

Press release: PM reaffirms commitment to UK's world-class tech sector

The Prime Minister will meet leading digital entrepreneurs and innovators from across the country on Wednesday 15 November, as she announces a series of measures to support the continued growth and success of the UK's world-class tech sector.

In the run up to the Budget, the Prime Minister and Chancellor will co-host a tech roundtable and reception at Downing Street, and reaffirm the Government's enduring commitment to this vital industry.

The PM and Chancellor will announce a new package of support to ensure Britain remains at the forefront of global innovation, which includes:

- Doubling to 2,000 the number of visas available to the brightest and best talent from around the world, including in digital technology
- An investment of £21 million to expand Tech City UK into a nationwide network – Tech Nation – to accelerate the growth of the digital tech sector across the country
- A new £20 million fund to help public services take advantage of UK expertise in innovative technologies like Artificial Intelligence
- The launch of a £20 million training programme which will challenge thousands of young people aged between 14 and 18 to test their skills against simulated online cyber threats

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

Our digital tech sector is one of the UK's fastest-growing industries, and is supporting talent, boosting productivity, and creating hundreds of thousands of good, high-skilled jobs up and down the country.

It is absolutely right that this dynamic sector, which makes such an immense contribution to our economic life and to our society, has the full backing of Government.

Helping our world-class entrepreneurs and innovators to succeed is how we lay the foundations for our prosperity and build an economy fit for the future.

Technology is at the heart of our modern Industrial Strategy, and

we will continue to invest in the best new innovations and ideas, in the brightest and best talent, and in revolutionary digital infrastructure.

And as we prepare to leave the European Union, I am clear that Britain will remain open for business. That means Government doing all it can to secure a strong future for our thriving tech sector and ensure people in all corners of our nation share in the benefits of its success.

The Home Office will look at how it can work with organisations across the UK to ensure wider take up of the additional visas outside London. Alongside this, the Home Secretary will meet with technology experts to seek their input on making sure our visa processes are as efficient as possible.

The new funding for Tech Nation will see the organisation expand its successful hub model to more cities around the country, including Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Birmingham. Building on the work of existing regional clusters, Tech Nation will support 40,000 entrepreneurs and up to 4,000 start-ups as they scale their businesses.

The new 'GovTech' challenge fund will encourage UK firms to use technology to solve challenges facing the public sector, while a dedicated new team will act as a front door into Whitehall to connect tech companies to the right parts of Government.

A new £2 million pilot voucher scheme is also being launched today by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), in Aberdeenshire, Bristol/Bath and North East Somerset, Coventry and Warwickshire, and West Yorkshire. This is part of Government's pledge to help bring the UK's fastest and most reliable broadband to homes and businesses across the country. Local companies will be among those offered vouchers by broadband suppliers to pay for gold-standard full-fibre gigabit connections, to help revolutionise our digital infrastructure and make it fit for the future.

The PM and Chancellor will also confirm that over two million people have now received free digital skills training from businesses such as Barclays, Cisco, Google and Lloyds Banking Group, under the Digital Skills Partnership launched by DCMS earlier this year.

And there are just days left for students to apply for a new apprenticeship and university bursary worth £4,000 a year, being offered by the National Cyber Security Centre as part of Government's investment in the next generation of cyber security specialists, digital entrepreneurs and tech innovators.

Chancellor Phillip Hammond said:

Britain is a world leader in digital innovation with some of the brightest and best tech firms operating in this country. Working with us, they can provide technological fixes to public sector

problems, boost productivity, and get the nation working smarter as we create an economy fit for the future.

Brent Hoberman, Co-Founder and Chairman of Founders Forum, said:

I welcome the UK Government's recognition of the importance and positive impact of the tech sector. These measures announced today will help reinforce the UK's European leadership in technology and entrepreneurship.

Sherry Coutu CBE, Chair of Founders4Schools and the Scaleup Institute said:

The digital tech sector is a key component of the UK's competitive advantage and these new measures are welcome news for innovative small and medium-sized businesses and third sector organisations by helping to create the conditions in which they can scale up.

Eileen Burbidge, Chair of Tech City UK, said:

We are delighted to hear that the Government wants to increase Tech City UK's funding for the next four years. Under the Tech Nation banner, this country that has brought so much innovation to the world and leads in sub-sectors such as fintech, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, robotics and life sciences, will build a national network of digital excellence so that the UK will continue to be recognised as one of the best places in the world to start or grow a digital tech business.

