

FINAL PRESS RELEASE

GOVERNMENT SELECTS ABERDEEN START-UP AS AN AMBASSADOR FOR UK MICROBUSINESSES

- **Melt has been handpicked to represent the Start Up Loans Company as an example of standout start-up success**
- **Margot James commends scheme as integral to the microbusiness economy in the UK and praises Melt**
- **Government-backed scheme has delivered more than 50,000 loans, bringing lending total to more than £345million since 2012**

A business-owner from Aberdeen has been chosen to represent successful UK start-ups by the Government-backed Start Up Loans Company (SULCo) with the return of its Ambassador Programme.

Melt is one of six start-ups that has been selected from amongst this year's top success stories and inspiring businesses. The year-long Ambassador programme was launched at a reception in London on 19th September to honour their hard work and dedication, and celebrate the success of UK start-ups.

The reception began with a panel discussion chaired by The Start Up Loans Company's interim CEO Joanna Hill. Joanna was joined by Keith Morgan, the CEO of British Business Bank, of which SULCo is a subsidiary, representatives from SULCo's Delivery Partner network and the Ambassadors.

The Start Up Loans Company forms part of The British Business Bank's UK-wide drive to encourage entrepreneurship, increase the rate of business creation and improve the survival prospects of early-stage businesses.

Mechelle Clark, 35, launched Melt, a grilled cheese toastie café, in March 2016 after receiving £20,000 from The Start Up Loans Company. After being made redundant twice in 15 months, she decided to leave the oil and gas sector completely to launch her own cheese toastie business.

The business now has a turnover of £80,000 and Mechelle sells both savoury and sweet toasties from her café and mobile van. Savoury options include macaroni and cheddar, haggis and gruyere; and cheddar, gruyere and béchamel. Sweet treats include mascarpone and Nutella.

As the Aberdeen café continues to grow, Mechelle is considering opening a second premises in Dundee. Available for catering hire, Mechelle also caters at birthdays, weddings, corporate events and food festivals in the local area.

Mechelle Clark, founder of Melt, said: "After being made redundant twice in just over a year, it felt like a personal set-back and my confidence was at an all-time low. Returning back to the drawing board, I realised the best way to secure a new job was by creating my own. I've always had a real passion for food, especially if I'm cooking for others, but I never thought I could do it for a living. Being hand-picked as an Ambassador to represent UK start-ups is a real privilege and I feel really grateful for the opportunity.

"Although leaving 10 years' experience in a former industry was daunting, I have no doubt that transitioning into self-employment was the right decision for me. I feel really lucky to be doing something I love every day – it barely feels like work! If the business continues to do well, we'd love to open a second store in Dundee in the next couple of years."

Minister for Small Business, Margot James, said: "The Start Up Loans Company has been crucial in helping tens of thousands of aspiring business owners to get their venture off the ground, and this year's ambassadors, such as Melt, are a great example of what promising entrepreneurs can achieve with the right support.

“This Government is committed to building an economy that works for everyone and the success of small businesses is crucial to this. That is why ensuring Britain remains the best place in the world to start, grow and scale up a business is at the heart of our Industrial Strategy.”

The launch of the Ambassador programme comes as The Start Up Loans Company announces it has provided over 50,000 loans to British start-ups, bringing the total it has lent so far to more than £345million.

Joanna Hill, Interim CEO of The Start Up Loans Company, said: “This year’s Ambassadors showcase the vibrancy and variety of the UK start-up landscape, from cheesemakers to incubator space for start-ups, the six businesses we’ve selected really do represent everything that’s great about this country’s entrepreneurial spirit.

“Melt is a prime example of what hard work and dedication can achieve. It forms part of the wider 2,800 businesses we’ve supported to date in Melt, totalling £17million of funding in Scotland.

“All of our Ambassadors’ stories show the drive and determination it takes to set up a successful business, and we’re immensely proud of the achievements they’ve made. One of the biggest barriers to launching a business is the fear of failure, but we know that with guidance and support, other business owners can follow in the footsteps of our Ambassadors.”

The Start Up Loans Company provides loans of up to £25,000 at a fixed interest rate of 6% per annum, as well as offering 12 months of free, dedicated mentoring to each business it supports.

The Ambassadors for 2017 are:

- **Launch 22:** a social enterprise which offers office co-working space, mentoring and events for fellow start-ups <http://www.launch22.co.uk/>
- **Jim Jams:** produces a range of reduced-sugar chocolate spreads and jams with listings in all major retailers <http://jimjams-spreads.co.uk/>
- **Waterfall Ways:** offers bespoke outdoor activity days, team building sessions and events on the edge of the Brecon Beacons <http://www.waterfallways.co.uk/>
- **Melt Cheese:** a shop serving toasties ranging from grilled cheese & haggis to mac & cheese. Mechelle started the venture after being made redundant twice <http://www.meltgrilledcheese.co.uk/>
- **Crunchposter:** an online recruitment agency which shares adverts with major job boards and now works with leading UK brands including: Boots, Cash Converters and the NHS <https://www.crunchposter.co.uk/>
- **Yorkshire Dama:** Halloumi cheese production company set up by a Syrian refugee. Razan’s business has gone on to win multiple food awards.

ENDS

Notes to editors

About SULCo:

The Start Up Loans Company (SULCo) was formed in June 2012. SULCo provides personal loans for business purposes of up to £25,000 at a 6% fixed interest rate per annum, and offers free dedicated mentoring and support to each business.

The primary aim of the Start Up Loans scheme is to ensure that viable start-ups and early-stage businesses have access to the finance and support they need in order to thrive. A network of Delivery Partner organisations support applicants in all regions and industries throughout the UK. The Start Up Loans scheme is not designed to generate a commercial profit. Capital payments together with the interest are recycled to help meet our customers’ increasing demand for finance.

Free guides on a range subjects related to starting a business are available on the SULCo website: <https://www.startuploans.co.uk/free-start-up-guides/> You can find recent media coverage and press releases in the Start Up Loans Media Centre here: <https://www.startuploans.co.uk/media-centre/>

The funding for SULCo is provided by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). SULCo is a subsidiary of the British Business Bank. The British Business Bank makes finance markets for smaller businesses work better, enabling the sector to prosper, grow and build economic activity. Their Business Finance Guide explores finance options and the journey from start-up to growth. Access the Business Finance Guide here: <http://www.thebusinessfinanceguide.co.uk/bbb>

Key statistics

* Since 2012, SULCo has delivered over 50,000 loans, providing more than £345m of funding, helping to back 27 businesses a day, and contributing to the creation of more than 60,000 jobs. *NB. that is jobs created or supported by a Start Up Loan including the individual recipient.*

* In the financial year 2016/17, the scheme provided 9,431 loans with a total value exceeding £91.2m - helping to support around 27 businesses every day of the year.

* 46% of loan recipients were formerly NEET (not in employment, education or training) and 42% were formerly unemployed or economically inactive.

* Approximately one in five loans go to residents in the UK's most deprived communities.

* The overall return on investment of the scheme is at least £3 per £1 invested.

* Loan recipients report estimated average turnover of £44,000 in the first year.

* For more information about Start Up Loans, please visit: <https://www.startuploans.co.uk/>

**All of these statistics are gross estimates, with the exception of the return on investment numbers, and are based upon Start Up Loans CRM and externally commissioned research undertaken by Qa Research*