

# The ultimate partnership

*Marriage can be an ideal grounding for a business, as Andrew Cave discovers*

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Husband and wife teams are at the heart of Britain's mid-sized business economy, giving each other the support and energy they need to tackle the challenges of the day.

The continuing strength of the model has been highlighted in HSBC's Business Thinking initiative to reward firms at the cutting edge of British business strategy and innovation.

Several of the 18 companies that were judged regional Business Thinking winners are run by husband and wife teams.

Such firms are being urged to enter Global Connections UK, the successor programme to Business Thinking, which is seeking to provide companies with additional know-how and connections to further their export goals.

Finalists in both programmes each gain access to lending of up to £6m and a financial reward of up to £120,000.

Chepstow Plant Services, which buys and sells second-hand construction and mining excavators and diggers, was set up by managing director Jon Williams above a Chinese takeaway in Chepstow in 2000.

Since 2007, it has been owned and run jointly with his wife Sian, who formerly helped run General Electric's plant company in the UK and is now Chepstow's finance director.

Now based in Newport, the firm expects to make profits of more than £500,000 on turnover of £20m this year. It employs 10 staff and has customers in more than 120 countries.

"It is much less lonely if you are running a business," says Mr Williams of the husband and wife model. "Having Sian in the business is like having a second pair of ears.

"Having the two of us driving the business makes everything easier. If one of us comes home grumpy, the other one tends to already know why."

Chepstow is spending its Business Thinking funding on expanding its business in Africa,



**Firm foundation:**  
husband and wife team  
**Sian and Jon Williams**  
run a construction  
plant company

## Enter now

◊ To enter Global Connections UK, firms must be based in the UK, have been operating for two years or longer and have an annual turnover of at least £2m. To register online, go to [www.hsbc.co.uk/globalconnections](http://www.hsbc.co.uk/globalconnections)

which, along with Australia, is its biggest export market.

Meanwhile, Higgidy, a pie and quiche-maker set up in Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, in 2004 by former Seattle Coffee Company executive Camilla Stephens, is spending part of its Business Thinking funding on expanding its factory and brand in a bid to grow to turnover of between £25m-£30m.

After Seattle was sold to Starbucks, Miss Stephens started making pies in her kitchen, naming them after the "higgidy" uneven finish that they got from being filled by hand with flavours reflecting the seasons.

She and her husband James Footitt sold their homes to provide the company's start-up capital. Higgidy now makes about 150,000 pies and quiches

a week, supplying supermarket chains including Sainsbury's, Morrisons and Waitrose. It turns over about £12m a year and has quadrupled its workforce over the past four years.

"It's a lonely road being an entrepreneur," says Mr Footitt. "It's a huge encouragement to be recognised. We're making a traditional product in a better way. We are just doing it really well."

Global Connections UK is open to UK businesses with turnover of more than £2m.

Finalists in five regions of the UK will get the opportunity to take part in International Exchanges, where they will learn about business opportunities from economists and entrepreneurs from the host nations and make connections to help expand their companies.