

# New UK-wide ambitions to accelerate genomic research and drive innovation in healthcare

- New 'Shared Commitments' set out priority actions for genomics initiatives across the UK
  - Cancer diagnosis, earlier detection of diseases and patient access to clinical trials will improve
  - Plans will advance government's priorities to reform healthcare and make the UK a scientific superpower
- Patients across the UK are set to benefit from faster cancer diagnosis and innovative new treatments thanks to a ground-breaking agreement with the nation's devolved governments.

The UK government, Welsh and Scottish Governments and Northern Ireland Assembly have today (Friday 18 March) agreed a series of commitments to improve outcomes for patients through better genomic testing and access to clinical trials.

The new Shared Commitments for the first time set out priority actions across the UK and are part of wider plans to improve healthcare through genomics – the study of genes and DNA

The Genome UK strategy announced in 2020 builds on innovative work already underway to create the most advanced genomic healthcare system in the world and deliver better healthcare at a lower cost, and forms part of the government's wider commitment to reform healthcare and ensure the UK and the NHS remain at the forefront of cutting-edge treatment. For example, using research to evaluate the use of whole genome sequencing in newborns to screen for rare genetic conditions and diagnose rare diseases earlier, enabling more tailored treatment sooner.

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Sajid Javid said: > > The pandemic has highlighted the importance of our booming UK life sciences sector and the potential it has to transform health and care services. > > By harnessing the power and innovation of genomic research, we can reduce diagnosis times and use cutting-edge treatments for some of the biggest health challenges we face, including cancer. > > By coming together and agreeing these new shared commitments, we will ensure patients across all four nations of the UK can benefit from these pioneering advancements and cement our place as a world leader in research and genomics.

Genome UK: Shared commitments for UK wide implementation 2022-2025 include working together to:

- Improve cancer diagnosis and treatment by working across the UK to better integrate genomic testing into healthcare and increase access to clinical trials to provide better, personalised treatment.

- Better early detection of disease by establishing a clear, evidence-based approach to Newborn Genome Sequencing, led by Genomics England in partnership with the NHS, alongside the devolved governments, to ensure learning is shared across the UK to benefit newborns and their parents nationwide.
- Build on the successful UK-wide partnership in sequencing of COVID-19 to strengthen collaboration on sequencing of other diseases. As part of this, the UK Health Security Agency will set up a national group on disease genomics with representatives from the four nations.
- Encourage innovative and cutting-edge industry partnerships in research and development across the UK to support implementation of Genome UK by bringing together the UK-wide genomics ecosystem to improve collaboration and maximise investment.
- Produce high-quality research by bringing together genomic data sets across the UK and increasing access to clinical trials as well as ensuring research feeds back into the NHS to improve patient care.

Building on the collaborative and innovative ways of working during the COVID-19 pandemic, these commitments aim to build on scientific successes, tackling future disease challenges and ensure patients can access more tailored treatment.

Minister for Innovation Lord Kamall said:

Clinical research has been vital in our fight against COVID-19 and the UK's innovation is enabling us to transform our health service and ensure it is firmly at the cutting edge of healthcare.

We're continuing to build on our game-changing genomic advances to better detect new diseases and faster diagnose and treat cancer, which will ultimately save lives.

These new shared commitments show a united vision across the nations to ensure we continue to build on the UK's world-leading genomic capabilities and remain at the forefront of genomic healthcare and research.

The commitments will also help cement the UK's position as the leading global hub for life sciences.

Bringing the joint ambition and skills in this field together will help transform the use of genomics in healthcare and place the UK firmly at the forefront of developments in advancements in genomics, as well as demonstrating the UK is a valued partner for international collaboration and an attractive location for investment.

Cabinet Secretary for Health Humza Yousaf said:

There has never been a time when genomics and the benefits it can bring to help revolutionise the way we provide health care has been

more focal.

The past two years showed us just a fraction of what can be achieved in this field and I am pleased that these shared commitments bring together our joint ambitions to deliver genomics healthcare.

Health Minister for Wales Eluned Morgan said:

The UK is at the forefront of the genomics revolution and it is absolutely right that we should be working with other governments across the UK to deliver on our joint vision. We are already working on our own genomics delivery plan through Genomics Partnership Wales, but it makes sense for us to share our expertise and research in order to ensure the best possible outcomes for patients across Wales and the rest of the UK.

Health Minister for Northern Ireland, Robin Swann:

I am pleased today to jointly publish the Genome UK: Shared Commitments with the Health Ministers for Scotland and Wales and the Minister for Technology, Innovation and Life Sciences in England.

