

Press release: Science Minister announces funding for cyber security and screen entertainment projects in Bristol

- New Industrial Strategy funding for projects to support next generation of cyber security products and media services to market in Bristol
- Science Minister Chris Skidmore has today visited the Bristol Robotics Lab at the University of the West of England to see the Industrial Strategy in action and how their cutting edge work supports the Grand Challenges
- the activities demonstrate how the modern Industrial Strategy is bringing jobs, opportunity and prosperity to all regions of the UK

In a boost for Bristol, Science Minister Chris Skidmore has announced that 3 ambitious research projects will receive up to £50,000 each in new government investment, building on the city's thriving cybersecurity and entertainment industries, and the South West's globally recognised strengths in environmental science.

The projects, 2 of which are being led by the University of Bristol and the third by the University of Exeter, have been awarded the early-stage funding from UKRI's [Strength in Places Fund](#), announced as part of the modern Industrial Strategy in 2017.

A total of 24 projects across the UK have initially been awarded up to £50,000 to develop their innovations, with 4 to 8 of the strongest set to receive between £10 million and £50 million each later in the year to carry out their projects.

Led by the University of Bristol, the 'Cyber Wales and West' project is looking to create a new cyber hotspot that will push the boundaries of innovation where academic talent and test-bed platforms will attract leading UK cyber businesses. The partnership between academia and industry will support business growth in the area, provide skills training and build on the city's reputation of thriving cyber businesses and academic talent. The industry focused Test Bed will allow rigorous testing for real time virtualisation, bringing together physical and virtual environments, enabling experts to identify the appropriate computer parts and networks to protect.

A second project being led by the University of Bristol is looking at how to enhance Bristol and Bath's enviable reputation for screen-based media by creating a vibrant creative cluster. The project 'My World' will seek to address current challenges faced by growing immersive formats of screen entertainment to address innovation and perceptual issues that are currently stalling further investment in the sector. It will focus on the relationships

between content creation, delivery and consumption.

Meanwhile, the University of Exeter is looking to establish an 'Environmental Intelligence Accelerator', working with a number of partners including the Met Office and Plymouth Marine Laboratory to make environmental data more accessible for decision-making. Addressing the global move to low-carbon economies and a changing climate, governments and businesses are in demand of environmentally-related information to inform their operations – from mitigating damage to property by natural hazards to reducing the negative impact on the environment by reducing pollutants. The project will seek input from partners around the world to address challenges in developing Environmental Intelligence Solutions and support private sector entrepreneurs test environmental sensors in the South West.

Science and Innovation Minister Chris Skidmore said:

From enhancing home screen entertainment to developing innovative solutions for fighting cyber-crime, Bristol has much to be proud of, and these shortlisted projects have the potential to revolutionise their respective industries.

We are committed to building on our world-leading reputation in science, research and innovation, and that is why we announced the Strength in Places Fund in our modern Industrial Strategy to boost productivity and create the high-skilled jobs of the future all around the UK.

Announced in the modern [Industrial Strategy](#) in November 2017, the Strength in Places Fund will benefit all nations and regions of the UK by enabling them to tap into the world-class research and innovation skills base that is spread right across the country. The fund brings together research organisations, businesses, and local leadership on projects that will lead to significant economic impact, high-value job creation and regional growth.

The announcement comes as Science Minister Chris Skidmore visits Bristol Robotics Lab where he has seen first-hand the important work being done to address the Industrial Strategy's [Grand Challenges](#). This has included learning about the role robots can play in addressing care solutions to support independent living, using medical robotics to provide precise and accurate sensing in surgery and advancing unmanned air vehicles such as drones. The visit follows the recent announcement that the Minister will be convening an industry group of robotics leaders to enhance the sector in the UK.

Press release: Biggest ever upgrade of M6 in Cheshire fully open

Highways England has completed a £265 million project to add extra lanes and new technology to a 19-mile stretch of the motorway between Crewe and Knutsford – the most significant change since the M6 first opened in the county in 1963.

A fourth lane has been introduced in each direction and a total of 258 electronic signs, 104 traffic sensors and 70 CCTV cameras will help tackle congestion and improve journey times for around 120,000 drivers every day.

The upgrade is the first of four smart motorway schemes to be finished that will increase the M6's capacity by a third on 60 miles of the motorway between Coventry and Wigan.

Jim O'Sullivan, Chief Executive of Highways England, said:

We have delivered the biggest upgrade to the M6 since the motorway opened in Cheshire almost 60 years ago, and it will mean quicker and more reliable journeys for everyone from businesses making long-distance deliveries to commuters getting to and from work.

Tens of thousands of drivers travel on the M6 between Crewe and Knutsford each day making it one of the busiest stretches of motorway in the country, so the extra lanes and new technology will help make the M6 fit for the future.

The new overhead electronic signs will provide drivers with live information about their journeys, including changes in the speed limit, lane closures and incidents on the route.

