New fellowship for civil servants launched

News story

MiSoC fellowship for civil servants brings together academics and policy-makers to help answer specific policy questions

The Open Innovation Team (OIT) is piloting a new fellowship with the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change (MiSoC), hosted at the University of Essex.

The fellowship is aimed at SEO-G6 policy officials and analysts, who will be mentored by experienced academics. It's a part-time programme where officials can access support using quantitative social science data and analysis to answer a specific policy question. Fellows propose a question they would like to research, and they receive guidance and mentorship from world-leading quantitative social scientists.

Proposals need to be focused on one of MiSoc's areas of interest, which include 'education and skills', 'families and well-being', 'ethnicity and migration' and the 'labour market and institutions'.

Our current fellows come from a range of government teams:

Head of Ethnicity Analysis and Briefing, Race Disparity Unit, Cabinet Office

This fellowship will form part of a programme to respond to the policy paper, Inclusive Britain, drafted in response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities. The research will look at migration patterns to the UK over the past 50 years.

Head of Tax, Department of International Trade

This fellowship aims to understand patterns and trends regarding the backgrounds of non-UK nationals with PhDs, and their value to the economy, to further inform tax policy.

Health Economist, UK Health Security Agency

This fellowship will aim to quantify the impacts of poor mental and physical health arising from the current cost of living crisis, and will consider possible policy responses.

If you’re an official interested in taking part in a fellowship, please contact us via fellowship@openinnovation.gov.uk and we will be in touch with next steps once the pilot has concluded in Spring 2023.

Share this page

Sharing will open the page in a new tab

Published 21 November 2022

Retailers disqualified after abusing covid loans

David Okot from Deptford, South-East London, received an 11-year disqualification, while Southsea’s Jason Meads has been banned for 10 years.

The retailers are now prevented from directly, or indirectly, becoming involved in the promotion, formation or management of a company, without the permission of the court.

David Ocaya Okot (40) was sole director of B&S News Ltd, which traded as a newsagent and convenience shop, B&S Newsagents, on Manor Lane in Lewisham, London.

David Okot purchased the shop in 2014 and ran it successfully until 2020 when increased competition in the area and rising costs meant that the business was no longer viable. The shop closed in January 2020 after failing to find a buyer.

Investigators, however, uncovered that David Okot successfully applied for a £50,000 Bounce Back Loan for B&S News Ltd in July 2020, despite being ineligible as the government-backed loan was only available for businesses trading during pandemic. This was after the company had stopped trading.

Further enquiries found that David Okot caused B&S News Ltd to transfer close to £50,000 from the company bank account into his personal account. The former convenience store owner said he was looking to relocate the business with the money but investigators found no evidence to support this claim.

And Jason Meads, from Southsea, Portsmouth, was the sole director of Hodl Clothing Limited. The company was incorporated in April 2018 and operated as an online clothing retailer.

The company, however, went into liquidation in October 2021 before the Insolvency Service uncovered Jason Meads had received government loans Hodl Clothing Limited wasn’t entitled to.

Investigators discovered that Hodl Clothing Limited applied for 2 Bounce Back Loans and received £37,500 after Jason Meads falsely claimed turnover was £150,000 when turnover was £0.

Further enquiries uncovered that Jason Meads transferred more than £36,000 from the Bounce Back Loan to a personal account but could not provide any evidence that the funds were used for the economic benefit of Hodl Clothing Limited.

Tom Phillips, Assistant Director at the Insolvency Service, said:

> Bounce Back Loans were offered to financially support viable businesses through the pandemic. The directors of these two retail companies have abused the Bounce Back Loans support scheme. David Okot applied for a loan despite having closed down his business before the pandemic, while Jason Meads used vastly exaggerated turnover figures to obtain more funding than his company would otherwise have been entitled to.
>
> Thanks to the work of our diligent investigators, we have removed these rogue directors from the corporate arena. Both David Okot and Jason Meads have received top-bracket disqualifications, which should serve as a stark warning to other directors that there are serious consequences to those who have abused Bounce Back Loans.

Notes to editors

David Okot

David Ocaya Okot is from Deptford and his date of birth is May 1972.

B&S News Ltd (Company number 09141191).

On 31 October 2022, the Secretary of State accepted a disqualification undertaking from David Ocaya Okot for 11 years, after he did not dispute that

B&S News Ltd obtained a Bounce Back Loan and failed to used it in its entirety for the economic benefit of the company. Nor did B&S News Ltd did not meet the criteria to apply for the loan.