Press release: Broadband boost for businesses

Suppliers will be offering vouchers worth between £500 and £3000 each to local businesses which can then be used to pay for the installation of gigabit speed connections. The aim of the pilots is to encourage the market to extend full fibre infrastructure in the UK by increasing demand and reducing the cost to customers.

The many benefits of a full fibre gigabit connection include:

- allowing businesses to upload and download massive files in a matter of

seconds

- enabling widespread use of videoconferencing throughout an organisation
- providing an unprecedented level of reliability whilst greatly enhancing resilience
- future proofing – making sure that businesses have the technology in place to deal with the ever increasing demands for internet speed and connectivity
- allowing businesses in remote communities to compete on a technologically level playing field with those companies based in major cities who may already have full fibre connectivity

Minister for Digital Matt Hancock said:

A world-class digital communications network is essential to ensure the UK's future competitiveness in the global market and its ability to attract investment. Faster and more reliable connections are transforming the way we live and work, and better broadband supports businesses to grow and become more productive.

These voucher pilots, alongside a range of other actions, are testament to Government's ambition for full fibre infrastructure across the UK to underpin our digital economy.

Four areas across the UK have been carefully selected to test the market conditions and infrastructure conditions we aim to help to create through the wider Local Full Fibre Network programme. The areas are:

- Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire
- Bristol, with Bath and North East Somerset
- Coventry and Warwickshire
- West Yorkshire Combined Authority (Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, Wakefield and York)

This programme comes as part of the government's £23 billion National Productivity Investment Fund aimed at improving productivity, which is key to raising living standards. This fund has already earmarked £740 million specifically for improving Britain's digital infrastructure, ensuring the UK is match-fit for the future.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, Andrew Jones MP, said:

We are determined to provide the infrastructure needed for British businesses to thrive and prosper. The rollout of next generation, full-fibre broadband will help do that.

Lightning internet speeds and unprecedented reliability will boost trade and ensure our firms can connect effortlessly to their customers and suppliers.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

- For more information on the scheme, please go to <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/>
- The trial voucher Scheme will only allow vouchers to be used to help pay for new connections that are “gigabit capable”. Generally, this will mean that the connection is physically delivered using a fibre optic cable directly into the premises (FTTP).
- Connections delivered this way are future-proof and have the capability to provide incredibly fast and reliable broadband connections. Other technologies are supported by the Scheme – for example, wireless – but these too must provide gigabit capable connectivity.
- The trials comes hot on the heels of the [Digital Infrastructure Investment Fund](#) announced earlier in the year, as well as new legislation to enable business rates relief for new fibre. Unlocking more than £1 billion for full fibre broadband, the fund has ignited interest from private finance to invest in the sector.
- £2m has been made available for vouchers for the test phase. Across the four areas this fund will operate as a single challenge fund. The market test phase will end when the money has gone or by the end of March 2019, whichever comes first.
- In order to take part in the Scheme, suppliers must be registered and must be able to demonstrate that they are genuinely able to provide the high quality connectivity the Scheme aims to support. If you think you meet these criteria in the areas where the test is taking place, contact us at: <https://www.gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk>

[News story: £21m to boost UK's world-class tech sector and spread the benefits across the country](#)

Today the Government announced that Tech City UK and Tech North are to become a national organisation, Tech Nation, to speed up the growth of the UK's pioneering and innovative digital companies and clusters, helping spread the benefits even further.

Successful companies which have benefitted from Tech City UK's work include Just Eat, Zoopla and Funding Circle.

Building on the organisation's work helping to turn London's Silicon Roundabout into a globally recognised tech hub, the funding will see the new Tech Nation work alongside existing tech partners and business organisations to accelerate the expansion already underway by rolling out its tech-hub

model.

As part of the plans, Tech City UK will give more than 40,000 people the opportunity to develop the skills needed to start or grow a digital business and will offer support for up to 4,000 UK tech businesses through targeted growth programmes.

Minister for Digital, Matt Hancock, said:

This new funding is an important part of our plans to make the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business, with the benefits spread right across the country.

This regional network will accelerate the growth of the digital tech sector, cement the pipeline of talent and spark the next generation of innovative firms to seize the future opportunities of digitisation – bringing jobs, skills and higher productivity to our regions.

Eleven regional hubs will form the backbone of a national network of digital excellence to reflect the country's standing as a global powerhouse for tech industries and help the Government achieve aims outlined in the Industrial and Digital Strategies.

The funding will also help entrepreneurs in emerging tech sectors, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Fintech, by connecting them to peers and potential investors in other hubs across the country and by offering tailored development programmes.

