

# [News story: UK's research and innovation bodies welcome budget](#)

The spring budget announced an initial investment of £270 million in 2017 to 2018. This is to kick-start the development of disruptive technologies that have the potential to transform the UK economy.

## **First challenges announced**

Following engagement with experts in academia and industry, the budget announced the first wave of challenges funded through the ISCF, part of the [Industrial Strategy](#). These include:

- leading the world in the development, design and manufacture of batteries that will power the next generation of electric vehicles, helping to tackle air pollution
- developing cutting-edge artificial intelligence and robotics systems that will operate in extreme and hazardous environments, including off-shore energy, nuclear energy, space and deep mining
- accelerating patient access to new drugs and treatments through developing brand new medicine manufacturing technologies, helping to improve public health

## **Investing in skills**

The budget also announced plans to build the pipeline of high-skilled research talent necessary for a growing and innovative economy. There will be an investment of £250 million over the next 4 years including:

- £90 million to provide an additional 1,000 PhD places in areas aligned with the Industrial Strategy. Around 85% will be in STEM disciplines, and 40% will directly help strengthen collaboration between business and academia through industrial partnerships
- £160 million to support new fellowships for early and mid-career researchers in areas aligned to the Industrial Strategy

## **Research and innovation leaders respond**

Dr Ruth McKernan, Chief Executive of Innovate UK, said:

The Chancellor's announcement today is a great example of how the Industrial Strategy challenge fund will deliver the science that business needs.

The first 3 challenge areas are developing revolutionising battery technology, getting innovative medicines to patients more quickly and developing robots for use in hazardous environments. The UK has

scientific expertise in these areas. We have excellent companies ready and willing to translate the technology into business growth across the UK.

The challenge fund is like nothing we have seen before, and it has enormous potential to deliver. These challenges announced today are just the start. Innovate UK and the research councils are already working together, building on the evidence we've gathered from organisations across the country to look at how we can get the UK's researchers and businesses working together and firing on all cylinders.

Professor Philip Nelson, Chair of Research Councils UK, said:

The Chancellor's announcements are most welcome. Long-term funding for research and developing high-skilled research talent is vital to the UK's future as a science power, continuing to feed the pipeline that transforms research into products and services. The UK is at the fore in many aspects of these fields, but countries across the globe are putting effort and resource in too, so these investments are strategically significant.

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## **Press release: £120 million funding boost for incoming NI Executive**

The Chancellor Philip Hammond has today set out his plans to make the most of the opportunities ahead by laying the foundations for a stronger, fairer, better United Kingdom outside the European Union – a country that works for everyone.

Included in his first Budget were numerous measures to ensure that economic growth is shared across every part of the country, including additional funding for Northern Ireland.

Employment in Northern Ireland is at a record high, and average wages have grown faster than in any other part of the UK since 2010.

Decisions to invest in social care, skills, schools and health will bring a £120 million funding boost for an incoming Northern Ireland Executive, following last week's Assembly election.

This means that a new Executive's resource budget will be boosted by £90 million through to 2019-20 and its capital budget by £30 million through to 2020-21. It can spend that funding on its own priorities to help create a

brighter, more secure future for the country.

Researchers in Northern Ireland could benefit from a new £270 million Industrial Strategy challenge fund which brings together business and academia to focus on productivity-boosting solutions for industries of the future. The first challenges set by the Chancellor today – are artificial intelligence and robots, electric vehicle batteries and speeding up the process of making new medicines. The country will also benefit from the new UK-wide National 5G Innovation Network, as part of the digital infrastructure package.

Northern Ireland will also benefit from recent action taken more widely, including:

- The rolling out of Tax-Free Childcare for working families with children under twelve, providing up to £2,000 a year per child to help with childcare costs and up to £4,000 for disabled children under seventeen.
- The freezing of fuel duty for the seventh successive year, saving the average driver in Northern Ireland nearly £10 every time they fill up their car.
- The raising of the National Living Wage from £7.20 to £7.50, giving people in Northern Ireland a well-deserved pay rise.
- Confirmation that the personal allowance and higher rate threshold will increase to £12,500 by 2020-21, which will reduce the income tax bill for 800,000 individuals in NI in 2017-18, and take 35,000 individuals out of income tax altogether.

Chancellor Philip Hammond said:

The Government's focus at this time is working with the parties in discussions aimed at forming a new Northern Ireland Executive. We want to see a new Executive setting a budget for 2017-18 as one of its early priorities – and it will have the opportunity to incorporate the new funding being made available today into its planning, when it does so. My Budget offers a further boost in ensuring that people across Northern Ireland can share the benefits of economic growth across the country.

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

I welcome the Chancellor's budget that underlines the Government's determination to build a country that works for everyone. The Budget reinforces this Government's commitment to strengthening the economy right across the UK. Northern Ireland will continue to benefit from the stability of being part of a strong UK economy.

We are committed to strengthening the economy through investing in skills and increasing prosperity right across the UK. Since 2010,

there are record numbers of people in employment in Northern Ireland and this Budget builds on that success.

The £120 million increase in funding for Northern Ireland in this Budget will give an incoming Northern Ireland Executive the freedom to invest in its priorities. This underlines the need for a functioning Executive in Northern Ireland, which can make the right decisions for Northern Ireland's economy. I am determined to continue working intensively with the parties to ensure the resumption of a strong, stable and inclusive Executive in Northern Ireland.

