

Independent review of UKRI published

The Department for Business Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has today (Wednesday 20 July) published an independent review of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), led by Sir David Grant.

Launched in April 2018, UKRI is the government's primary funder of research and innovation. It is composed of:

- the 7 disciplinary research councils
- Research England, which is responsible for supporting research and knowledge exchange at higher education institutions in England
- Innovate UK, the UK's innovation agency

This is the first review of UKRI since its creation. The report comes following the publication of UKRI's first [5-year strategy](#). Ministers and UKRI leadership have expressed their support for the review's 18 recommendations, which include investment in harmonising IT systems, clarifying roles and responsibilities within UKRI and with BEIS, and further focus on demonstrating outcomes from their funding.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

I welcome Sir David's recommendations. To support our ambition to establish the UK as a true Science Superpower, we have given UKRI its largest funding settlement ever, with over £25 billion across the next 3 years.

Our ambitions for a world-class research and innovation system require a world-class funder, which is why we will work closely with UKRI to deliver these recommendations and ensure they are equipped and ready to support those goals.

CEO of UKRI Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser said:

UKRI's 5-year strategy sets out our clear ambition to be more effective, more efficient and to work in new and different ways to realise our full potential.

I warmly welcome the momentum that Sir David's timely review adds to these efforts. His expert advice and careful recommendations will help us continue to strengthen UKRI in our work to fuel the UK's outstanding research and innovation system.

I would like to thank Sir David and the review team that supported him for their tireless efforts and collaborative approach.

UKRI Chair Sir Andrew Mackenzie said:

David Grant's review has offered valuable and timely support and challenge to the UKRI Board, highlighting opportunities for us to better steer UKRI to capitalise on the extraordinary research and innovation talent and creativity that will put the UK at the forefront of solutions to national and global challenges.

The review was led by Sir David Grant, supported by a secretariat in BEIS. Sir David was Chair of the National Physical Laboratory from 2015-2021, and Vice Chancellor of Cardiff University from 2001-2012.

The review forms part of the government's Public Bodies Review Programme. These reviews are intended to ensure that arms-length bodies are contributing effectively to government objectives and operating in an efficient manner.

Read the [full report and recommendations](#).

UK and US launch innovation prize challenges in privacy-enhancing technologies to tackle financial crime and public health emergencies

Today, the UK and US governments launched a set of prize challenges to unleash the potential of privacy-enhancing technologies (PETs) to combat global societal challenges. Announced at the Summit for Democracy last year, innovators from academia, industry, and the broader public will have the opportunity to participate in up to two separate tracks (improving detection of financial crime and forecasting an individual's risk of infection during a pandemic) as well as the option to design one generalised solution that works for both scenarios for broader applicability.

Competing for cash prizes from a combined UK-US prize pool of \$1.6 million (£1.3 million), innovators will develop privacy-preserving federated learning solutions that enable artificial intelligence models to be trained on sensitive data without organisations having to reveal, share, or combine their raw data. Winning challenge solutions will be showcased at the second Summit for Democracy, which President Biden plans to convene in the first half of 2023.

The first track – aimed at transforming financial crime prevention – will

spur technological innovation to tackle the challenge of international money laundering. According to United Nations' (UN) [estimates](#), money laundering costs up to \$2 trillion each year, undermining economic prosperity and financing organised crime. PETs can be harnessed to facilitate privacy-preserving financial information sharing and collaborative analytics, allowing anomalous payments to be identified without compromising the privacy of individuals.

Innovators will work with synthetic global transaction data created by SWIFT, the global provider of secure financial messaging services. Registered challenge participants will receive access to data that is realistic, but artificial, and therefore does not run the risk of revealing private information.

To provide regulatory context important for understanding the potential of these maturing technologies to counter illicit financial activity, the prize challenges will provide opportunities for innovators to engage with regulators on both sides of the Atlantic, including the UK's Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), and the U.S. Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN). Innovators will also engage with the UK National Economic Crime Centre.