Gerard Grech, CEO of Tech City UK (soon to be Tech Nation), said:

We are thrilled the Government is backing our model which has played an important role in helping the country's tech firms accelerate their growth.

Tech Nation will help transform the UK from a series of standalone tech clusters into a powerful national network that will reinforce the UK's position at the top of global tech rankings.

This will ensure we continue to be at the forefront of digital innovation, developing tech talent and attracting international investment.

Eileen Burbidge, Chair of Tech City UK (soon to be Tech Nation), said:

We are delighted to hear that the Government wants to increase Tech City UK's funding for the next four years.

Under the Tech Nation banner, this country that has brought so much

innovation to the world and leads in sub-sectors such as fintech, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, robotics and life sciences will build a national network of digital excellence so that the UK will continue to be recognised as one of the best places in the world to start or grow a digital tech business.

Britain is already a global tech powerhouse and the Government is determined to see that continue. More than 1.4 million people work in the UK's digital tech sector and jobs are being created at twice the rate of other sectors in the economy. Average advertised salaries are £50,000, 30 per cent higher than the national average.

The sector has a turnover of more than £118 billion and figures on foreign investment published in July found in the first half of 2017 there was a record £5.6 billion investment in tech in the UK.

In the face of international competition for this high-value employment industry, Tech Nation will help the UK accelerate the growth of the tech sector.

Successful Tech North programmes such as Founders Network and Northern Stars will be extended nationally, and existing national programmes such as Future Fifty and Upscale will be strengthened.

David Buttress, Partner at 83North and former CEO and co-founder of Just Eat, a Future Fifty alumni company, said:

Tech City UK and the Future Fifty programme have given fast-growing companies like ours a great opportunity to learn from our peers and exchange ideas. They have also enabled us to get our voice heard in government, so that we can give our point of view on the way our working world is changing. That will continue to be extremely important for all emerging tech sectors.

Samir Desai, Funding Circle, a Future Fifty alumni company, said:

Tech City UK has been an excellent advocate for the tech sector, understanding the needs of startups and scaling businesses and representing this coherently to Government. The programme they deliver is comprehensive and has supported us across a range of issues and business priorities.

Cherry Freeman, co-founder LoveCrafts, a Future Fifty company, said:

Being involved in Tech City UK's Future Fifty has been fundamental in helping us to drive LoveCrafts' growth on an international scale. They have been a great supporter and resource to us and it's

great news that they are going to expand their role over the next four years. I know that they will make a great success of working with entrepreneurs and founders in tech clusters across the country.

Virraj Jatania, founder of Pockit, an Upscale company, said:

Exchanging ideas with people who are going through similar things as yourself, as we do on Tech City UK's Upscale programme, has been a great way for me to improve my personal performance and make sure that I am sufficiently ambitious for my company. They understand the challenges facing the sector and makes sure that people are speaking out for people like us, so that we can get on with building our businesses.

The first set of clusters to form Tech Nation will be located in:

- Midlands – Birmingham
- Scotland – Edinburgh and Glasgow
- Northern Ireland – Belfast
- Wales – Cardiff
- Greater London – London

[News story: Government backed scheme helps train two million people in digital skills](#)

The Digital Skills Partnership sees Government, businesses, charities and voluntary organisations join forces to give people of all ages the opportunity to boost their online know-how by offering free training in areas such as basic online skills through to cybersecurity and coding.

At the launch of the government's Digital Strategy in March, four million training opportunities were pledged by businesses such as Barclays, Cisco, Google and Lloyds Banking Group. With over half of those training opportunities having now been completed, the Partnership is continuing work with business to bridge the gap between the estimated 11.5 million people who lack at least one basic digital skill.

Minister for Digital Matt Hancock said:

Just eight months ago we committed with the tech sector to

delivering four million skills training opportunities. Today two million of those have already been delivered. This is a massive over-delivery in a vital area, and there's more to come.

Digital skills training is essential to ensure that the UK can take advantage of technology and the opportunities it presents.

If we want to maintain our position as a world leading digital economy we need to ensure more people are able to use basic online services, use the digital tools they need for work, or gain the advanced skills in coding, AI or data science that are required in specialist roles.

Through this Partnership with industry and other sectors, the Government can deliver on its commitment to strengthening digital skills right across the country so that no-one is left behind.