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## [Recent initiatives important milestones towards greater peace in Mali, say UN, regional partners](#)

8 March 2017 – Commending recent progress, including the launch of interim authorities in Kidal, northern Mali, the United Nations together with regional blocs urged the parties to the peace agreement in the African nation to overcome the difficulties which are impeding the establishment of such authorities in the Taoudéni and Timbuktu regions.

The UN, the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the European Union (EU) – in their capacity as members of the Mediation Team supporting the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers Process – also welcomed the successful conduct by the parties of the first mixed patrol in Gao on 23 February, within the framework of the Operational Coordination Mechanism, and called on them to extend the patrols in Kidal and Timbuktu without delay.

“[These] initiatives represent important milestones towards the successful implementation of the Agreement and towards greater peace and stability and the return of state services,” read a joint declaration issued by the four organizations.

Noting the important steps still to be taken, the organizations further invited parties to the Agreement to continue to honour the commitments made, in particular at the high-level meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee held in the capital, Bamako, last month, as well as to implement all the provisions of the Agreement for the interim period so as to support in a consensual manner the ongoing State reform and the new political and security architecture.

SEE ALSO: UN News focus page on Mali

“In that regard, [we] call on the parties to establish without delay the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reinsertion, the Integration Commission, and the National Council for Security Sector Reform which are key to advancing the peace process,” added the joint declaration.



Rwandan Peacekeepers from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) patrol the streets of Gao, in northern Mali. UN Photo/Marco Dormino

Also in the declaration, the organizations also welcomed the establishment of a consultative framework involving all parties as well as the international Mediation Team, as well as commended progress towards preparing for a national conference, the *Conférence d'entente nationale* and called for broad and inclusive participation for its preparation and organization.

The organizations, however, noted concern at the recent increase in attacks and clashes, particularly in north and central regions of Mali, such as those in Boulkessi, in Timbuktu as well as terrorist attacks in border areas in Burkina Faso and Niger, and underlined the need to bring the perpetrators to justice.

They also called on the parties to the Agreement to work closely together to improve intercommunal relations, share information about security threats, and take concrete steps to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism and spill-over into the region.

“In this regard, [we] welcome the initiative of the G5 Sahel Member States to more effectively fight violent extremism in support of the Malian parties,” said the parties.

They also reiterated their commitment to support, in coordination with the lead and the other members of the Mediation Team, the implementation of the Agreement as well as their determination “to counter those who take actions to obstruct or threaten the implementation of the Agreement.”

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## [£600,000 fine for Council contractor after major burns to employer](#)

The underground cabling at the scene of the incident

Gloucester Crown Court heard the 61-year-old man was working at the site on

Eastgate Street on 29 May 2015. While trying to replace the traffic light pole he came into contact with a live underground cable which immediately gave him the electric shock and set him on fire. The man, who was an employee of another company asked by Amey to carry out the work, received burns to his hands, arms, stomach, face, legs and chest.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that although this was the first time this particular group of individuals worked on an Amey project, Amey did not provide adequate information on the location of underground services in the area. The inquiry also found that Amey's supervision of the work was not adequate, and it had not properly managed the risks from the underground services.

Amey LG Limited, of Edmund Halley Road, Oxford, pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 25 (4) of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015. The company was fined £600,000 and ordered to pay costs of £15,498.

After the hearing HSE Principal Inspector Helena Tinton said: "This man suffered life changing injuries as a result of this incident. He's not been able to return to work, he still can't use his hands properly and has been left both physically and mentally scarred by what happened. Had Amey given adequate information to the team working on site, and had Amey ensured the work was properly planned and supervised, this incident could have been avoided.

"This case should act as a reminder to local authorities and their contractors of the risks of working underground and the danger of severe electric shocks."

For further information please visit [www.hse.gov.uk/construction/safetytopics/underground.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/safetytopics/underground.htm)

#### **Notes to Editors:**

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. It aims to reduce work-related death, injury and ill health. It does so through research, information and advice, promoting training; new or revised regulations and codes of practice, and working with local authority partners by inspection, investigation and enforcement. [hse.gov.uk](http://hse.gov.uk)
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: [www.legislation.gov.uk/](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/)
3. HSE news releases are available at [www.hse.gov.uk/press](http://www.hse.gov.uk/press)

Journalists should approach HSE press office with any queries on regional press releases.

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# John McDonnell responding to the Budget

**John McDonnell MP, Labour's Shadow Chancellor**, responding to the Budget, said:

"Philip Hammond has used his first Budget to claw £2 billion in tax on those self-employed who are on low and middle incomes. But he continued to boast about the £70 billion worth of tax giveaways at the top announced by his predecessor.

"Labour will oppose this unfair £2 billion sole traders tax on the self-employed low and middle earners.

"Rather than provide the funding that would end a social care crisis in which 1 million vulnerable people go without adequate care, or calling an end to the state of emergency in our NHS, the Tories are doing next to nothing and don't seem to recognise the scale of the crisis they have created.

"The Tory rigged economy continues for households in our country, who face being £1,800 worse off by the end of the forecast period, and if you are on the National Living Wage by the end of this parliament you face a 25p per hour cut.

"This Budget does not address the problems created by seven years of Tory failure, and it has failed the fairness test for women who will be hit by a cuts in public services, and the national living wage.

"Instead of equipping our country for Brexit, he is building our economy on sand, and the little he has announced today will mean we are less prepared for the challenges we face outside of the EU."

Ends