New high-tech 5G lab to boost network security and resilience

- Lab will allow Britain's brightest innovators to test technology in a 'simulated' real-world environment
- Central pillar in government strategy to build a more secure and innovative 5G supply chain

A new high-tech lab to speed up the development of 5G communication kit and help Britain diversify its supply chains will be launched today.

The government-backed £1 million SONIC Labs will help accelerate the adoption of 'Open RAN' technology which is a major pillar of the government's 5G Diversification Strategy.

The strategy aims to build a more secure and innovative supply chain which is fit for the future, less reliant on a small number of multinational suppliers and more accessible for new market entrants.

The lab will be a real-world testing facility that aims to bring in multiple providers to supply components for 5G radio equipment.

Open RAN technology will end situations where only one supplier's technology can be used for a telecoms network to function. For example, it will allow components from different telecoms suppliers to be exchanged or used as replacements at masts that, until now, have been kitted out by a single supplier.

Based in London and Brighton, SONIC Labs will enable telecoms equipment manufacturers to examine how their kit behaves in a fully interoperable, technology-neutral mobile network. It also aims to encourage innovative vendors to enter the UK telecoms supply chain and drive innovation in public networks.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman will launch the centre at a virtual event this morning. He said:

> I'm thrilled that SONIC Labs is opening its doors to the wealth of telecoms expertise we have in this country to explore new ways of building 5G networks.
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> Our investment is a crucial element of our strategy to tackle the world's over-reliance on a small number of telecoms vendors by growing our own cutting-edge solutions at home.
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> I look forward to seeing how the lab will help deliver the incredible social and economic benefits of new technology for people around the UK.

The lab is being run by Ofcom and Digital Catapult, who have built the facility using existing Digital Catapult infrastructure and capability, £1 million of seed funding from DCMS, and a bespoke SONIC Labs branch as part of Ofcom's Innovation Lab in Riverside House.

SONIC Labs will work with a diverse range of vendors to explore new open approaches to telecoms networks, including Accelleran, Mavenir, Radisys, Benetel, Phluido, Druid and Effnet.

Digital Catapult Chief Technology Officer Joe Butler said:

> In SONIC Labs we are experimenting to make interoperability a reality. This effort supports our mission to drive UK capability in advanced digital technology and we are grateful to Ofcom for working with us in this partnership and to DCMS for the opportunity to leverage the 5G testbeds we have developed in this effort.

Ofcom Chief Executive Dame Melanie Dawes said:

> SONIC Labs is an exciting project that gives us the opportunity to explore how new telecoms technology could operate in the UK market. It's all about bringing innovation to our communications networks – helping to support fast, secure and reliable connections for the future. A number of companies are already getting involved and we look forward to more joining too.

In his speech at the SONIC Labs launch, Mr Warman also announced that DCMS is developing a long-term strategy for 5G and future wireless networks in the UK.

As part of this, the government will be considering the role of spectrum, the finite radio wave resource central to developing these technologies, and set out how the government will continue to ensure that wireless infrastructure plays an integral role in enabling the UK's economy and society to build back better.

The government will be working closely with industry, Ofcom, academia and others to help shape its thinking and develop the evidence base. More detail on how we will develop this work will be announced later this year. Find out more about SONIC Labs

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For more information contact the DCMS press office: 020 7211 2210