Traffic sensors at the side of the motorway will also be used to automatically set variable speed limits to keep traffic moving, preventing tailbacks and stop-start conditions caused by sudden braking.

And new CCTV cameras will provide extensive coverage of the motorway to help Highways England's traffic officers and the emergency services respond quickly to incidents, with frequent emergency areas giving drivers a safe place to stop if they break down.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

We are investing record amounts to improve journeys for people right across the country – including £13 billion on transport in the North.

This upgrade will mean motorists in the North West will get to work, the shops, or to visit friends and family more easily, quickly and safely.

It also builds on other improvements in the region where drivers are already seeing the benefits of investment in the M60, M62 and the A556.

Drivers have already been benefitting from better journeys after the first two sections of the M6 upgrade were completed earlier this year, and the whole scheme has been finished over a week ahead of schedule.

Statistics from the first week of operation of the stretch between Middlewich and Knutsford (junctions 18 to 19) show that traffic was flowing at around 70mph for 22 hours each day, with the new variable speed limits also helping to keep the motorway congestion-free during peak times.

Tatton MP Esther McVey visited Highways England's North West regional control centre in Newton-le-Willows earlier this month to find out more about how the new technology will help to keep the motorway moving safely. She said:

I visited the control centre to see for myself how the smart motorway will benefit and support Tatton residents and drivers. The centre acts as an 'all seeing eye' which monitors the roads, takes calls from the public, and links up the emergency services and Highways England traffic officers.

I was reassured that, even with the hard shoulder now being used as an extra lane, accidents and breakdowns can be attended to faster as a result of the smart motorway intelligence.

Esther McVey visiting the control centre

Other improvements that have been carried out as part of the scheme include resurfacing the entire route with a low-noise road surface, installing a new concrete safety barrier to reduce the risk of vehicles crossing onto the opposite carriageway in collisions, and fitting 700 metres of noise barrier to reduce noise levels for people living close to the motorway.

Highways England is reminding drivers getting used to the new four-lane motorway to keep left unless overtaking and to take note of the new electronic signs to make sure they are getting the full benefits of the smart motorway upgrade.

Find out more tips on [driving on a smart motorway](#).

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Press release: AI and Public Standards – Committee announces review

The [Committee on Standards in Public Life](#) has today announced a review into whether the existing frameworks and regulations are sufficient to ensure that high standards of conduct are upheld as technologically assisted decision-making is adopted more widely across the public sector.

Publishing the terms of reference for the inquiry today, [Lord Evans, Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life](#) said:

[“Honesty, integrity, objectivity, openness, leadership, selflessness and accountability](#) were first outlined by Lord Nolan as the standards expected of those who act on the public’s behalf.

“These principles have stood the test of time and are deeply embedded across much of the public sector – from the Civil Service and NHS bodies to local councils and schools. The increasing development and use of data and data-enabled technologies in our public services can potentially bring huge advantages in terms of pace and scale of service delivery, but there are some major ethical and practical challenges about what this means for accountability, objectivity and the other Nolan principles.

“As the Committee celebrates its 25th year as an advisory body conducting broad reviews of key ethical issues, we want to look at what the future holds for public services and help ensure that high standards of conduct continue to be ‘built in’ to new ways of making decisions on the public’s behalf.

“We are keen to hear from individuals and organisations who are developing policy, systems or safeguards on the use of AI as we gather evidence for this review.”

The Committee expects to publish its report in the New Year.

Notes to Editors

1. Interview requests and media enquiries should go to Maggie O’Boyle on 07880 740627.
2. The independent Committee on Standards in Public Life advises the Prime Minister on ethical standards across the whole of public life in the UK. It monitors and reports on issues relating to the standards of conduct

of all public office holders. To find out more about the Committee's work click [here](#).

3. The current members of the Committee are: Lord (Jonathan) Evans, Chairman, Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP (Labour), Simon Hart MP (Conservative), Dr Jane Martin CBE, Dame Shirley Pearce DBE, Jane Ramsey, Monisha Shah and Rt Hon Lord (Andrew) Stunell OBE (Liberal Democrat).
4. You can follow the Committee on twitter @PublicStandards.

Press release: £500,000 penalty for sewage discharge at Sutton Park

Severn Trent Water Limited was sentenced at Birmingham Crown Court on 22 March 2019, for the incident which occurred in November 2013. In addition to the fine, the company was ordered to pay prosecution costs of £50,693 and a victim surcharge of £120.

The incident occurred due to a blockage in the company's sewer system within Sutton Park.

On 12 November 2013 at around 4pm, the Sutton Park Visitor Centre received a report of a sewage smell and that a sewer was discharging waste into the Longmoor Valley. Due to poor light, the location of the incident was not identified until the following morning when a park ranger found a large amount of sewage flowing from a manhole cover and spreading across the surrounding area.

