

Alumni event and celebration of St Andrew's Day at the British Ambassador's residence

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St Andrew's Day 2020: Alister Jack's message

St Andrew's Day is a chance for us to celebrate all that is great about Scotland, and Scots, and to reflect on what it means to be Scottish.

In 2020, St Andrew's Day will feel very different.

We are living through a global pandemic. Our lives are almost unrecognisable from a year ago.

But I believe that, this year more than ever, we should take the time to mark just how much we have collectively achieved.

Over the past few months, we have risen to the challenge of the, frankly terrifying, virus. We have, and are, all doing our bit to defeat it. We have made huge personal sacrifices because we know it will save lives and protect our precious NHS.

Our frontline workers – from health care staff to supermarket workers, teachers and everyone in between – have been nothing short of heroic. Looking after the ill, supporting the vulnerable, and keeping the country going. You are an inspiration to us all.

So many others have also done their bit. From picking up shopping and prescriptions, to organising spirit-lifting video chats and amazing charity

fundraisers – individuals up and down the land have gone out of their way to look after friends, relatives and neighbours, and also strangers in need.

We have much to be proud of. In 2020, it seems to me, being Scottish is about fortitude and kindness. And also optimism. With new vaccines on the way we are starting to see some light at the end of the covid tunnel.

So, this St Andrew's Day, I ask you to join me in thanking everyone who has done their bit to help us all get through 2020 so far. I have never felt more proud to be Scottish.

UKHO and Cefas launch new innovation challenge to support offshore renewable energy growth

The UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) has partnered with the [Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science \(Cefas\)](#) to launch the latest marine innovation challenge, focused on the offshore renewable energy sector.

As part of the [ADMIRALTY Marine Innovation Programme](#), the latest challenge invites participants to develop solutions that use marine geospatial data to help identify new areas for offshore renewable energy and optimise the performance of existing infrastructure.

To support planners in this sector, access to marine geospatial data is essential to find suitable sites for offshore wind and tidal wave energy generation. Accurate data also helps mitigate potential environmental issues, while ensuring the longevity and optimised performance of these installations.

Throughout the challenge applicants can access a wide range of geospatial and scientific data to help them develop key solutions. Selected applicants will then get to work alongside experts at both the UKHO and Cefas to develop a prototype product to test with users. The winner of this challenge will receive a chance to develop an alpha product to test in the offshore renewable energy market, which is estimated to be worth £178 billion and employ more than 1.5 million people globally by 2030.

Mark Casey, Head of Research, Design and Innovation at the UKHO, commented:

The offshore renewables sector is a vital pillar in the blue economy and has an important role to play in the fight against climate change. With significant potential, this sector must be supported with access to data to enable better decision-making.

The ADMIRALTY Marine Innovation Programme is dedicated to harnessing the power of innovation to explore how data can support ocean sustainability. To achieve this, we must be collaborative. We are proud to partner with Cefas for this challenge and we welcome applications from any organisations with a creative solution for how marine data can accelerate growth in offshore renewables.

Stuart Rogers, Chief Scientist at Cefas, said:

We are pleased to partner with UKHO again to build on our previous successful collaborations. We recognise the global potential for offshore renewables and are keen to work with the sector to ensure that future development can proceed in an environmentally sustainable way. We believe this project has the potential to accelerate high quality data synthesis relevant to offshore renewables and contribute to the de-risking of future developments, allowing the sector to contribute to meeting the UK government's targets for renewable energy generation and net zero.

Find out more

To participate in this challenge, applications must be submitted by Thursday 31 December 2020. You can find out more about the challenge and access the application form below:

[Mapping of tech scale-ups from Argentina is created to receive guidance in the UK](#)

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CMA reports on the state of competition in the UK

Commissioned by the Chancellor and the Business Secretary, the report looks at the state of competition in the UK economy. It is intended to provide a baseline for future analysis and monitoring, by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) and others; to inform the work of the CMA; and to contribute to wider public debate on these important issues.

To produce today's report, the CMA considered the economy as a whole as well as individual sectors, using quantitative and qualitative indicators of how markets are functioning. It analysed key metrics of competition, including entry and exit rates, profitability and market concentration, as well as considering the experiences of consumers.

Although much of the study uses comprehensive analysis covering the last 20 years, with the most recent data from 2018, the CMA has also started assessing early metrics of how the coronavirus (COVID-19) has affected competition.

Key findings include:

- Taken together, the indicators examined suggest that competition across the economy as a whole may have declined over the last 20 years.
- Concentration rose as a result of the 2008 recession and, though it has decreased slightly since 2010, it remains 3 percentage points higher today than in 1998.
- Among the biggest companies in the economy, profits and mark-ups appear to be rising. The biggest firms saw mark-ups increase by 9% over the last 20 years.
- Consumer surveys suggest that the UK has a relatively high incidence of consumer problems compared to EU member states and poor complaint handling. In 2018, around 1 in 3 UK customers experienced a consumer problem across all markets, the highest in the EU (where the average is 22%). Evidence also shows that transport, telecommunications/mobile/internet, utilities and property services perform relatively poorly when it comes to satisfaction and trust.
- The UK scores relatively well in these surveys on consumer switching in some service markets, although switching is not as common among low

income and financially insecure consumers.

In addition, and in order to consider the early effects of the coronavirus pandemic, the CMA placed questions in 2 ongoing Office for National Statistics surveys and considered “business demographic” data: the number of businesses created and closed.

Although it is still early to draw any definitive conclusions about the impact of the pandemic on competition, initial data shows:

- Since the start of the pandemic, around 40% of consumers report shopping around less than usual, particularly among older groups (55+) and those with an illness or condition that limits their ability to perform day-to-day activities. The main reason given for shopping round less is feeling safer buying in one place, which could suggest this drop is temporary.
- The accommodation and food services, as well as the arts, entertainment and recreation sectors are more likely to report that the number of competitors in their areas had decreased.
- Most businesses did not report experiencing any challenge in selling goods and services online during the pandemic.
- 40% of companies have postponed or reduced plans to expand and the new businesses created up to Q3 2020 appear to be smaller in size than in previous years.
- Construction, accommodation and food; and arts, entertainment and recreation saw the biggest drops in the number of businesses being created. There are no clear regional differences in business creation, although London is the only area to record positive business growth in both Q1 and Q2 2020 .
- There has so far been no spike in business closures, although the overall business population shrank in Q2 2020 for the first time since Q2 2017.

Mike Walker, Chief Economic Adviser at the CMA, said:

Understanding what is really happening to competition across the UK economy is more important than ever as we start to analyse the impact of a devastating global pandemic.

Our findings suggest a need for vigilance – by the CMA and by

government – to ensure competition is not weakened because of the effects of coronavirus.

We will be presenting our findings to government and we hope that they will add to public debate around the UK's economy and markets, as well as providing a baseline for future analysis.

Throughout this work, the CMA has drawn on the considerable internal knowledge amassed during its day-to-day work of enforcing consumer and competition law, assessing mergers and examining markets. It has also sought the assistance of outside experts and other parts of government; and has set out where it thinks further work is needed.

For more information, and to read the report, visit the [State of UK Competition report page](#).