

Press release: Government announces £300 million for landmark ageing society grand challenge

- Today's funding will support better diagnosis for UK patients through AI and new tech at new regional centres of excellence
- 500,000 Biobank volunteers will see their genome sequenced providing data that will help the UK lead the world in development of tools for early diagnosis and new pioneering therapies
- Extra £40 million invested in new hub for UK Dementia Research Institute
- New funding will develop new products and services which will help people live in their homes longer, tackle loneliness, and increase independence

As part of the government's plan to build a Britain fit for the future, the Business Secretary Greg Clark has today (Monday 12 March) announced a £300 million competitive fund to develop the innovations and new technologies of tomorrow.

Through the ambitious Industrial Strategy, government is investing over £300 million from its Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) to bring together the UK's world-class research expertise with business investment to develop technologies and industries that can help the UK prepare for the challenge of an ageing society.

To ensure taxpayer money is being invested in the right areas, the government set out four Grand Challenges in its Industrial Strategy – priority areas and industries the UK is determined to be at the forefront of in the future where we can lead the global technological revolution, creating more skilled jobs to boost the productivity and earning power of people throughout the UK. Through its Ageing Society Grand Challenge the government has committed to invest in harnessing the power of innovation to help meet the diverse needs of an ageing society.

More than 10 million people in the UK today can expect to see their 100th birthday, compared to the 15,000 centenarians today. Ageing populations are a global phenomenon that are creating new demands for technologies, products and services, including new care technologies, different housing models and innovative savings products for retirement.

Today's new allocation of funding will see the government invest over £300 million to ensure the UK is able to meet these demands, with £98 million for a 'healthy ageing programme' and £210 million for a 'data to early diagnosis and precision medicine programme' to improve diagnosis of disease and develop new medical treatments and technologies.

Welcoming today's announcement, Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

Through our Industrial Strategy we will not only boost innovation and productivity across the UK, but we will also ensure that this government changes people's lives for the better.

We are investing over £300 million into developing the treatments of the future, in new technologies that will revolutionise the way we age and provide everyone with the best possible chance to grow old with dignity in their own home.

By 2020 we want to be the best country in the world for dementia care and research and today's announcement of £40 million for the Dementia Research Institute is a vitally important step on that journey.

Caroline Dinenage, Minister of State for Care said:

As a society we are living longer – a child born today can expect to live to 100 years – but now we must seize the opportunity to improve the quality of lives lived longer. With an increasingly ageing population we must transform the way we think about our work, our housing, our health, our finances and our communities.

These investments will not only help in our aims to make this the best country in the world to live with dementia but provide a revolutionary vital boost to develop and scale up products and services of the future, ensuring everyone can age well and live more independently throughout their lives.

Healthy ageing programme

The £98 million 'healthy ageing programme' will drive the development of new products and services which will help people to live in their homes for longer, tackle loneliness, and increase independence and wellbeing.

The programme will be investing in tackling one of the toughest medical challenges facing society today, dementia. With an estimated 850,000 people in the UK living with the disease, the government will be investing in the creation of innovative new treatments of the future to help tackle it.

An extra £40 million will be going into the UK Dementia Research Institute (UKDRI) to create a new hub in partnership with University College London (UCL) that will host 350 leading scientists, researching new treatments to improve the lives of millions.

Dr Rob Buckle, Chief Science Officer at the Medical Research Council, added:

Developing the UK Dementia Research Institute hub in partnership with UCL will bring tremendous benefits for science and for health.

The new building will provide state-of-the-art facilities for research and the development of new dementia therapies, and will be located alongside neurology clinics and have a dedicated space for engaging dementia patients and their families and carers.

Data to early diagnosis and precision medicine programme

The £210 million investment in the 'data to early diagnosis and precision medicine' challenge will see the UK lead the world in the development of innovative new diagnostic tools, medical products and treatments.

As part of the funding announced today, the government will be investing in genomics, ensuring the UK continues to lead the world in large scale whole genome sequencing. Genome sequencing can help those with rare diseases receive faster diagnoses and cancer patients gain better access to personalised treatment programmes.

Through the new investment, the UK will sequence the genomes of 500,000 Biobank volunteers. The data from each of these volunteers will provide a rich resource of data that UK researchers will use to build a greater understanding of disease processes and enable the development of tools for early diagnosis and a new wave of therapies.

Regional centres of excellence

Over £70 million is going to be invested in creating regional centres across the UK to offer UK patients better diagnosis using new technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI).

This investment, as well as future funding from industry, in new centres of excellence will support industry collaboration with the NHS to help the UK lead the world in digital pathology and radiology, including using AI to analyse medical images.

Applying AI to medical images has the potential to diagnose disease more accurately and therefore provide more targeted treatment, and increase efficiency in the health system.

Each centre will enable companies, including SMEs, to rapidly develop, test and implement products and systems in partnership with doctors and academics, improving patient care and gaining early evidence of real-world product value.

Investing in these programmes will enable research that could result in globally significant advances in healthcare such as cures for some cancers. The different strands of the ISCF programme will create the data needed to enable research into better diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease.

Notes to editors:

What is the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund?

1. In the Industrial Strategy White Paper the Government committed to invest a further £725m in the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) over the next four years. The Government, through UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), will invest in challenges through the ISCF. Through focusing on the big innovation challenges facing the UK, the ISCF will maximise the value of the new ideas being developed and capture the value of innovation in the UK.
2. The ISCF is a new mission orientated funding approach providing an opportunity to build on our competitive advantage in key areas of research and business sectors, and develop innovative ideas that will transform industries and create whole new ones. It will bring together the UK's world leading research with business around a major industrial and societal challenge. Challenges have been aligned to the four 'Grand Challenges' set out in the Industrial Strategy White Paper.
3. The ISCF will borrow from the US Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) model by placing the responsibility for delivering a challenge in the hands of a 'Challenge Director'. Challenge Directors will be leading experts in the area and will coordinate across different delivery organisations to make the challenge a success.

Expressions of interest are now open for the [Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund Wave 3](#).