

[Robotics Growth Partnership launches cyber-physical infrastructure vision](#)

The Robotics Growth Partnership (RGP) has today launched its [Vision for cyber-physical infrastructure \(CPI\)](#), bringing together physical and digital tools to help accelerate the innovation process and reduce cost and risk for innovators to rapidly prototype, test and develop ideas.

The RGP was established by government in 2019, with the aim of putting the UK at the cutting edge of the global smart robotics revolution. It brings together representatives from across industry, academia, and government to determine how smart machines will be able to support the UK's economic recovery from the pandemic, build resilience to future shocks, and help achieve national objectives such as Build Back Stronger and Net Zero.

Published today (11 February 2022), the RGP's Vision for CPI recognises the quickening pace of technological change, and the ways in which the pandemic has demonstrated the significance of data – particularly real-time data for national systems and infrastructure – identifying that in combating significant challenges, those with the right tools, models and simulations are the most able to adapt and respond at pace and scale.

Science Minister George Freeman said:

From tackling climate change and revolutionising healthcare, to preparing for national security risks and disruptions to supply chains, we are facing a number of significant opportunities for innovative problem-solving on a global scale.

Advances in connected digital and physical technologies are allowing us to create new tools and models to better predict and manage future global shocks from climate change to pandemics, test innovation in real time and drive UK leadership in new approaches to agile regulatory testbeds.

This Vision represents an important milestone, and lays the groundwork for the commitments made in our Innovation Strategy.

The RGP has engaged widely and effectively to develop and test this Vision through a series of virtual events including workshops, seminars, and a dedicated Cyber Physical Fabric summit in July 2021.

The RGP's Vision and thinking have played an important role in informing the ongoing work in government on digital twins and wider CPI, and it will lay the groundwork for the upcoming CPI consultation committed to in the Innovation Strategy.

The implementation of the CPI would build upon and complement several other

national strategies including the National Data Strategy, the AI Strategy, Innovation Strategy and 10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution.

See also the [letter from Science Minister George Freeman in response to the publication of the Vision for CPI](#).

Apprenticeships for prisoners to cut crime

- prisoners to have access to apprenticeships for the first time to help cut crime
- scheme to provide job-based training in key industries and boost local employers
- game-changing move to get more ex-offenders into jobs and cut £18 billion cost of reoffending
- launch comes in National Apprenticeship Week celebrating the positive impact apprenticeships bring to employers, individuals, and the economy.

Polling published last year found that nine out of ten businesses that hire ex-offenders say they are reliable, good at their job, punctual and trustworthy.

Currently prisoners are unable to take advantage of apprenticeships, which would give them access to gold-standard training they can gain the skills needed to secure work on release – with evidence showing that prison leavers in work are significantly less likely to re-offend.

The government will change the law so that prisoners at open prisons across England are able to apply for apprenticeship opportunities in vital industries, including hospitality and construction , providing direct routes into jobs with businesses in the community.

The scheme will initially be offered up to a hundred prisoners across England before being rolled out across the wider prison estate.

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Dominic Raab, said:

We are introducing prisoner apprenticeships to give offenders the skills and training they need to secure a job on release.

Getting offenders into work offers them a second chance to lead a more positive life and stay on the straight and narrow.

Breaking the cycle of crime is critical to our mission to drive

down reoffending, cut crime and protect the public.

Secretary of State for Education Nadhim Zahawi said

We want everyone to have access to the high-quality training they need to progress and build a brighter future.

Apprenticeships will offer prisoners a lifechanging chance to gain the skills they need to secure a rewarding career, while providing more businesses with the skilled workforce they need to grow.

At HMP Prescoed and Cilwrgi farm the Deputy Prime Minister yesterday (10 February 2022) met offenders working in agriculture in areas such as maintenance, animal care and woodland management.

The prison has one of the largest training programmes in the prison estate, giving prisoners the experience to plug local skills shortages and contribute positively to the community.

The new scheme is the latest step in the government's drive to boost the number of prison leavers with jobs. Prisoners are already able to study, train and work while in jail and a further 5,000 prisoners take part in vital work in the community through release on temporary license, where they learn important skills and help shore up local labour shortages.

Prisons like HMP Ford in West Sussex partner with sectors facing staffing concerns – including construction, hospitality and agriculture – with a number of offenders also training up as HGV drivers.

The scheme will see hundreds of prisoners start an apprenticeship by 2025, with pre-apprenticeship training offered to thousands more – preparing them for a full apprenticeship scheme or a higher skilled job on release.

This week is [National Apprenticeship Week 2022](#) which aims to celebrate and promote the fantastic benefits which apprenticeships offer both learners and employers, spotlighting businesses who are investing in this life-changing education route.

Note to editors

The government intends to bring forward Regulations later in the year that will change the law to allow prisoners to access apprenticeship opportunities while they are still serving time but are out on day release or nearing the end of their sentence.

CMA to keep 'close eye' on Google as it secures final Privacy Sandbox commitments

- The CMA has secured legally binding commitments from Google to address competition concerns over its Privacy Sandbox
- CMA now moves into the next phase where it will supervise Google to ensure the Privacy Sandbox is developed in a way that benefits consumers

The Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) competition investigation was launched in January 2021 over concerns that the proposals would cause online advertising spending to become even more concentrated on Google, weakening competition and so harming consumers who ultimately pay for the cost of online advertising. The CMA was also concerned that the proposals could undermine the ability of online publishers, such as newspapers, to generate revenue and continue to produce valuable content in the future – reducing the public's choice of news sources.

The final commitments accepted by the CMA today are a result of an in-depth investigation and extensive engagement with Google and market participants, including 2 formal public consultations. They address the CMA's competition concerns and Google has also said that the commitments will be rolled out globally.

The CMA is working closely with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to oversee the development of the proposals, so that they protect privacy without unduly restricting competition and harming consumers.

You can [read the full list of commitments](#) but they include:

- Involvement of the CMA and the ICO in the development and testing of the Privacy Sandbox proposals, to ensure they achieve effective outcomes for consumers to protect both competition and privacy;
- Google will engage in a more transparent process than initially proposed, including engagement with third parties and publishing test results, with the option for the CMA to require Google to address issues raised by the CMA or third parties;
- Google will not remove third-party cookies until the CMA is satisfied that its competition concerns have been addressed. If the CMA is not satisfied that its competition concerns have been addressed, the CMA may

take further action (i.e. re-open its investigation, impose interim measures or proceed to a decision);

- Commitments to restrict the sharing of data within its ecosystem to ensure that it doesn't gain an advantage over competitors when third-party cookies are removed; and commitments to not self-preference its advertising services;
- A Monitoring Trustee will be appointed to work alongside the CMA to ensure the commitments are monitored effectively and Google complies with its obligations. This appointment is expected to be made shortly.

[Google has today published a blog post](#) about its obligations under the commitments and the next phase in the development of the Privacy Sandbox.

[Google have set out further detail on the process they will follow in engaging with third parties.](#)

Andrea Coscelli, the CMA's Chief Executive, said:

Our intervention in this case demonstrates our commitment to protecting competition in digital markets and our global role in shaping the behaviour of world-leading tech firms.

The commitments we have obtained from Google will promote competition, help to protect the ability of online publishers to raise money through advertising and safeguard users' privacy.

While this is an important step, we are under no illusions that our work is done. We now move into a new phase where we will keep a close eye on Google as it continues to develop these proposals.

We will engage with all market participants in this process, in order to ensure that Google is taking account of concerns and suggestions raised.

The CMA has secured a raft of mechanisms in the commitments that are designed to hold Google to account.

These include:

- CMA oversight of the design of tests of replacements to third-party cookies and other Privacy Sandbox proposals
- A standstill period of at least 60 days before Google proceeds to withdraw third-party cookies, during which the CMA and Google will work to resolve any remaining competition concerns

- A mechanism for Google to resolve concerns raised by the CMA without delay.

The CMA may re-open its Competition Act 1998 investigation and impose interim measures in future if necessary.

The commitments will terminate six years from 11 February 2022, unless released at an earlier date in accordance with section 31A(4) of the Competition Act 1998.

1. More information is available on the case page for [‘Investigation into Google’s ‘Privacy Sandbox’ browser changes’](#).
 2. This is further evidence of the collaborative partnership between the CMA and the ICO, and of the close relationship between the interests of competition and data protection. The ICO and the CMA published a [joint statement on the relationship between the aims of competition and data protection in May 2021](#). Within its decision published today, the CMA has set out more on how it intends to consult with the ICO on aspects of the proposals that relate to data protection. On 25 November 2021, [the ICO published an opinion](#) that refers to the CMA’s investigation
 3. The Government has proposed establishing, within the CMA, a statutory Digital Markets Unit (DMU) to oversee a new regulatory regime for the most powerful digital firms, promoting greater competition and innovation in these markets and protecting consumers and businesses from unfair practices. The Government is currently analysing responses to a consultation on the DMU’s powers. While the role of monitoring the implementation of any commitments would fall to the CMA for their duration, in the medium term the establishment of the DMU could provide an appropriate framework for regulatory oversight and scrutiny.
 4. The CMA does not intend to publish the responses to the consultations, but the information contained in the responses has been summarised on an anonymous basis in the decision.
 5. For media enquiries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or press@cma.gov.uk.
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UK's new travel rules take flight

- from 4am on 11 February all testing requirements removed for eligible fully vaccinated arrivals and only a simplified passenger locator form needed, ahead of half term
- arrivals who do not qualify as fully vaccinated will only need to take a pre-departure test and a PCR test on or before day 2 after they arrive in the UK
- changes come as children aged 12 to 15 in England can now prove their vaccination status or proof of prior infection for outbound travel with the digital NHS COVID Pass

Major changes to the UK's coronavirus (COVID-19) travel rules have come into force today (4am, 11 February 2022). This will make international journeys cheaper and easier for passengers ahead of the half term.

The relaxation in requirements is thanks to the success of the UK's vaccine and booster rollout. It means that eligible fully vaccinated travellers arriving in the UK no longer need to take any COVID-19 tests – resulting in the UK having one of the most free-flowing borders and open societies in Europe.

Eligible fully vaccinated travellers are, therefore, only required to fill out a simplified [passenger locator form](#), confirming their vaccination status, travel history and contact details.

Also, from today, arrivals who do not qualify as fully vaccinated will only need to take a [pre-departure test](#) in the 2 days before they depart for the UK and a PCR test on or before the end of day 2 after they arrive in the UK, as well as completing the passenger locator form. These passengers will not need to self-isolate on arrival and will only need to do so if they test positive.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

The UK has eased international travel measures for COVID-19 and now has one of the most free-flowing borders in the world – sending a clear message that we are open for business.

As our travel sector rapidly recovers, and we accelerate towards a future where we want travel to remain open for good, these rule changes coming ahead of half term are good news for families, businesses and the travel sector.

Determined to make travel cheaper and easier for families, the decision to remove testing requirements could save the average family around £100.

Since 3 February 2022, children aged 12 to 15 in England can demonstrate their vaccination status or proof of prior infection via a digital [NHS COVID](#)

[Pass](#) for outbound travel. This makes it easier to travel to countries that require proof of vaccination or prior infection in order to access venues or services, including museums, restaurants and cafes.

By the end of February, people will also have an extra day to fill out the passenger locator form before travelling.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

As we learn to live with COVID-19, we are taking a balanced approach to opening up international travel and removing all tests for people who have played their part and have been vaccinated.

Thanks to the millions of people who have come forward for their COVID-19 jabs, we are one of the most boosted countries in Europe and are able to take these steps today.

As the government goes one step further to reopen the travel sector, the UK will be reconnecting with key global markets, and from today will accept vaccine certificates from an additional 16 countries and territories including China and Mexico. This will bring the total [list to over 180 countries and territories](#) worldwide.

VisitBritain CEO Sally Balcombe said:

Britain's tourism industry is ready to welcome international visitors, we know there is pent-up demand for travel and our priority is to build back visitor spending as quickly as possible, competing hard for international visitors who contribute billions to our economy.

Our £10 million global GREAT Britain marketing campaign is already rolling out across our major overseas markets, showing that Britain is packed full of fresh and exciting experiences to come and enjoy today.

This year's landmark events including HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the Commonwealth Games and the ground-breaking 'Unboxed' events across the UK, set to be global tourism draws, also present exciting and timely opportunities to highlight experiences that visitors can only have here, and to promote our warm welcome and creativity to the world.

With more people travelling overseas, the government is continuing to remind everyone that travelling abroad is still different and countries may change their own rules at short notice.

All travellers are encouraged to check [FCDO travel advice](#) for the latest entry requirements and COVID-19 rules for their destination beforehand.

Sean Doyle, Chairman and CEO of British Airways, said:

It's great news that restrictions are being lifted in time for families to get away for a much-needed break this half term. We've seen a boost to bookings directly as a result of lifting restrictions and customers can now travel, safe in the knowledge that they won't be burdened by expensive and unnecessary testing to return to the UK. We hope that other countries will soon catch up with the UK's pragmatic approach.

Sophie Dekkers, Chief Commercial Officer of easyJet, said:

We've continued to see pent-up demand each time restrictions are removed and UK bookings increased following the welcome reduction of travel restrictions, which has been sustained in recent weeks with a further boost from the removal of all testing by the UK government.

We have been encouraged to see strong late bookings in the lead-up to half term, which is a key time for many of our customers, with thousands set to enjoy a long-awaited family break and we can't wait to welcome more customers back on board in the coming days.

Andrew Flintham, Managing Director for TUI UK, said:

The recent changes to travel, particularly the removal of testing for everyone is who double vaccinated, is a huge leap forwards in getting travel back to normal. There remains a huge pent-up demand for international travel and we've seen strong and sustained booking patterns since the announcement as customers look to go abroad with ease and without the added expense of testing.

As a result, bookings for February half term and Easter holidays are comparable to 2019, with Mexico, Dominican Republic, Cape Verde and the Canaries the most popular destinations. And we expect this summer to be stronger than 2019 for the UK market.

Mark Tanzer, Chief Executive of ABTA – The Travel Association, said:

Today's changes are a big step forward for the outbound travel industry and holidaymakers, and a recognition of the importance of travel to people's lives and to the UK economy.

Travel rules have been holding people back from taking a foreign break, so these changes should serve as a boost to consumer confidence, leading more people to plan and book their overseas trips.

There are still steps people need to take when heading abroad and ABTA travel agents and tour operators are on hand to guide travellers through the process.

While the [red list](#) will continue to remain on standby as our first line of defence against future variants of concern arriving from abroad, the government is looking to replace the hotel quarantine policy with other contingency measures including home isolation – provided a sufficiently robust digital solution to ensure compliance with home isolation can be found. Further details will be set out on this later in the spring.