Jason Meads

Jason Richard Meads is from Southsea and his date of birth is March 1989

Hodl Clothing Limited (Company number 11314684)

On 10 October 2022, the Secretary of State accepted a disqualification undertaking from Jason Richard Meads, after he did not dispute that he caused the Company to apply for 2 BBLs totalling £37,500 using overstated turnover figures in the application form and consequently Hodl received £37,500 more monies that it was entitled to from the BBL scheme. Furthermore, he did not dispute that he failed to ensure that the BBL funds were used for the economic benefit of the Company. Mr Mead's ban is effective from 31 October 2022 and lasts for 10 years.

About disqualifications

Disqualification undertakings are the administrative equivalent of a disqualification order but do not involve court proceedings.

Persons subject to a disqualification order are bound by a range of restrictions.

Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct.

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

Defence Innovation Loans updates: join the upcoming webinar to see what we have in store

- On 13 December 2022, DASA and Innovate UK will host a webinar to share exciting changes for the future of Defence Innovation Loans
- Defence Innovations Loans are delivered via a unique partnership between DASA and Innovate UK
- Defence Innovation Loans is an alternative funding method to help Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) who often struggle to bring their ideas to market

The Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) introduced Defence Innovation

Loans in the summer of 2021, as an alternative funding method to help convert mature defence innovations into viable business propositions that can compete for defence procurement. Aimed at Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), and with a below market interest rate of 7.4% per annum, Defence Innovation Loans provide affordable funds to help innovators commercialise defence innovations.

Following success of the Defence Innovation Loans funding model, DASA and Innovate UK are pleased to hold an upcoming webinar to announce exciting changes to improve the service. Attendees will also have the opportunity to ask the hosts questions they have about the service.

Register now: 13 December – Defence Innovation Loans: Webinar

What will the webinar cover?

- What is DASA?
- How do Defence Innovation Loans work?
- What is new with Defence Innovation Loans?
- Who can apply – is your business and innovation eligible?
- What you can borrow – amounts and eligible costs.
- What project and loan periods are available and what the repayment terms are.
- How to apply for a Defence Innovation Loan; information about submitting applications to DASA and Innovate UK.
- Q&A.

Defence Innovation Loans: what's new?

DASA always seeks to improve its services, so aspects of the Defence Innovation Loans model will change in mid-December 2022. Here is how we are improving the service and making it easier for you to apply:

- Defence Innovation Loans are expanding to offer loans from £100K to £2m (previously £250K to £1.6M)
- the loan availability period will be up to 3 years (previously 2)
- Defence Innovation Loans will return to cycles, but will remain open at all times throughout the year
- the initial outcome of loan eligibility will still be carried out by DASA and Innovate UK, within 7 weeks from the closing date of the cycle

Attend the upcoming webinar to learn more and keep an eye on the DASA homepage for updates.

Who can apply for a Defence Innovation Loan?

To apply for a Defence Innovation Loan, you must:

- be a UK registered SME
- intend to exploit the results in the UK or overseas to make a significant and positive impact on the UK economy and / or productivity

- give evidence that your business is suitable to take on a loan

Please note, individuals, academic institutions, research organisations and large companies are not eligible for Defence Innovation Loans.

What innovations are considered for a loan?

Defence Innovation Loans are open to innovative ideas to improve the defence of the UK. Your innovation must be mature, at [TRL 6](#) or above, to ensure the solution can be commercialised within the time scale of the loan. There must also be clear evidence of a Defence need for the innovative solution.

Register now

Defence Innovation Loans: meet the Access to Mentoring & Finance (A2MF) Team

The A2MF team works closely with innovators to understand their business needs and aspirations. Their goal is to help companies become investment, market and supply chain ready. Engrained in the extensive business incubation and support community, the A2MF team use a smart brokerage model to help companies identify and access the expertise and funding required to overcome challenges to business growth and realise their ambitions.

[Meet the team and learn more](#)

[Public urged to stay safe during busy seal pupping season](#)

Thousands of grey seals descend on the beaches of Donna Nook and the nearby coastline during November and December to give birth. This spectacle attracts wildlife enthusiasts from across the UK who scramble across the dunes to witness this natural wonder.

However, areas of Donna Nook and land in close proximity is owned by the MOD. As well as being home to historical military activity, the site, including inland and beach locations is still used for live firing and tactical training activities.

These activities pose a safety risk to the general public. Safety remains the MOD’s top priority and one risk that the MOD is specifically keen to highlight is the very real danger of disturbing military debris, including unexploded ordnance. Items that are fired, dropped, discarded or buried can be inadvertently disturbed by walkers, ramblers and dogs, sometimes with unintended consequences.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal specialists from the Royal Engineers check a detonated 3kg payload at RAF Donna Nook, after it was dropped by an RAF Hawk during Exercise TERMINAL STRIKE last year. Crown Copyright / MOD 2021.

As custodians of large parts of the land, the MOD is keen to educate the public about these dangers and the simple actions they can take to reduce the risk of injury or worse.