Nick Williams, Managing Director, Consumer Digital at Lloyds Banking Group said:

With 11.5m people in the UK lacking Basic Digital Skills, it is crucial that organisations work together to improve digital capability across the UK. At Lloyds Banking Group we have committed to help 2.5m people by 2020 and we are proud to have already trained more than half a million individuals and businesses face-to-face this year. This has been achieved by utilising our extensive branch network, but also through partnering with other industry leaders like Google and the Good Things Foundation. We are delighted to be a key part of the Digital Skills Partnership and working with others towards a strong digital future for the UK.

Ashok Vaswani, CEO Barclays UK said:

Barclays is pleased to support the Government's Digital Pledge and be part of today's milestone in boosting the UK's digital skills. We are committed to ensuring the UK is armed with the digital skills and tools required for current and future generations and at Barclays we've improved the digital skills of over 1.1million individuals- through initiatives such as teaching coding to UK school children, expanding our network of 18,000 strong Digital Eagles, and providing free training to small businesses across the country. Earlier this year we launched a huge Digital Safety drive to keep consumers and businesses protected against the growing threat of digital fraud and scams. The industry, working with the Government must do everything in our power to keep the UK digitally safe. We have also expanded our Eagle Labs network- giving fast growing businesses access to space, technology and 3D printers.

Chief Executive of Good Things Foundation Helen Milner said:

We're proud to be a member of the Digital Skills Partnership, bringing our expertise in supporting the hardest to reach to gain digital skills to improve their lives. Through the Online Centres Network, and with other partners, we've supported 75,000 people to gain basic digital skills since March.

We're pleased the government is taking an ambitious approach to ensuring that not only can the UK become a leading digital nation, but that no-one is left behind as we do this, and we're pleased to be playing our part. The Digital Skills Partnership has created more than four million free digital skills training opportunities as part of our Digital Strategy to make Britain the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business and ensure our digital economy works for everyone.

Free training opportunities that have been successfully accessed include:

- Lloyds Banking Group training 550,000 individuals, SMEs and charities face to face on digital skills, including internet banking.
- Barclays improving the digital skills of over 1 million individuals. This includes teaching basic coding to 45,000 children.
- BT teaching 250,000 school children through its Barefoot Computing programme and remaining on track to meet its pledge to train 500,000 by the end of the 2017/18 school year, taking the total to 1.5 million.
- Google's training opportunities on offer include their Digital Garage which teaches local businesses and the wider community digital skills. It has already reached its target to visit 100 cities and towns in 2017 and will continue to visit other locations around the UK.

Cisco also recently announced 250,000 more people would be trained in a range of digital skills through their Networking Academy by 2020. This is alongside existing pledges on training opportunities from IBM UK, HP and Accenture.

Next month, the first Digital Skills Partnership Board with representatives from the public, private and charity sectors will meet to discuss a more joined up approach to delivering digital skills and best ways to tackle digital exclusion so everyone can make the most of the digital world.

Press release: Minister for London welcomes £1.4 billion Croydon redevelopment

The redevelopment of Croydon town centre passed a major hurdle today (14 November) as Croydon Council's planning committee approved the £1.4 billion scheme, backed by global investment.

Three years after it was first proposed, the redevelopment of the Whitgift Shopping Centre will now progress with government support following meetings hosted by Minister for London Greg Hands at the Department for International Trade.

Croydon will join Stratford and Shepherd's Bush as London's third Westfield shopping centre and one of the company's 17 flagship centres across the world, from China to the USA. Westfield's investment of £700 million represents a huge commitment from the Australian firm to Croydon, and London, as a global retail destination.

Construction is now set to begin next year, creating 7,000 new jobs and 1,000 new homes for the borough. The final proposals were put to the planning committee after a series of meetings chaired by the Minister for London, where Croydon Council, Westfield and the Greater London Authority (GLA), along with all three of Croydon's MPs, agreed the funding needed to move the project forwards.

The redevelopment follows a record year for overseas-backed projects in the UK and London, with 891 projects in London made possible through foreign direct investment in the last year.

Minister for London Greg Hands said:

I am delighted that after convening two meetings of all concerned parties, here at the Department for International Trade, we will now see construction taking place. This major redevelopment of the Whitgift site will bring huge benefits to Croydon and London with thousands of new homes and jobs.

This is a great example of local and central government working together with private investors, and as Minister for London I'm delighted to be supporting the project, and seeing it secure planning approval.

As Minister for Trade it is also yet another example of London and the UK's appeal to international investors, bringing much-needed regeneration projects to life. Croydon will join locations across the world, from San Francisco to Sydney, with a flagship Westfield site, once again proving London's enduring strength as a leading

global retail destination.