

BSSP Q&A brief for Business Link Providers

Q1. What is the Government's Business Support Simplification Programme (BSSP)?

The Business Support Simplification Programme (BSSP) is streamlining publicly funded business support schemes from over 3,000 to less than 100 by 2010 alongside making Business Link the main route by which businesses can access support.

The Programme covers any publicly-funded activity that benefits a business or potential business through grant, subsidy, advice or other service. The new portfolio of simplified products will roll out between October 08 and March 2010 with each product being targeted at a market failure in provision.

To ensure consistency, the new portfolio is being developed under a shared framework agreed by central, regional, local government and the business community. This covers product design, procurement, marketing and branding, evaluation and measurement.

Q2. Who is responsible for BSSP and where can I find out more?

Strategically, BSSP is led centrally by Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) in association with the other departments, agencies e.g. UKTI, RDAs and Local Authorities that provide business support. RDAs lead the delivery of BSSP in the regions.

The Business Link Managers Group is now engaged in the process. In addition, a special joint BERR / RDA Customer Journey Group has been established to ensure BL aligns fully and properly with the new portfolio of Business Support Simplification Products. Business Link Operators will be kept informed of progress during the transition by their RDA representative of BLMG who have also set up an extranet for all relevant information which will be launched week commencing 25th August 2008.

Should you need more information please contact your RDA representative in the first instance. For queries about the extranet please contact Stuart Cole, stuart.cole@businesslinksurrey.co.uk, 07748 115419

More information on wider BSSP policy can be found on BERR's website at: <http://www.berr.gov.uk/bbf/simplifying-business-support/page44805.html>

Q3. Why is the Government doing this?

Supporting businesses and encouraging economic growth is a priority at all levels of Government. Businesses say they are confused by the existing number of publicly funded support schemes and discouraged from applying. This often means the people who need, and are eligible to apply for, support most don't always get it.

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Plus, duplication and inefficiency - with a number of providers offering similar schemes – means the system does not always provide value-for-money for government providers.

Fewer, high impact, measurable products that clearly target help where it is needed will deliver a better service to customers, better outcomes for providers and achieve more with the same resource. This aim reinforces the Government's wider commitment to strengthen economic performance at national, regional and local level, as well as tackling persistent pockets of deprivation.

Q4. What is the connection between the Business Support Simplification and Transformational Government programmes?

They are both about improved service for business customers through making it easier, cheaper and quicker to obtain information and interact with Government. BSSP will be implemented in accordance with transformational government principles, ensuring that the customer journey to the support they need is as short and clear as possible, making it seamless and cheap to access. For example, information on the products in the new portfolio will be online 24/7 on www.businesslink.gov.uk, so allowing businesses a convenient route to access support whenever they may need it.

The businesslink.gov website is being developed accordingly to become the Government's main web portal for contact with business. Business facing material from all departments will be converged onto the site. As part of this, short term, the Grants and Support Directory is being cleansed of old and out-of-date products. Long term, better tools to help customers such as online applications for support are being explored.

Q5. Will BSSP have any impact on business support products developed at a regional or sub-regional level, or is it purely a national initiative?

BSSP is a cross-government initiative and all levels of Government (national/regional and local) will be expected to comply with the new product portfolio. This means only providing products from the portfolio. However, National/regional funding organisations (largely RDAs) will decide which of these products to offer in the respective regions; and local authorities can also chose to co-fund products regionally and deploy some products locally. As the main access route into support, RDAs and their Business Link Providers will need to work closely with all funders (including Local Authorities) that opt to provide support. Schemes that are not BSSP compliant will close by 2010.

BSSP is about focussing effective support on customer need. The new portfolio has been designed to benefit providers too. The evidence base and common framework for BSSP will make products consistent, easy to manage and quality assured.

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Q6. What is Business Link's role in the Business Support Simplification Programme (BSSP)?

The online and offline Business Link channels will become the main route by which businesses can access publicly funded support. This means BL fulfilling its information, diagnostic and brokerage (IDB) role as the first stage of a customer's journey to support - sign posting them to the appropriate products/schemes for their needs. As an impartial source of advice, Business Link will continue to advise clients on all sources of support be it from the private, public or voluntary sectors.

Q7. How will BSSP enable Business Link to provide a better service to customers?

In future all publicly funded business support will sit under the simplified portfolio, making it easier for Business Link to direct customers to targeted, quality support aimed at maximum impact. The portfolio will be regularly reviewed by a Management Board made up of business and public sector representatives to make sure it continues to meet business needs.

Q8. Will business support simplification involve any change to Business Link's core Information, Diagnosis and Brokerage service?

No, it won't change the basic brokerage model. But, it will add IDB for new products to Business Link advisers' remit, for example, the integration of Train to Gain skills brokerage from April 09.

Q9. How many business support products will there be in the new portfolio and when will they be launched?

The portfolio is still being finalised, the total number of products will be known in the autumn. Advisors will receive product details prior to the 'go live' date. The first product, Export Credit Insurance, went live in March 08. More products will 'go live' in the six months between October 08 and March 09.

The products sit under a range of generic business offers, or themes, that address common business issues. Details of the offers and the associated product 'go live' timeline are below.

Offer	Go live dates
Export Credit Guarantee	March 08
Skills Solutions for Business	Oct 08
Capital Investment Grants	Oct 08
Preparing to Export	Oct 08
Investigating New Overseas Markets	Oct 08

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Getting the most from Foreign Direct Investment	Oct 08
Business Collaboration Networks	Nov 08
Shared Business Support Environments	Nov 08
Business Creation	Dec 08
Business Expertise for Growth	Dec 08
Debt Finance	Jan 09
Risk Capital	Jan 09
Finance Awareness and Capability	Jan 09
Promoting resource efficiency & sustainable waste management	March 09
Protecting the natural environment	March 09
Local Community Business Coaching	March 09
Innovation Finance	March 09

Q10. How was the need identified for the new portfolio of products?

A combination of customer needs, in terms of the type of support and the support system, and policy needs, in terms of what Government was trying to achieve in providing support, were assessed. Businesses, representative organisations and other interested parties were invited to contribute to an extensive public consultation in 2007, the outcomes of which fed the approach that is now being implemented.

Q11. Will there be any flexibility to meet the specific needs of local areas?

There has to be some flexibility to meet local need. RDAs and the teams designing the products have met with Local Authorities to decide what this should be. Once concluded, agreed flexibility will be included in the product descriptions. In future, there will be no further flexibility without a strong business case to the Management Board evidencing the need for change.

Q12. What will happen to existing, publicly funded business support schemes?

Schemes and projects that are not BSSP compliant will close, or be marked for closure, by 2010. Product funders (Government Departments, RDAs, LAs) should give details to Business Link of the schemes that are either concluding naturally, are closing, or which align to the new portfolio. However, schemes will not be withdrawn until replacement products are in place.

As products do wind down, associated marketing and other sign-posting e.g. web sites, will also wind down so businesses are steered to new products and away from the old. This process is being carefully managed to avoid confusion and all RDAs have produced Regional Transition Management Plans detailing how change will be managed in each region. For more information, consult your RDA.

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Q13. What does 'go live' actually mean?

'Go live' means a product will be available for businesses to apply for. RDAs will provide Business Link with a series of fact sheets which contain details of the products by [Date]. The fact sheets will contain information on the product names, eligibility criteria and contact details etc. This will be consistent with the information on www.businesslink.gov.uk in the Grants and Support Directory section which is being re-developed.

When businesses approach Business Link looking for support – by phone, web or face-to-face – the expectation is that Business Link will assess their business needs and consider if products in the new portfolio could be of help, referring them accordingly to the right provider.

'Simple Support, Better Business', which was published as part of Budget 2008 set out the vision and a number of scenario case studies for how business support would look in 2010. This can be found at: <http://www.berr.gov.uk/bbf/simplifying-business-support/page45200.html>.

Q14. How will Business Link information and advisory teams be made aware of new product details, and that it is available?

New product names, descriptions and eligibility criteria are due to be signed off summer 08. Product Teams will provide details via the BERR / RDA Customer Journey Group prior to launch.

Q15. Why has a new brand been developed, for the new business support product portfolio?

All products in the new portfolio will sit under a single brand that identifies the product as part of the government funded portfolio. The brand is currently in development but all promotional material for new products will carry the brand name and logo. Business Link will be the 'call to action' on all promotional materials. The branding guidelines will require product providers to liaise/work with national and/or regional Business Link marketing contacts when they are planning any campaign activity. Some products will be co-branded i.e. they will carry the logo and name of the funder in the case of products that already exist and are well-known, or if a provider is well-known and trusted by the customer e.g. a Local Authority.

Q16. Who is responsible for marketing of the new business support products?

A marketing framework is currently under discussion with delivery partners that will look at how products are promoted to business customers. As

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Business Link is impartial, it will not be expected to promote products, although it is not unrealistic to expect it to promote its IDB services to customers in order to generate customer interest.

Q17. Who is responsible for screening, processing and fulfilling applications for the new business support products?

For the time being, existing arrangements will remain in force, on a product by product basis.

Q18. How will the impact of new business support products be measured?

A performance measurement framework for the portfolio is being developed. This will include product success criteria and other measurements of performance in terms of access and delivery etc. The framework will ensure products and the overall portfolio are consistently assessed to make sure they achieve the intended outcomes for business customers, and for government providers of support.

Q19. How will the demand for business support products be matched with the availability of funding and capacity?

Each RDA will, in consultation with key partners (primarily Local Authorities) establish what their priorities are in order to develop their Regional Economic Strategy (RES). The RES & the resulting action plan will help RDAs & LAs prioritise funding and product volumes. In some cases the RES priorities may mean that certain products are not offered in some localities.

Some products (e.g. the Skills and International Trade products) will continue to be funded nationally, and these funding arrangements are not expected to change significantly.

Q20. Does BSSP mean no new government products after 2009?

No. It is important that government support continues to evolve to meet changing circumstances and business need, particularly in a dynamic, global economy. Beyond 2010 the Management Board will regularly review the portfolio to make sure it is still fit for purpose, taking action if not. The same Board will also assess business cases for new products and any necessary modifications, making sure there is a strong economic rationale for them before they can go live.