



Introduction and guidance

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Introduction and guidance

Starting your small business focuses primarily on very small business structures, where one to nine people are employed, but many of the ideas are applicable to larger businesses as well. This will develop your knowledge of the general points and principles of small business start-up and operations. You will have the opportunity to reflect on how these principles might be applied in practice.

If you are looking at this course because you are considering working for yourself in some capacity, you will find lots of information of interest. You may notice that some activities ask you to think about a business you are planning to start. You may or may not have a business in mind, but this shouldn't stop you from completing the course, as you can consider any potential business for the exercises.

We will be featuring a number of micro-businesses as case studies as we move through the course. These are based on real businesses but the names have been changed. Each section of the course offers short, interactive quizzes to test your knowledge and provide you with the opportunity to earn a digital badge.

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Successful completion of the course will enable you to gain a suite of online badges and a statement of participation. The badges are validated by the Social Partnerships Network (SPN), a group of organisations with a shared commitment to extending education opportunities to all those that wish to benefit. These courses do not carry any formal academic credit. However, they do provide a way to help you progress from informal to formal learning.

Starting your small business is one of a suite of six free online SPN-badged courses that aim to provide you with an opportunity to engage with learning informally, studying as much or as little of the course and at your own pace.

Guidance for accessing alternative formats

You can download this section of the course to study offline. The alternative formats offered that will best support offline study include Word, PDF and ebook/Kindle versions of the materials. The other alternative formats (SCORM, RSS, IMS, HTML and XML) are useful to those who want to export the course to host on another learning management system.

Although you can use the alternative formats offline for your own convenience, you do need to work through the online version of the course for full functionality (such as accessing links, using the audio and video materials, and completing the quizzes). Please use the downloads as convenient tools for studying the materials when away from the internet and return to the online version to ensure you can complete all activities that lead to earning the section badge.

In order to access full functionality in the online course, we recommend that you use the latest internet browsers such as Internet Explorer 9 and above and Google Chrome version 49 and above.

If you have difficulties in streaming the audio-visual content, please make use of the available transcripts.

Structure of the course

This course consists of five sections, with each section focusing on a particular aspect of starting a small business:

- 1 **Small business structures** looks at the different ways in which a small business could be set up and operated in the United Kingdom. The section will encourage you to consider a small business you are planning to set up or one that you are interested in. You will then select an appropriate structure for the business.
- 2 **Small business and marketing** looks at sales and marketing approaches for small businesses and how to nurture effective customer relationships. You will then take your small business idea and create a plan for the business to improve the relationships with customers.
- 3 **Small business responsibilities** covers legal requirements and financial aspects of small businesses. These include how to transfer money within a business and relationships with regulatory organisations. You will review your business idea and consider the most appropriate legal structure and the financial and legal responsibilities for your chosen business idea.
- 4 **Succeeding in a small business** looks at the common features shared by successful small businesses and some of the potential pitfalls in running a small business. You will use this information to produce an action plan to improve the potential for success for your business idea.

Together they amount to approximately 15 hours of study time. Each section has a mixture of reading, video clips, activities and quizzes that will help you to engage with the course content.

A further section, **Taking my learning further**, will enable you to reflect upon what you have learned within this course. It also directs you to relevant websites and resources, which further relate to the development of your learning and career prospects.

Once you have studied a section, you will be asked to complete a short online quiz of no more than five questions per section. This helps to test and embed your learning. If you pass the quiz (and you do get more than one attempt!), you will be awarded with a downloadable badge for that section.

Starting your small business is designed to allow you to dip in and out of the resources and collect badges as you wish, so that you can study in small chunks to fit around your work and life commitments. If you choose to complete all sections of *Starting your small business* and collect the full set of badges, you can download a statement of participation that recognises your achievement. You may find this useful to show your employer as evidence of your learning. For more information on how to obtain your badges, read [What is a badge?](#)

Navigating the website

To find your way around this course, you simply click on the links. The home page has links to all the sections, quizzes and relevant resources. When you are in a section, the left-hand menu has links to that section's topics and its associated quiz. The menu also has links to the other sections of *Starting your small business* and to the resources section.

