

# New £53 million funding for UK manufacturers to boost competitiveness through digital tech

- £53 million of government funding to help propel the latest breakthroughs in digital manufacturing and support adoption by businesses of all sizes
- five new research centres, a new digital supply chain innovation hub, and 37 individual projects will benefit from new funding to help digitalise and transform manufacturing supply chains
- investment to support manufacturers right across the UK, helping them build back better by increasing productivity and boosting competitiveness

Five brand new digital manufacturing research centres and projects to help supply chains become more productive are among recipients of £53 million of new government funding to drive the development of the latest digital manufacturing technologies, Investment Minister Lord Grimstone announced today.

The funding has been awarded through the national Made Smarter programme, a collaboration between UK government and industry designed to support the development and increase use of these emerging technologies. Adoption of the latest data-driven innovations, such as use of AI and blockchain in supply chains, or advanced robotics and smart machines in manufacturing, will help manufacturers to increase productivity, become more sustainable and build back better from the pandemic.

Nearly £25 million will be invested in five new industry-sponsored research centres set up around the UK, including at the University of Strathclyde and University of Nottingham, to accelerate the development of cutting-edge digital solutions that can transform manufacturing businesses across many sectors.

Based in universities throughout the UK, they will help to make supply chains faster, more efficient, and more resilient. Each centre will focus on a different area of manufacturing and include:

- Digital Medicines Manufacturing Research Centre, based in Strathclyde, Cambridge and Loughborough Universities, aims to create digital supply chains that enable medicines to be supplied on demand and enable clinical trials to operate more flexibly
- Research Centre for Smart, Collaborative Industrial Robotics, based in Loughborough, Strathclyde, Cranfield, Bristol and Warwick Universities, will look to eliminate barriers to adopting robotics and accelerate their widespread use in manufacturing
- Research Centre for Connected Factories, based in Nottingham, Cambridge

and Sheffield Universities, will work to create a 'Morphing Factory' where production can be easily repurposed in response to changing market demand, for example, during the pandemic when drinks manufacturers have transformed their production lines to make hand sanitizer

- Materials Made Smarter Research Centre, based in Strathclyde, Cambridge and Loughborough Universities, will work on overcoming technological challenges preventing adoption of new materials and manufacturing processes needed to become more sustainable and help achieve net zero emissions
- People-Led Digitalisation, based in Bath, Nottingham and Loughborough Universities, aims to achieving the highest level of manufacturing productivity by increasing the digital knowledge and awareness of manufacturers

Minister for Investment, Lord Grimstone, said:

As we embark on a digital manufacturing revolution, we want to make sure our manufacturers are bolstered by the latest cutting-edge technology as we all work to build back better from the pandemic.

Improving productivity and becoming more competitive is not just about sophisticated manufacturing, but also about smarter manufacturing, and we want to make it as easy as possible for companies large and small to make the changes needed to take full advantage of the innovative technology being developed.

A further £18 million has been awarded through the Digital Supply Chain Competition to 37 winning projects to support their development of innovations designed to help manufacturing supply chains become more productive and sustainable. Some of the winning projects under the collaborate research and development funding are:

- Automotive company Jaguar Land Rover's project, investigating the use of blockchain technology when tanning leather to improve traceability and reducing environmental, social and economic risks
- Durham-based Pragmatic Printing SORT-IT project, aiming to use digital technology and intelligent automation to track and sort packaging waste for recycling
- Technology provider Circular, which has developed a blockchain platform enabling businesses to monitor and track the origin and quality of raw materials in their supply chain, including dynamic tracking of CO2 emissions
- Armagh-based Food for Thought's project, which is planning to improve the use of robotics and technology to increase food traceability and better use of cold storage infrastructure
- Perpetual Labs's project, which aims to create a digital model-driven approach to manufacturing which makes information accessible in one place in one standard language for all involved in the supply chain, allowing for improved work methods

£10 million in funding has also been awarded today to the new Made Smarter Innovation Digital Supply Chain Innovation Hub to develop breakthrough solutions that create supply chains that are fully connected, resilient and sustainable.

Delivered through a collaboration led by Digital Catapult, and bringing together businesses, universities and research technology organisations, the new Hub network will help make innovation more accessible for a wide range of potential businesses, including manufacturers and technology providers large and small. The hub will provide them with access to clusters of test beds and other practical laboratories.

Made Smarter Innovation Challenge Director, UKRI, Chris Courtney, said:

Digital technologies have the power to radically transform how we manufacture and deliver the products and services of today and the future delivering a productive, sustainable and flexible manufacturing sector and enhancing the future of work within it. There are enormous opportunities to innovate in this area, we have world leading industries, a powerful scientific and research community and a vibrant technology sector. It is vital we form a vibrant connected ecosystem from applied research to industrialisation in order to fully capitalise on that potential.

We have seen tremendous demand for this area across all sectors, company sizes and locations, and real evidence of the vibrant community of innovators in the areas of digital manufacturing and supply chains. I'm excited to see how this powerful coalition transforms the future of manufacturing and its supply chains.

Jeremy Silver, CEO of Digital Catapult, said:

The opportunity for innovation in manufacturing supply chains is incredibly broad. The Made Smarter Digital Supply Chain Innovation Hub will demonstrate how the tangible impact of emerging digital technologies can affect the nation's supply chains, mitigating against the kinds of component shortages experienced during the pandemic, boosting efficiency, reducing waste, and supporting some of the UK's most important industrial sectors through fostering a culture of innovation.

Digital Catapult brings to the Hub its significant experience in driving ambitious innovation programmes and creating opportunities for businesses right across manufacturing sectors, as well as extensive experience in building major testbed facilities that provide real hands-on technology experience for businesses. Through this groundbreaking, UK-wide collaboration with leading organisations in industry, we hope to provide a lasting boost for the UK's world-leading manufacturing industries as they accelerate back to growth.

Today's announcements follow on from the £300 million joint government and industry funding made available through the Manufacturing Made Smarter Challenge and the £8 million government funding given to help small and medium sized manufacturers take advantage of industrial digital technology under the UK government's Made Smarter Adoption programme. The Made Smarter Adoption programme includes free impartial, expert advice, funded digital internships, access to specialised leadership and management training, as well as match funding for digital transformation projects.

Made Smarter was formed following a nationwide review into UK manufacturing that recommended three key changes:

- more ambitious leadership
- more innovation in developing new technologies
- faster implementation and adoption of those technologies

It will be boosting the digital skills of industry leaders, bringing businesses and research development together to develop new technology, and helping makers embrace new digital tools. In doing so, we'll inspire the next industrial revolution and make the UK a leader in digital technologies.

[Visit the Made Smarter website for more information.](#)

The next round of collaborative research and development, focusing on Sustainable Smart Factories, will be open to applications in late 2021. For updates on opportunities, sign up to Made Smarter Innovation Network newsletter on the Made Smarter website to keep up to date on upcoming funding opportunities.