

# New £30 million competition to make UK a pioneer in building 5G networks

- £30m to put UK at the cutting edge of developing new tech for 5G mobile networks
- Scheme is a key part of government's 5G Diversification Strategy
- Comes as ex-Fujitsu chair Simon Blagden is named as lead for Diversification Advisory Council

The scheme will tackle the world's over-reliance on a small number of telecoms vendors by developing new, innovative solutions right here in the UK. It will help build confidence in the security and resilience of new 5G technology as it delivers incredible social and economic benefits for people and businesses.

The [Future RAN Competition \(FRANC\)](#) will fund innovative R&D projects across the UK to speed up the adoption of a new breed of wireless communication technology – Open Radio Access Network (Open RAN) – which allows equipment from multiple suppliers to be used in 5G networks and will end their current dependence on one company's technology to function. But there are still barriers to Open RAN being used over more traditional mobile network technology.

To receive a share of the £30 million, tech and telecoms innovators are encouraged to submit proposals for projects that will help to fast-track the availability of viable Open RAN products and suppliers and create a stronger case for government and business investment in the technology.

Proposals could include exploring issues around power efficiency, the management of radio wave 'spectrum' resource, the availability of advanced software platforms, systems integration and security.

The government hopes the competition fosters research collaboration between international and new homegrown players in the UK's public telecoms networks.

Its launch follows the opening last week of a new government-backed £1 million high tech [lab](#) to help accelerate the adoption of Open RAN technology.

Both schemes are major pillars of the government's £250 million [5G Diversification Strategy](#) which was published alongside a timetable for the removal of Huawei equipment from 5G networks.

The strategy aims to build a more secure and innovative telecoms supply chain which is fit for the future, less reliant on a small number of multinational suppliers and more accessible for new market entrants. This will help the UK capitalise on 5G's potential to improve people's lives with lightning fast connectivity and revolutionary data capacity.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman said:

This competition aims to get some of our most creative minds helping the UK safely and securely deliver the amazing benefits of 5G for people and businesses.

It is a major part of our plans to harness the country's tech prowess, open up the telecoms market, and create new jobs and investment as we build back better from the pandemic.

Matthew Evans, Director of Markets, techUK, said:

Today's announcement is another positive step in driving forward the UK's telecoms diversification agenda, with concrete action to help support the development of innovative new products for our mobile network infrastructure. It is a clear signal that the UK has a world-leading market in which to innovate and invest, as well as spurring the opportunity for UK tech companies, SMEs and academia to take advantage of this growing global market.

We find ourselves at the start of a challenging period of time, with pressure on rolling out 5G at pace whilst ensuring our networks are resilient, secure and future proof. That's why it's important that government bring forward further plans on supporting open and disaggregated networks, from technical standards to a long term R&D roadmap.

The government today also announces the former non-executive chair of Fujitsu UK, Simon Blagden, as the chair of the new Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council, an independent expert body to succeed the Telecoms Diversification Taskforce.

The taskforce was commissioned by the government to provide advice on how to effectively deliver a more competitive and diverse 5G telecoms market and submitted its final report in April.

The government today publishes its [response](#) to the report and outlines how it will take forward the taskforce's [recommendations](#) across four areas as well as its activity to date.

One of the taskforce's recommendations was to establish a permanent external body to advise on the delivery of the diversification strategy and wider related issues, including potential supply chain issues in other telecoms equipment such as fixed broadband. The new Advisory Council will fulfil those roles.

Simon Blagden CBE, Chair of the Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council, said:

I am greatly enthused to be joining as Chair of the new Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council. I am looking forward

to working with the Minister, Advisory Council members and the team at DCMS to contribute towards this important agenda.

The Taskforce also recommended investment in R&D that addresses key technical barriers to high-performance Open RAN – a challenge that the FRANC and high tech SONIC lab will take on.

The deadline for applications for the FRANC is 27 August 2021, with winning projects expected to be announced in the autumn.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- The FRANC is just one part of a longer-term programme of Open RAN R&D. Two other Open RAN projects announced in the Diversification Strategy are already underway and delivering results and learnings.
  - Thanks to £1 million of government funding, last week the SmartRAN Open Network Interoperability Centre (SONIC), a joint programme between the Digital Catapult and Ofcom, launched a new facility based in Brighton and London. The SONIC Lab will enable telecoms equipment manufacturers to examine how their kit behaves in a fully interoperable, technology-neutral mobile network.
  - NeutrORAN, led by Japanese supplier NEC and with £1.6 million government funding, is developing a testbed in North Wales for multiple vendors and mobile operators to come together to test Open RAN neutral host in a live outdoor rural environment.
- Biography: Simon Blagden CBE

Simon Blagden serves as non-executive Chairman of Larkspur International and has 30 years experience in the IT, Telecoms and Digital industry. He was previously non-executive Chairman at Fujitsu Telecommunications UK, a post he held for 14 years. His career began at GEC where he was International Commercial Manager. In 1991, he joined Quante AG as UK Managing Director and then joined the Main Board in 1995 as CEO, managing operations worldwide. In 2000 he joined Spescom in Johannesburg as CEO to head up its international telecoms and IT business.