The second track of the challenges – aimed at bolstering pandemic response capabilities – will strengthen global readiness for ongoing and future public health emergencies by developing privacy-preserving solutions that can forecast an individual's risk of infection. Innovators will have access to a synthetic dataset created by the University of Virginia's Biocomplexity Institute, which represents a digital twin of a regional population. As with the financial dataset, the pandemic response dataset is synthetic and will not reveal private information. Challenge participants will be able to engage with staff from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), NHS England, and the UK Research and Innovation DARE UK (Data and Analytics Research Environments UK) programme.

Nadine Dorries, Secretary of State for the U.K. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, said:

I'm delighted that we are today launching joint UK-US prize challenges to accelerate the adoption of privacy-enhancing technologies (PETs). These cutting-edge technologies can help us to harness the power of data to tackle global challenges like international money laundering and to plan for subsequent public health emergencies, while respecting citizens' rights. This partnership demonstrates the UK and US' commitment to working together to address transnational challenges, as well as to ensuring that our vision of the tech revolution – one that is open and democratic – prevails.

Dr. Alondra Nelson, head of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, said:

These prize challenges will catalyze talent and ingenuity on both sides of the Atlantic to advance privacy-enhancing technology solutions and enable their potential to tackle global challenges like those of cross-border financial crime and pandemic response.

This important initiative reflects our common purpose of developing technologies and driving innovation in a manner that reinforces our commitment to and expression of democratic values and the fundamental right to privacy.

Dr. Sethuraman Panchanathan, Director of the National Science Foundation (NSF), said:

Building on decades of NSF research investment in the field, these prize challenges will accelerate the translation of game-changing privacy-enhancing technologies. In this way, these prize challenges – supported by NSF’s Directorate for Computer and Information Science and Engineering and the new Directorate for Technology, Innovation and Partnerships – illustrate the synergy of foundational research and translational activities in moving research to practice. By harnessing innovation across national lines and strengthening a transatlantic community of innovation, the US-UK prize challenges will demonstrate the value of international collaboration to develop technologies in ways that uphold our shared values.

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo said:

We are on the cusp of solving some of the world’s most intractable problems and improving our quality of life with the power of artificial intelligence, but we must do it responsibly by upholding our shared values around privacy,

I’m thrilled that we’re launching these joint UK-US privacy-enhancing technology prize challenges and motivating our best researchers in industry and academia to innovate on protecting privacy so that we can all reap the benefits.

John Edwards, UK Information Commissioner, said:

Bringing the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) into the start of these prize challenges ensures peoples’ privacy and trust are at the heart of the design process. People can have confidence in the power of personal data to save lives and stop financial crime.

Privacy-enhancing technologies allow for great innovation when used in the right way. We’re looking forward to supporting these

solutions and the final outcomes that will ultimately help the public.

Planning for the challenges is being led by the U.K. Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation (CDEI) and Innovate UK, and the U.S. White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF). The U.S. challenge is funded and administered by the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology and the U.S. National Science Foundation.

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Notes to editors:

- The multi-stage competition involves a white paper submission, prototype development, and a red-teaming phase. Innovators have until Monday 19 September to enter the competition. More information about the prize challenges can be found at petsprizechallenges.com.
- The UK-US collaboration on the prize challenges was first [announced](#) at the first Summit for Democracy in December 2021.
- PETs allow sensitive personal or commercial data to be shared and/or analysed, while protecting individuals' privacy and proprietary information. PETs include maturing technologies, such as privacy-preserving federated learning, which allows machine learning models to be trained on high quality distributed datasets, without having to share the raw data.

[The Sizewell C Project development consent decision announced](#)

The application involves the construction of a new nuclear power station producing reliable, low-carbon electricity to help Britain achieve Net Zero. It is intended that Sizewell C will generate enough low-carbon electricity to

supply six million homes.

