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# Funding Options for SME Growth

*Exploring loans, grants, and investment to fuel your business expansion*

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## Introduction: Financing Your Growth

Growth requires investment, and understanding your funding options helps you choose the right path for your business. Whether you need capital for new equipment, additional staff, larger premises, or working capital to support increased sales, there are more options available than ever before. This guide explores the main funding sources, their advantages and disadvantages, and how to improve your chances of success.

**Top Tip:** Consider what you are willing to give up - debt requires repayment but you keep full ownership; equity provides cash without repayment but dilutes your stake.

## Traditional Bank Finance

Banks remain a major source of business funding, offering various products to suit different needs:

### Term Loans

Fixed amount borrowed over a set period with regular repayments. Suitable for specific purchases like equipment or property:

- Fixed or variable interest rates available
- Terms typically 1-10 years depending on purpose
- May require security or personal guarantees
- Predictable monthly repayments aid budgeting
- Interest is tax deductible as a business expense

### Overdrafts

Flexible borrowing facility attached to your business account for short-term cash flow needs:

- Only pay interest on what you use
- Provides buffer for timing differences
- Can be recalled by bank (usually with notice)
- Higher interest rates than term loans
- Annual arrangement fees apply

## **Asset Finance**

Funding specifically for equipment, vehicles, or machinery:

- Hire purchase - you own the asset at the end
- Finance lease - you never own the asset
- Operating lease - includes maintenance, return at end
- Asset acts as security, reducing risk to lender
- Spreads cost over useful life of asset

## **Government-Backed Schemes**

The UK Government offers various schemes to support SME growth, often with more favourable terms than commercial lending:

### **Start Up Loans**

Government-backed personal loans for new businesses up to £25,000. Available to businesses trading less than 3 years with fixed 6% interest rate and repayment terms up to 5 years. Includes free mentoring and support.

### **British Business Bank Programmes**

Various schemes delivered through partner lenders:

- Recovery Loan Scheme - for established businesses
- Regional Growth Funds - area-specific support
- Help to Grow - management training and digital adoption
- Various sector-specific programmes

### **Grants and R&D; Funding**

Non-repayable funding is available for specific purposes:

- Innovate UK grants for research and development
- R&D; Tax Credits - up to 27% of qualifying expenditure

- Local authority business grants
- Sector-specific innovation funding
- Export development grants

**Top Tip:** Check the British Business Bank website and your local Growth Hub for current schemes - they change frequently.

## Alternative Finance

Beyond traditional banks, a growing sector of alternative lenders offers different approaches to business funding:

### Peer-to-Peer Lending

Online platforms connect businesses with individual and institutional lenders:

- Often faster decisions than traditional banks
- May accept businesses with shorter trading history
- Interest rates vary widely based on risk assessment
- Major platforms include Funding Circle, MarketFinance

### Invoice Finance

Unlock cash tied up in unpaid invoices:

- Invoice factoring - sell invoices, provider collects payment
- Invoice discounting - borrow against invoices, you collect
- Typically receive 80-90% of invoice value immediately
- Useful for managing growth in B2B businesses
- Costs depend on volume and debtor quality

### Merchant Cash Advances

For businesses accepting card payments, receive an advance repaid as a percentage of future card sales:

- Quick access to cash with minimal paperwork
- Repayments flex with your sales
- No fixed term or regular payment amounts
- Can be expensive compared to traditional finance

## Crowdfunding

Raise funds from many small contributors via online platforms:

- Reward crowdfunding - backers receive products or perks
- Equity crowdfunding - investors receive shares
- Debt crowdfunding - similar to P2P lending
- Also provides marketing and customer validation
- Popular platforms include Crowdcube, Seedrs, Kickstarter

## Equity Investment

For businesses with high growth potential, selling a stake in your company can provide substantial funding without repayment obligations:

### Angel Investors

Wealthy individuals who invest their own money in early-stage businesses:

- Typically invest £10,000 to £500,000
- Often bring valuable experience and contacts
- Usually seek businesses they understand
- May take active advisory role
- Often found through angel networks (UKBAA, Angels Den)

### Venture Capital

Professional investors managing pooled funds for high-growth businesses:

- Larger investments, typically £1 million upwards
- Seek businesses with potential for rapid scaling
- Usually want significant minority stake (20-40%)
- Expect exit within 5-7 years
- Bring extensive networks and expertise

### Tax-Advantaged Investment Schemes

HMRC schemes encourage investment in smaller businesses:

- EIS - investors get 30% income tax relief on investments up to £1 million
- SEIS - investors get 50% relief on first £200,000 invested in qualifying companies
- Your company must meet specific criteria to qualify

- Makes investment more attractive to potential backers

## Preparing a Successful Funding Application

Regardless of the funding source, thorough preparation significantly improves your chances:

- Clear business plan showing how funds will be used
- Financial projections demonstrating ability to repay or generate returns
- Up-to-date management accounts showing current performance
- Evidence of market demand and competitive advantage
- Strong management team with relevant experience
- Personal investment showing your commitment
- Security or collateral if applying for secured lending
- Exit strategy for equity investors

**Top Tip:** Get your accountant to review your application before submission - they can strengthen your financial narrative and identify potential concerns.

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### Need Personalised Advice?

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