If you feel unsure, practise hovering your mouse over a link in the menu and clicking on it. This is the easiest way to move from page to page. You can also click on the 'Next:' link at the end of each page of text. Don't worry about breaking a link or damaging the web page – you won't. Have a go as soon as you can before you begin your study.

Why study this course?

According to the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS, 2015):

- there were a record 5.4 million private sector businesses at the start of 2015 – an increase of 146,000 since 2014 and 1.9 million more since 2000
- small businesses accounted for 99.3% of all private sector businesses at the start of 2015; 99.9% were small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
- total employment in SMEs was 15.6 million; 60% of all private sector employment in the UK
- the combined annual turnover of SMEs was £1.8 trillion, 47% of all private sector turnover in the UK
- 76% of businesses did not employ anyone aside from the owner.

Small businesses are essential to the financial health of the UK and the opportunities to start up or work for a small or **micro-business** have never been greater.

The proportion of small businesses that stop trading within two years is high – anecdotal evidence suggests it is as many as 50%. This course is designed to help you decide if running a small or micro-business is worth exploring further. This course should be seen as the first step in the journey, leading to more research and self-reflection. It provides challenges and areas of reflection coupled with clear signposts to the help and advice that is available, most of it free.

Rob Moore, the author of this course, will now give you a bit of background into why you might like to study this course.

Video content is not available in this format.

We will be using the five short case studies throughout this course – you may wish to familiarise yourself with them now. You would find it helpful to have the case studies page open in a separate tab whilst working through the sections.

As you start this course, you may have a business idea in mind or might even be running a small business. Each of these is fine. This course will ask you to apply the different ideas to a business idea of your own – this could be one you are running or thinking of running, or one you will create.

This is a good point to consider your business idea. If you have not considered one yet, the Entrepreneur Handbook website has [100 business ideas to consider](#) (Purseley, 2014). Throughout course you will find activities that ask you to write down your thoughts and feelings based on the issues being discussed. There will be a few simple questions which encourage you to focus your thinking. It would be helpful for you to spend some time thinking about what you have learned within each section, and how it relates to your current role. We encourage you to record your answers and thoughts as you go along. We will not be using these in the course but they will be very helpful if you wish to take your ideas further.

The activities are not there to test you. They aim to help you reflect on what you have read in more depth. These activity spaces are entirely for your own use to help you recognise what you have learned, even if you haven't yet encountered it within your role. Nobody else will see what you write here. The aim is to help you become more reflective, by bringing together aspects of both your personal and professional experience so you can review and learn from them.

Learning outcomes

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- explain what **business structures** are available and suitable for a small business in the UK
- recognise the ways in which a small business can gain and keep **customers**
- identify the financial and legal obligations of running a small business
- explain some of the common aspects of successful small businesses.

Before you begin

Spend a few moments thinking about your current learning needs and opportunities by doing Activity 1 below.

Activity 1

Allow about 15 minutes

Below is a link to a short questionnaire to get you thinking about:

- What are your current priorities for learning?
- How does studying a short online course fit into your everyday lifestyle?
- What goals are you hoping to achieve by studying this course?

Questionnaire about your learning (1)

Hopefully, by the end of the course you will be able to reflect on your answers.

We hope you enjoy the course!

Glossary

business structures

These define the way that a business is set up, how it is managed and the reporting responsibilities.

customers

Individuals or businesses purchasing products or services from the business. A customer could also be a client and consumer.

micro-business

!Warning! Calibri not supportedA small business or enterprise with fewer than ten employees.

References

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Pursey, J. (2014) '100 business ideas you can start today for less than £5k', Entrepreneur Handbook, 10 November. Available at:

<http://entrepreneurhandbook.co.uk/100-business-ideas-start-today/> (Accessed 4 July 2016).

Acknowledgements

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