The application was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration by NNB Nuclear Generation (SZC) Limited on 27 May 2020 and accepted for Examination on 24 June 2020.

Following an Examination during which the public, Statutory Consultees and Interested Parties were given the opportunity to give evidence to the Examining Authority, recommendations were made to the Secretary of State on 25 February 2022.

This is the 114th Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and 69th energy application to have been examined by The Planning Inspectorate within the timescales laid down in the Planning Act 2008.

The Planning Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Sarah Richards said:

"The Planning Inspectorate has now examined more than 100 nationally significant infrastructure projects since the Planning Act 2008 process was introduced, ensuring local communities have had the opportunity of being involved in the examination of projects that may affect them.

"This Examination took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions and the Examining Authority worked hard to ensure that local people, the local authorities – East Suffolk District and Suffolk County Council – and other Interested Parties were able to fully participate.

"The Examining Authority listened and gave full consideration to local views and the evidence gathered during the Examination before making its recommendation."

The decision, the recommendation made by the Examining Authority to the Secretary of State and the evidence considered by the Examining Authority in reaching its recommendation are publicly available on the project pages of the [National Infrastructure Planning website](#).

ENDS

Journalists wanting further information should contact the Planning Inspectorate Press Office, on 0303 444 5004 or 0303 444 5005 or email: Press.office@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Notes to editors:

The Planning Inspectorate's [National Infrastructure Programme of Projects](#) details the proposals which are anticipated to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate as applications in the coming months.

Government to strengthen and modernise reservoir safety regime

The Government has today committed to improving reservoir safety through reforms to the regulatory regime and modernisation of the Reservoirs Act 1975 as it [accepted all of the recommendations](#) of the [second part of an independent review by Professor David Balmforth](#).

With the review recognising the strong safety track record of reservoirs in England, the reforms will help to ensure that the regulatory regime remains effective and robust in securing the ongoing safety of such critical infrastructure so that those living downstream of reservoirs are protected from flooding which could risk their lives and property.

They will build on action already being taken to improve reservoir safety following the incident at Toddbrook Reservoir in 2019, including the [government's full implementation of the recommendations](#) of the first part of the independent review.

Environment Minister Steve Double said:

The safety of those living and working near reservoirs must always be a priority. By modernising and reforming legislation and regulation regimes, we will help to protect communities and provide them with increased peace of mind.

Professor Balmforth's review provided us with a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the reservoir safety regime, and the progress that is needed to ensure it is fit for the future, with safety standards consistently applied across all our reservoirs.

Caroline Douglass, Environment Agency Executive Director for Flood and Coastal Risk Management, said:

England has a strong reservoir safety record, but we are always be looking for ways to improve our approach, especially in the face of a changing climate.

We look forward to working with Defra, reservoir owners, and engineers to implement these reforms and ensure that reservoirs are regulated using a modern risk-based approach.

Reform of the regulatory programme will be delivered in collaboration with reservoir owners and engineers over the coming years, with a timeline that will ensure that the changes can be managed by industry while maintaining

ongoing reservoir safety management.

In 2022/23 and 2023/24, reforms will be made through existing powers, guidance and training, including:

- improving enforcement options and flexibility using civil sanctions;
- introducing review of engineers' reports by the Environment Agency;
- developing proposals for a proportionate charging scheme to improve recovery of regulatory costs; and
- introducing a free registration scheme for owners of small raised reservoirs during 2022/23.

In 2023/24, a consultation on the modernisation of the Reservoirs Act will look at:

- developing a new risk/hazard classification and how it could operate;
- developing proposals to make the future supply of reservoir engineers more sustainable;
- developing proposals for regulating small raised reservoirs within the new safety regime, for consultation.

The reforms will build on actions which are already being taken to improve reservoir safety following the incident at Toddbrook Reservoir in 2019, including a Ministerial Direction requiring all large raised reservoirs to have on site emergency flood plans, new guidance on spillway inspection and management, new guidance for reservoir engineers about carrying out inspections and supervision, and research to improve the future supply of engineers.