Lt Col Andy Hough, DIO’s Regional Commander for the East of England, said:

> The pupping season presents a wonderful opportunity for members of the public to explore unique areas of the Defence Estate at Donna Nook and the surrounding region. We recognise the huge benefit to mental and physical well-being that outdoor recreation can have when safe to do so.
>
> Due to its location and historical and active engagement with military activity, debris does often wash up with the tide, or remain in situ after air delivered training. Many of these items can be extremely dangerous. If members of the public spot anything we ask them to report it, never touch it. This includes keeping dogs on a lead and paying special attention to what they might pick up off the floor.
>
> Just a few months ago a member of the public carried a piece of munitions debris from the beach to hand over to my colleagues. What they considered an act of diligence, put their life at risk. Had an item exploded it would have undoubtedly led to a fatality.

In addition to accidentally disturbing UXO, a small minority deliberately search out and remove ordnance as a hobby, with some even selling what they find to collectors.

Two spent 3kg bombs near one of the targets at RAF Donna Nook. Crown Copyright / MOD 2022.

Lt Col Hough added:

> Deliberate removal of UXO is not only dangerous, it’s also against the law. We encourage anybody considering removing and selling UXO to stop and think about the danger they are putting themselves in.
>
> We’re really keen to see people out enjoying the pupping season. However, our message is simple. Only access military land when and where it is safe to do so, and with caution at all times.

Donna Nook is part of a public safety campaign targeting popular tourist sites in the UK. Respect the Range reinforces a key safety message about safe access to military land and training estates. More information on the campaign can be found at gov.uk/guidance/safe-access.

UK services industry welcomes extension of Swiss visa agreement

- UK and Switzerland agree three-year extension to the Services Mobility Agreement (SMA), enabling UK professionals to work in Switzerland for up to 90 days a year permit free
- Extension welcomed by UK services industry, which accounts for around 80% of the UK's GDP and workforce
- News comes ahead of negotiations on an ambitious new trade deal between the two services superpowers in 2023

Following intensive discussions, the UK and Switzerland have today agreed to extend the Services Mobility Agreement. The deal, which has been in operation since the start of 2021, has had a transformative effect on companies' ability to provide services in each other's countries by allowing employees to easily work in both states.

The extension of the agreement means UK professionals – from accountants and lawyers to advertising creatives – can continue to travel and operate freely in Switzerland for up to 90 days a year without needing a permit.

Switzerland is the UK's sixth largest export market for services, worth over £12 billion in exports last year. 'Other business services', including accountancy, architectural, and legal services made up the majority of these, worth £6.5 billion, while financial services accounted for £1.9 billion.

The SMA will be rolled over for a further three years, providing UK and Swiss companies with welcome certainty. Moving skilled people between countries is vital to services exports, facilitating the delivery of projects and face to face conversations that help to win new clients and get deals done.

The two countries have also agreed to launch negotiations next year on a new free trade agreement, which will establish long-term arrangements for services mobility and boost trade between the UK and Switzerland even further, in 2023.

Trade Secretary, Kemi Badenoch, said:

> The UK and Swiss economies are both services powerhouses and closely aligned. Today's agreement is a win-win for both sides.

> From financial services in Edinburgh to cyber security in Wales, the deal ensures UK businesses capitalise on the huge opportunities on offer.
>
> This is just the beginning. I am excited to launch negotiations on an ambitious, future-facing trade deal with Switzerland that will boost our already incredibly strong trading relationship, worth £39 billion last year.

Switzerland is a world leader in innovation and has placed top of the Global Innovation Index for twelve consecutive years. It offers huge opportunities for companies across the UK, who already export billions in services there every year. Scotland, home to Edinburgh's thriving financial services scene, exported over £700 million in services to Switzerland in 2020 while Wales, with its cyber security hub, exported £175 million.

Rain Newton-Smith, Chief Economist at the Confederation of British Industry said:

> Businesses across the UK will welcome today's extension of the Services Mobility Agreement, as called for by the Trade in Services Council. With four in five UK jobs located in the services sector, the ability to work in Switzerland is hugely beneficial for firms trading with the UK's 7th largest export market. Business will hope this injects crucial momentum as the UK and Switzerland prepare to negotiate an enhanced FTA.
>
> The CBI's co-chairing of the UK-Switzerland Bilateral Trade and Investment Council will provide an important forum for firms to discuss ways to further unlock new and exciting trade opportunities with Switzerland.

Policy Chairman of the City of London Corporation, Chris Hayward, said:

> The extension of the Service Mobility Agreement is hugely welcome. Access to the world's best talent, and a capacity to move highly skilled labour between the UK and Switzerland is of paramount importance to the financial and professional service sector.
>
> The UK and Switzerland are the two largest financial centres in Europe which means strengthening our services trade relationship is a top priority for the sector. Looking ahead, we hope to see the mobility agreement expanded, incorporated and future proofed within a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement.