held in Liverpool in 2014 is a good example of how a global event in the UK can provide unrivalled opportunities to build connections and generate future investment. Hosting it in Liverpool, demonstrated to the international business community that the UK was open for business and an attractive destination for foreign investment. The International Festival of Business aimed to generate more than £1.7bn in contracts and £100m of direct foreign investment in the subsequent 5 years. Initial research suggests 1,400 UK companies have so far secured or expect export sales totalling an estimated £100million over 3 years<sup>6</sup>.
  21. Equally, the impact of the London 2012 Olympics has demonstrated the potential for ongoing investments to be made as a legacy of these large-scale, global events. The UK met a 4 year target to raise £11 billion worth of economic benefit from the London Games in just over 1 year. This was through businesses securing contract wins, additional sales and foreign investment, all generated by the hosting of the Olympics. More than 60 UK companies, for example, won contracts for the subsequent 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, most of them mid-sized enterprises.

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<sup>6</sup> IFB 2014 “The Highlights”

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## Feedback

Five key areas emerged from the feedback we received where further support is required:

### **1. Governance**, including ministerial support and central government co-ordination:

- Political support of the bidding process is crucial for some, high profile events. Support is required beyond Ministerial letters and could include hosting of delegations, involvement in bid presentations, use of historic government buildings etc.;
- Whilst there is a lot of work ongoing in the devolved nations, there is a lack of co-ordination and information sharing at UK Government level which means the UK is missing out on securing some significant events;
- Planning to be significantly in advance, given peripatetic events often plan their next event 5 or 6 years or more in advance;
- Any planning and prioritisation should be based on an assessment of those key industries the UK Government wishes to support through event development, including high growth sectors.

### **2. Infrastructure and funding:**

- Feedback was broadly positive about the quality of the UK's infrastructure and venue availability. It was felt that there was often a perceived lack of suitable venue space rather than an actual gap;
- It was clear however, that the UK does not have any venues capable of hosting the very largest global trade fairs under one roof and lacks 'congress' style facilities where accommodation and wider facilities are integrated within the conference space as exist in several destinations overseas;
- Venue accessibility was also raised as an issue, with concern about the difficulties (and misconceptions) that can occur linking transport hubs with appropriate venues;
- It was clear that whilst funding is important and vital, it is not the only means by which the industry secures success – political will, co-ordinated planning and integration of existing facilities were crucial.

### **3. Visas and ‘welcome’:**

- A significant number of industry representatives called for a means of identifying high profile delegates at the border, so that the UK’s welcome for them could be improved. It was noted that this is a particular feature in competitor countries. This was described as an ‘events visa’ but industry representatives made clear when we spoke to them that they were not seeking an additional visa category – simply a means of identifying delegates and having a “marketing” tool to enhance their visit;
- Suggestions included opening a special delegate lane for attendees of large events so that they could bypass any large queues at incoming passport control;
- Creation of a single point of contact for major, global events was called for to enable event organisers to identify and resolve any potential border and visa issues at the earliest opportunity. In particular, concern from industry focused on the negative perception some delegates have of the cost and process associated with obtaining a UK visa.

### **4. Marketing and strategic partnerships:**

- There was some feedback about the presentation of the UK’s offer overseas, given that each of the home nations are represented separately, with no, overall UK-wide representation;
- UKTI also noted that their current focus is on supporting UK businesses overseas, rather than supporting VisitBritain in promoting the UK as an attractive business tourism destination;
- Within England, it is clear that London attracts the majority of business tourism, and there is a need to ensure that there is adequate support for regional destinations, building a strategic partnership between VisitEngland and UKTI.

### **5. Sharing of best practice:**

- This was particularly called for by those organising more localised, smaller scale events who wished to learn from the experience of others;
- Concern was also expressed about ensuring that local authorities were fully engaged in supporting the industry and that more could be done to highlight the positive impact of business visits and events to the local economy and to the community in terms of



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place-making, civic pride, community cohesion, employment and trade for local businesses.



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## Proposals

### Overview:

1. Given the diversity of the sector it is proposed to target support for events within a tiered approach. Tier 1 events would be identified by a cross-Whitehall (including the devolved nations) and industry group reporting to Ministers. Support in this strategy is not limited to 'tier 1' events – the value and importance of all events held in the UK is recognised by the UK Government. However, we believe that National tourist boards, liaising with Government and local partners as appropriate, should lead in co-ordinating support for these events.

### Tier 1:

2. What we mean by tier 1 events:
  - a. Events which are high profile either globally, or within a particular sector and serve to put the UK on the map;
  - b. Events which have a large investment potential, both during the event and the potential for future investment. This is not just related to the number of delegates attending an event, although that will be a significant factor for many.
  - c. Current examples include, major government events like the G7, World Expos, other leading world congresses and large international trade fairs and major scientific events such as the European Society of Cardiologists, which will be hosted in London in August 2015 and will be attracting c. 35,000 delegates.
3. Support:
  - a. Strategic identification of events where central UK Government support would be valuable, linked to priority industries.
  - b. Support would primarily be at Ministerial level, providing UK Government backing of the bidding process and during the hosting of the event as appropriate.
  - c. Co-ordinated bid planning, taking into account any competing bids from cities within the UK.

### Tier 2:

4. What we mean by tier 2 events:

- a. Events which form the bulk of the business visits and events work. Events in this tier are likely to bring in the majority of investment to the UK from the business visits and events sector.
- b. Events in this sector are likely to range significantly between those that Ministers would provide a lower level of support to (compared to the Ministerial support provided for tier 1 events) to those that do not require a bidding process or are smaller in nature and therefore it would not be always necessary for UK Government intervention.

5. Support:

- a. Support for these events would build on the extremely positive work already underway by UKTI, VisitEngland and in marketing the UK offer overseas, and by VisitScotland, Tourism Northern Ireland and the Welsh Government in supporting the bidding and hosting process for the regions. Any additional UK-wide support would be to focus on removing barriers currently faced by the sector in bidding and hosting visits and events e.g. visa issues for delegates, future development of infrastructure and facilities and a co-ordinated marketing of what the UK has to offer.
- b. Ministerial support would be provided as appropriate, including letters of support, hosting delegations etc.

**Tier 3:**

6. What we mean by tier 3 events:

- a. Events or business visits which are likely to be localised, smaller scale events that primarily have a domestic market.
- b. It is important to be clear that these events are not any less important than those in tiers 1 and 2. Research by the Association of Festival Organisers, for example, suggests that the value to the UK economy of folk festivals alone is over £76million<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> APPG report 2013.

7. Support:
  - a. Support here would be about facilitating local authority support and links with the sector. Highlighting best practice is key for the sector as well as raising awareness of the wider economic benefits for local areas of hosting business visits and events.
  - b. Some of these events will have the potential to become tier 2 and even tier 1 events in the future.
8. The specific proposals below have been split into those that are relevant to a UK-wide Government approach, and those that are specifically related to proposals within England. Given that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have existing, individual strategies on visits and events, they are not separated out from the UK-wide approach as we do not intend to duplicate their existing work.

## UK wide proposals:

### Governance

1. In order to operate a tiered approach effectively, it is proposed that a new business visits and events board be established. This board would be responsible for:

- Identifying and prioritising tier 1 events along with targeted actions for Ministers and cross Government departments to ensure the success of bids for events of high strategic importance. This prioritisation exercise would be linked to key industrial sectors with high growth potential;
- Overseeing the implementation of the business, visits and events strategy;
- Consideration of any strategic issues for the sector that require cross government and sector support to resolve, as and when necessary.

Membership of the board would include:

- Representatives from the business visits and events industry
- Relevant Government departments
- VisitBritain
- UKTI
- VisitScotland, Visit Wales, Tourism Northern Ireland and VisitEngland

The board would report into the Ministerial GREAT Programme Board to ensure co-ordinated, cross-Government action. Opportunities for action include (but are not limited to):

- Direct Government backing of individual bids
- Letters of support from Ministers
- Hosting, by Ministers, of delegations or bid parties
- Use of Government buildings where possible, including heritage sites.

2. A priority list of business visits and events, along with appropriate actions, will be identified by the industry board. This should include events which the UK could bid for in the coming 5 -10 years and events that the UK currently hosts but is at risk of losing due to overseas competition.

This prioritisation exercise will take into consideration industries that are identified as a Government priority for growth, working closely with UKTI, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and board members and will consider what new events might be created to help secure the UK's competitive advantage.

3. Requests for Ministerial support received by all home nations – VisitScotland, Visit Wales, Tourism Northern Ireland and Visit England to be reported to the GREAT Programme Board on a regular basis in order to identify where UK Government co-ordination may be required.

## **Infrastructure and funding**

4. The Government has announced a £2million GREAT UK Challenge Fund. We would expect cities and regions around the UK to provide innovative bids as part of this fund which might include supporting the development of business visits and events.

5. In order to reinvigorate investment and retain the UK's global reputation, the UK Government to support a bid for the UK to host the World Expo in 2025 and to work with partners to identify a suitable venue and location.