Easier access to locally-applied HRT to treat postmenopausal vaginal symptoms in landmark MHRA reclassification

For the first time ever in the UK, postmenopausal women will be able to access a low dose Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) product from their local pharmacies without prescription, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) announced today.

Gina 10 microgram vaginal tablets (containing estradiol) are used for the treatment of vaginal symptoms such as dryness, soreness, itching, burning and uncomfortable sex caused by oestrogen deficiency in postmenopausal women aged 50 years and above who have not had a period for at least 1 year. This product is locally-applied, meaning it is inserted into the vagina and not

taken orally.

The decision to reclassify these vaginal tablets follows a safety review by the MHRA, independent advice from the [Commission on Human Medicines](#) (CHM), and a [public consultation](#). The UK regulator sought views from patients, pharmacists, prescribers and a wide range of stakeholders including the Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists, the Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare, the British Pharmacopoeia Commission and the British Menopause Society.

Low-dose vaginal estradiol has been widely used for the treatment of postmenopausal vaginal symptoms as a prescription medicine since 1991 and has a well-established safety profile. The product will be supplied from a pharmacy when it is considered safe and suitable to do so, following consultation with a pharmacist.

Pharmacists are trained healthcare professionals. They will have access to training materials and a checklist that will enable them to advise women on whether these low dose vaginal tablets are appropriate and safe for them to use and to give the information they need, so they can make informed choices. Other vaginal tablets that also contain estradiol, including Vagifem 10 microgram vaginal tablets, will still be available on prescription.

Dr Laura Squire, Chief Healthcare Quality and Access Officer at the MHRA, said:

This is a landmark reclassification for the millions of women in the UK who are going through the menopause and experience severe symptoms that negatively impact their everyday life. Women will be able to safely obtain a local vaginal HRT product without a prescription, which increases women's access to treatment and gives them greater control over their choices while relieving pressure on frontline GP services.

In reaching this decision, we have seen positive support from a wide range of people, including many women aged 50 years and above who could benefit from this decision. We would like to thank everyone who submitted their view in our public consultation.

We will continue to improve women's access to medicines for menopausal care when it is safe to do so, and to place their views at the centre of our regulatory decisions.

Minister for Health, Maria Caulfield, said:

Menopause affects hundreds of thousands of women every year, but for some its symptoms can be debilitating and for many they can be misunderstood or ignored.

Making Gina available over the counter is a huge step forward in

enabling women to access HRT as easily as possible, ensuring they can continue living their life as they navigate the menopause.

We're putting women's health to the top of the agenda – our Women's Health Strategy published today is testament to that. More widely we're continuing to work with suppliers and manufacturers to secure sustainable short-term and long-term access to HRT and our UK-wide menopause taskforce will tackle taboos and issues surrounding menopause.

Systemic HRT medicines circulate in the blood and are used to treat hot flushes and other menopausal symptoms. They include oral tablets and patches (transdermal patches) and gels which are put on the skin. Local HRT such as Gina is applied directly to the vagina and gradually releases into the vaginal tissue with very little absorption into the bloodstream.

Notes to Editors

- [Consultation outcome](#) – The public consultation received 1229 responses, with over 88% being in favour of the reclassification. All the responses received were carefully considered.
- [Public assessment report for the prescription only medicine to pharmacy reclassification of Gina 10 microgram vaginal tablets.](#)
- We are committed to widening access to medicines for the benefit of public health when it is safe to do so. Further information on reclassification can be found [here](#) and the criteria for prescription control can be found [here](#).
- Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is responsible for regulating all medicines and medical devices in the UK by ensuring they work and are acceptably safe. All our work is underpinned by robust and fact-based judgements to ensure that the benefits justify any risks. MHRA is an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care.
- The Commission on Human Medicines (CHM) advises ministers on the safety, efficacy and quality of medicinal products.