These commitments will ensure that all patients across the UK can benefit from the wide range of opportunities offered by genomic healthcare so that the UK remains at the forefront of genomic research in the world.

The future of genomics in Northern Ireland has the potential to be very exciting and far-reaching in its ability to benefit patients and families here, however it is imperative that we lay the proper foundations for the service to develop and thrive. Publication of these Shared Commitments today is the first step, and establishment of a DoH-led Genomics Partnership for NI will allow us to keep step with our UK counterparts and ensure future progress in this exciting field, for the health, wealth and prosperity of the NI population.

Jennifer Harris, ABPI Director of Research Policy said:

Genomics is already transforming lives, helping our scientists create new generations of treatments for many conditions.

To ensure patients can benefit from these new breakthroughs, a coordinated effort across the UK is needed – which these plans demonstrate.

Today's announcement is welcome, and we look forward to further collaboration between the government, the pharmaceutical industry and the research sector to harness the UK's world-class genomics capability.

David Atkins, UK BioIndustry Association representative on the National Genomics Board, said:

SMEs are a vital part of the UK's existing strength in genomics. Fostering the right environment and developing a workforce for these companies is key to achieving the ambition of Genome UK.

The commitments set out in this plan, including enabling industry access to clinical assets, expertise and partnerships are an important step in realising the vision of making the UK the best place to start and scale new genomics companies.

The UK Bioindustry Association welcomes these shared commitments and is looking forward to working with the UK government and devolved governments on the next phase of Genome UK implementation.

Nick Meade, Joint Interim Chief Executive at Genetic Alliance UK, said:

We very much welcome these Shared Commitments. As the largest alliance of organisations supporting people with genetic, rare and undiagnosed conditions in the UK, we wholeheartedly support more coordinated implementation action to progress the vision of Genome UK. We hope that collaboration between devolved administrations will realise the potential of genomic healthcare for the benefit of patients across the UK. We are delighted to see the UK wide-commitments on patient and public engagement and look forward to engaging with the UK and devolved governments on their implementation plans.

## Background

- The Shared Commitments build on the vision outlined in Genome UK in September 2020 and the commitments in the first implementation plan for 2021-2022 in May 2021.
  - They will be followed by more detailed implementation plans from each country by the end of 2022.
  - The landmark Genome UK vision can be found [here](#)
  - The first implementation plan from 2021-2022 can be found [here](#)
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# Government backs latest stage of British Sign Language Bill

- The government backs Bill's next step to make British Sign Language (BSL) a recognised language in GB
- The British Sign Language Bill will benefit more than 150,000 BSL signers
- The Third Reading of the British Sign Language Bill takes place today (Friday 18 March 2022)

The British Sign Language Bill, a Private Member's Bill introduced by Rosie Cooper MP, will, if passed into law, recognise BSL as a language of England, Wales and Scotland in its own right.

It will be supported by a duty on the Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to regularly report on what each relevant government department has done to promote or facilitate the use of British Sign Language in its communications with the public.

The Bill also places a requirement on the DWP Secretary of State to issue guidance to ministerial departments on the promotion and facilitation of BSL.

Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work Chloe Smith MP said:

We know many D/deaf people can experience social isolation and face reduced access to work and education because of barriers in communicating their basic needs and aspirations.

Legally recognising BSL will create a more inclusive and accessible society, improving the lives of D/deaf people and helping public services to get it right.

Rosie Cooper MP said:

This Bill is all about improving the lives of deaf people and the Minister and I have worked together in strengthening it and achieving cross-party approval.

I am confident that with the support of MPs across all parties today, we can get this Bill passed and start making positive steps to give deaf people equal access to public services.

David Buxton, Chair of the British Deaf Association said:

The BSL Bill presents a real opportunity for change, to finally break down avoidable communication barriers and to give Deaf people and their language – BSL – the recognition, inclusion, and equality that they deserve.

If the BSL Bill passes into law, we are ready to work hand-in-hand with the UK government to redesign public services that meet the unique needs of the 151,000 people who have British Sign Language as their first or preferred language.

We also hope that the legal recognition of BSL will encourage many more people across the UK to learn British Sign Language and go on to become interpreters, bilingual professionals and allies of the Deaf community. BSL can bring us all together as a society.

Mark Atkinson, Chief Executive at RNID, said:

We at RNID, our supporters and the wider Deaf community are delighted that the British Sign Language Bill is set to clear the final stage of its passage through the House of Commons. We hope it receives the same support from peers in the House of Lords as it has from MPs and ministers.