Officers from Natural England attended and mapped the extent of the damage. They found that the sewage had spread across an area of 1.15 hectares (an area slightly greater than the size of an international rugby pitch). Sewage had also entered a nearby ditch and travelled 700 metres into the Longmoor Brook to the Longmoor Pool within the Park.

Severn Trent Water Ltd liaised with Natural England, the Environment Agency, Birmingham City Council and Historic England to produce a plan to remediate the site. Soil and plants had to be scraped up across the affected area to stop the spread of sewage contamination. Around 0.65 hectares of rare and sensitive plants were destroyed. Representatives from Natural England expressed concern with the progress and efficiency of the clean-up operation, which concluded in May 2014.

In passing sentence, His Honour Judge Drew QC recognised that Sutton Park is an environmentally sensitive area, and a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest. The judge noted that the clean-up operation had been slow and poorly managed, but that the company had ultimately taken all necessary steps to remediate the site and that it had made a long term

commitment to restoring the affected area.

In mitigation, the court noted the company's overall environmental record and set of values, that the company had accepted responsibility for the incident, and that it was not a commercially motivated offence.

The Environment Agency has recognised an improvement in Severn Trent Water Limited's overall environmental compliance since the incident. The organisation were identified as an industry leading company in the Environment Agency's Environmental Performance Assessment in 2017.

Emma Johnson, Natural England's Area Manager for the West Midlands, said:

There's a lot of love for Sutton Park. It is used and enjoyed by many, it's a prime site for wildlife and is part of the history of the West Midlands. The sewage spill incident caused by Severn Trent Water and the impact it had is amongst the worst damage to a SSSI that Natural England have witnessed.

It's particularly disappointing as water companies should have technology and processes in place to prevent this type of spill from happening. Natural England have supported and worked closely with the Environment Agency and I hope that the outcome of this prosecution helps highlight the importance of protected sites and the need to look out for them.

Looking forward, I am hopeful that ourselves and the Environment Agency can work with Severn Trent Water to rectify the issues and restore the site to a healthy state, and prevent future spills.

Marc Lidderth, Area Environment Manager for the Environment Agency said:

This case demonstrates how partners work together to share information and advice to protect the environment. It also highlights the importance of reporting environmental damage or pollution quickly, and members of the public can do this by calling the Environment Agency Incident Hotline on 0800 807660.

[News story: 'Rogue' private landlords must stop exploiting students](#)

Rogue private landlords providing poor and substandard living conditions for students will be warned over exploiting learners by the Universities Minister

today (25 March), as new regulations now in force give tenants the power to make them face justice in court.

Speaking to students today, the Minister will hit out at private landlords who do not fulfil their responsibilities, resulting in some students encountering poor conditions such as a lack of heating or hot water. Some [figures](#) have even suggested that one in five students live in 'squalor' and reported mice, slugs, and other vermin infesting their accommodation.

[New regulations](#) came into force last week empowering students and renters across the country, giving them the right to take landlords to court where they fail to address serious defects in homes such as mould, damp and safety hazards.

The Minister will describe the regulations as a 'milestone' for student renters, helping to raise standards in student accommodation and hold landlords more accountable for their actions and responsibilities.

Universities Minister Chris Skidmore said:

Students' time at university should be some of the best days of their lives and yet I have heard appalling stories of students living in terrible conditions, which can affect their studies and even their mental health.

While there are many landlords who do take their responsibilities seriously, for too long rogue private landlords have been exploiting vulnerable students by failing to provide even basic standards of living.

Now the time is up for these landlords making a profit from shoddy accommodation. These new regulations make landlords more accountable, helping to improve standards, and students should use their powers to make sure landlords face justice where they're not fulfilling their responsibilities.

Minister for Housing Heather Wheeler MP said:

For the last year, we have worked tirelessly to ensure all tenants, including students, have access to a fairer private rented market across the country.

From cracking down on unnecessary costs through our Tenant Fees Act, extending HMO regulations to offer protections to more tenants than ever before and giving councils the funding they need to tackle rogue landlords, we are determined to make renting of the standard it should be.

Now, these changes are set to have a real impact. Students must use these powers to crackdown on poor quality accommodation and

opportunistic landlords profiting from tenants' misery.

A [survey by NUS and UniPol](#) found that in 2018, 40 per cent of UK students who rented privately lived with damp and mould on their walls. The same survey found that over a third of students said poor living conditions made them feel anxious or depressed (36%).

To make sure that students receive adequate accommodation when renting privately, Unipol and Universities UK have created codes to set standards for practice and conduct, which landlords can sign up to, to make sure standards are met.

The Universities Minister is calling on all private landlords renting properties to students to sign up to these codes to help to ensure they act responsibly, meet standards of practice and have a clear complaints process.

Mr Skidmore will also encourage all universities to consider the social value of contracting out services, such as accommodation, to help make sure the wider community benefits from these decisions.

He is working with the University of Northampton to look at ways in which universities can ensure they are embedding social values in their procurement practices.