Consideration could include the feasibility of investing in a new, congress style event facility or utilising existing infrastructure.

6. The industry board to work with DfT to ensure future transport improvements consider the impact on business visits and events industry.

## **Visas and 'welcome'**

7. The Home Office to identify a single point of contact that can be used by the sector when organising tier 1 visits and events to ensure any potential visa and immigration issues for delegates are identified and resolved as early on in the planning process as possible.

8. The Home Office (Border Force) will discuss any event specific requirements at the Border with DCMS including the provision of special arrangements at ports of entry for priority events as identified through the industry board. Border Force will

work with UK Visas & Immigration in any discussions concerning accreditation. Without exception those travelling to the UK will be subject to checks at the border in accordance with Home Office requirements but it is recognised that the application and arrival experience by delegates provides an important first impression of what the UK has to offer.

**9.** Organisers of events, identified as a priority through the industry board, to work collaboratively with the Home Office to ensure that delegates can be identified as appropriate at the border.

**10.** The Home Office to produce 'mythbusting' advice on business visit visas that the Business Visits and Events Partnership can distribute to its member organisations. This should include information for delegates on the range of UK visas available, countering any potential concerns relating to process times and cost.

## **Marketing and strategic partnerships**

**11.** VisitBritain to develop a GREAT international events promotional toolkit and to undertake international business events promotion at a Britain level, alongside other GREAT partners.

**12.** VisitBritain to create an online UK Business Events Portal to provide information on the benefits of bringing a business event to the UK and the resources available to both potential organisers and delegates.

**13.** VisitBritain to work with relevant organisers and associations to ensure GREAT branding at major business events and exhibitions.

**14.** UKTI to consider in its plans for a revised events programme from 2016 how to:

- Create greater co-operation with other Government Departments, agencies and the events industry to attract events to the UK. This would include working with VisitBritain to identify opportunities to bring major conventions, exhibitions, conferences and trade shows to the UK with HMG's own priority growth sectors;



- increase the international profile of UK events;
- and actively promote the UK and its core cities as business tourism destinations.

### **Best practice and expertise**

**15.** The industry board to identify best practice from the devolved nations, cities and venues for dissemination and use as appropriate on tier 1 and 2 events.

## **England specific proposals:**

### **Governance**

**16.** VisitEngland, with DCMS, to review the support provided by the Ministerial Bid Support Initiative for events in tier 1 and 2. Clear criteria to be advertised on what events would be seen as strategically important for Ministerial engagement and VisitEngland to co-ordinate, with DCMS, appropriate departmental or cross-government support, escalating to the GREAT Programme Board where necessary. The criteria should be clear about which high growth industries are of particular focus.

The Ministerial Bid Support Initiative to include offers of Ministerial support beyond letters as appropriate and relevant for each specific event.

**17.** A central email address to be created for venues, cities and organisers in England to use to access such support and advertised through VisitEngland and by the Business Visits and Events Partnership. This email address would be maintained and co-ordinated by VisitEngland.

### **Infrastructure and Funding**

**18.** In line with the recommendations of the Triennial review, VisitEngland to have an important role in growing and supporting business visits and events in England, using a challenge fund model. VisitEngland will use its experience of working with partners to grow the value of business visits and events, through programmes such as Northern Futures and the Regional Growth Fund, to

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develop the criteria for the future challenge fund.

**Marketing and  
strategic  
partnerships**

**19.** VisitEngland to work with UKTI and VisitBritain to ensure that English destinations – particularly regional destinations – are represented adequately in their work representing the UK as an attractive business tourism destination.

**Best practice  
and expertise**

**20.** The Business Visits and Events Partnership to continue to offer to spread best practice through its Partners and its website.

VisitEngland to consider how they can best support this and promote the positive impacts of business visits and events with local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

## Next Steps

1. This strategy is the beginning of a programme of work to ensure that the UK is better placed to attract, secure and develop business visits and events.
2. Implementing these proposals will not be without its challenges. It is clear that bidding for events is a highly competitive process. One of the first tasks for the industry board will be to undertake a prioritisation exercise to identify:
  - a. events in the UK which, with some further support could be world-class events and which should benefit from an approach under tier 1 in this strategy;
  - b. which events that are not currently held in the UK, which could be bid for over the coming 5-10 years;
  - c. which sectors, if any, we might be able to help create new, bespoke events for, showing UK expertise.
3. This exercise will have, at its core, a consideration of which events will support priority industries and regional growth priorities.

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