We welcome the mechanisms within the Bill and commitment from government to working with a proposed advisory board of Deaf people to put the Bill into practice. Giving the Deaf community a seat at the table will mean government policies and public services will meet the needs of Deaf people for fully inclusive and accessible services.

We mustn't miss the vital opportunity the Bill gives us to win legal recognition of BSL and expand Deaf people's rights. On behalf of the Deaf community and alongside other charities, we will continue pushing to make sure the Bill is passed into law before the end of this session of Parliament.

The Minister for Disabled People has also announced the launch of an advisory board of BSL signers to offer guidance to the DWP on matters relating to BSL; examine how the DWP goes about increasing the number of BSL interpreters; and make sure the Access to Work scheme better meets the needs of BSL signers to support them in employment.

The Third Reading of the Bill will take place today in the House of Commons

and the Government will once again be supporting its introduction into law.

The BSL Bill was first introduced on 16 June 2021 and passed the Second Reading stage on 28 January 2022, receiving unanimous cross-party support.

The Minister for Disabled People has worked closely with Labour MP Rosie Cooper and D/deaf people's charities and organisations, such as the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) and the British Deaf Association (BDA), to ensure the Bill effectively meets the needs of those who will benefit most.

- Figures from the British Deaf Association suggest that 151,000 people use BSL in the UK, 87,000 of which are D/deaf.
- A Private Members Bill on BSL was introduced on 16 June 2021 and had its Second Reading on 28 January 2022.
- The Bill is recognising BSL as a language of England, Wales and Scotland in its own right supported by a duty on the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to regularly report on what each relevant government department has done to promote or facilitate the use of British Sign Language in its communications with the public.
- The Bill also places a requirement on the DWP Secretary of State to issue guidance on the promotion and facilitation of BSL, which will be developed together with D/deaf BSL signers as part of the advisory board.
- The Bill will be supported by a package of non-legislative measures, including:
  - establishing a non-statutory advisory board of BSL signers to advise the DWP Secretary of State on matters related to BSL;
  - examining how the government might increase the number of BSL interpreters;
  - reviewing how the DWP might work to ensure the Access to Work fund helps BSL users; and
  - consider how government can further facilitate and promote BSL usage.
  - The Access to Work scheme is available to help people who are disabled or have a physical or mental health condition stay in employment and covers those who work from home. It can provide grants up to £62,900 to keep a job accessible.

Media enquiries for this press release – 0115 965 8781

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[\*\*Russia is responsible for the\*\*](#)

# suffering in Ukraine, Russia alone can end this war: UK statement to the UN Security Council

Thank you, Mr President, and I join others in thanking our briefers today as well.

As we've heard, it's 3 weeks since we met in this Chamber to make one final effort to avert a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

It's 3 weeks since we were interrupted by the news that President Putin had abandoned diplomacy and chosen war.

These have been 3 devastatingly long weeks for the people of Ukraine. For the 3 million people who have fled – and for those who have stayed.

As we heard from the UN, Russian forces are laying siege to populated cities and towns, and indiscriminately shelling residential areas with high impact weaponry, including cluster munitions.

43 healthcare facilities, including a maternity hospital, have been attacked, killing the most vulnerable and depriving civilians of access to medical assistance.

And President Putin's war is causing suffering well beyond Ukraine's borders.

Thousands of students, many from nations around this table, have been caught up in the violence.

The war is spiking food and energy prices, bringing further pain to countries in the developing world already suffering from the impact of COVID, and famine, and conflict, and climate change.

Millions of refugees have been taken in by countries across Europe.

Mr President, Colleagues, 3 weeks since the start of Russia's invasion – one point should be clear in our minds.

This is an unprovoked war of aggression waged by Russia.

Russia is responsible for the suffering it has inflicted on Ukraine and beyond.

Russia alone can end this war.

141 UN Member States have unequivocally condemned Russia's illegal invasion. The International Court of Justice has issued a legally-binding order, requiring Russia to suspend military action in Ukraine immediately.



This week, perversely, Russia tabled a resolution that, among other things, called for the protection of civilians, including women and children.

This is cynical game-playing in the face of human suffering.

Just yesterday in Mariupol, Russian forces reportedly targeted civilians taking cover from the onslaught, despite the word 'children' written on the ground where they sheltered.

If Russia really wanted to protect women and children, it would withdraw its troops from Ukraine and end this illegal invasion today.

Thank you, Mr President.

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## **P&O Ferries: staff redundancies and suspension of services**

With permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the developing issue with P&O Ferries.

Earlier today (17 March 2022), P&O announced their decision to make around 800 seafarers redundant on several routes across the UK.

Let me say right off the bat: the way that these workers were informed was completely unacceptable. I will say more on this in a moment or 2.

While this is fundamentally a commercial decision for the company, I wanted to come to the House today to inform members about our latest understanding of the situation and what is now being done.

In taking this decision to make seafarers redundant, P&O have also today informed us that they will be suspending services, for approximately a week to 10 days while they locate new crew. These affected routes are:

- Dover to Calais
- Larne to Cairnryan
- Dublin to Liverpool
- Hull to Rotterdam

I know members across this House will share my concern over the loss of these routes. I should stress that they are only temporary and that alternative provision will be provided by other operators, to whom I am extremely grateful.

Passengers will still be able to travel to and from the UK, including across the Channel, with freight coming in and out of the country.

I understand that DFDS is stepping in to provide alternative services for passengers with valid tickets and I would like to thank DFDS for their swift action.

However, I must warn travellers that they should expect some disruption over the coming days.

I have asked my officials to liaise with the Kent Resilience Forum and Cabinet Office to closely manage traffic in Kent over the coming days while P&O works to restore services.

Today, the Dover TAP has been activated, although as members will know this is not all that uncommon. There is some queuing on Jubilee Way, although the Port of Dover expect this to reduce over the afternoon.

I have also asked officials to remain in close contact with other resilience forums around the country, as well as the devolved administrations, in managing this issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker, we of course have long planned contingencies for this sort of situation, particularly around the Channel, and I do not expect the supply of critical goods and services to be impacted as a result of this decision by P&O, although queues on the way to Dover are more likely to occur at times.

Modelling suggests that we have sufficient capacity to handle the temporary loss of these P&O ferries.

Let me turn now to the issue of the seafarers themselves, Mr Speaker.

These are hardworking, dedicated staff who have given years in service to P&O. The way they have been treated today is wholly unacceptable and my thoughts are first and foremost with them.

Reports of workers being given zero notice and escorted off their ships with immediate effect while being told cheaper alternatives would take up their roles shows the insensitive nature by which P&O approached this issue – a point I made clear when I spoke to the management at P&O earlier this afternoon.

As I told Peter Hebblethwaite, I am extremely concerned and frankly angry at the way workers have been treated today by P&O.

As a matter of urgency, I have asked my Department to liaise closely with counterparts in the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that workers are being signposted to the most relevant support and I am intending to call the trade unions immediately after this statement to discuss the situation with them.

Mr Deputy Speaker, there can be no doubt that the pandemic has had a devastating impact on the finances of many travel companies including P&O. But while their finances is a matter for them and them alone to take, I would have expected far better for the workers involved.

We will continue to engage closely over the coming days and I commend this statement to the House.

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## Change of Development Attaché of Montserrat: Alba Smerglia-Heimpold

Press release

Alba Smerglia-Heimpold has been appointed as the new permanent Development Attaché in the Governor's Office.



Alba Smerglia-Heimpold has been appointed as the new permanent Development Attaché in the Governor's Office. She takes over the role from Peter Reid who has been in the post for 12 months. Alba's focus in her role will be supporting the Government of Montserrat to propel the island forward in terms of inclusive and sustainable development. She will be starting her 4-year post on Montserrat in March 2022.

Alba has a background in Development Economics and International Development and is accredited to the FCD0 cadre of specialists in political economy and politics. Prior to joining the Governor's Office in Montserrat, Alba was First Secretary Development in the British High Commission in Islamabad, where she has led high profile work on open and inclusive societies and development work to strengthen local resilience to climate change. She has been involved in the UK Government response to the Afghanistan crisis and led reporting on the global impacts of Covid-19 on democratic governance.

Alba held various other positions in the FCD0, including Deputy Team Leader (Governance, Open Societies and Anti-Corruption Department), Senior Research and Evidence Manager in the Research and Evidence Directorate and Internal Audit.

Prior to joining the Civil Service, Alba was a university researcher in Glasgow, specialising in public sector reform, public financial management,

and inclusive economic growth. Alba is fluent in Italian and Spanish and in her free time loves hiking, cooking and reading.

She is married to Konrad Heimpold (former Senior Auditor at PwC) who will be accompanying her to Montserrat. She is looking forward to starting her role in Montserrat, learning from local people about Montserrat's culture, heritage and traditions.

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