

# £26 million government funding to boost biomass in UK

- £26 million government funding to increase UK production of sustainable biomass that can be used to power homes and businesses
- new funding will support the development of innovative new biomass production solutions
- biomass can be used for low carbon energy and is a key component in UK's commitment to tackle climate change

From today (20 December) innovative biomass projects across the UK can bid for a share of £26 million as the government ramps up plans to boost the use of materials such as grasses, hemp and seaweed to help the UK reach net zero.

Biomass refers to sustainably derived plant material that could be used as fuel to produce energy for heating and powering homes and businesses. Biomass, which is also backed by the independent Climate Change Committee, will be an important part of the renewable energy mix, vital for the UK to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

The chosen projects will drive biomass productivity in the UK through the breeding, planting, cultivating and harvesting of organic matter; from water-based materials such as algae, to whole trees through sustainable forestry operations.

The funding, available through Phase 2 of the government's [Biomass Feedstocks Innovation Programme](#), will see projects previously supported under Phase 1 with government funding to design new ways of boosting biomass production in the first round of the scheme, able to apply for further support to bring their projects to life.

Energy and Climate Change Minister Greg Hands said:

Developing greener fuels like biomass is key to helping the UK slash carbon emissions and drive down costs for consumers.

This £26 million government investment will support innovators across the UK, boosting jobs and investment, and help ensure we have the homegrown supply we need to support our plans to build back greener and tackle climate change.

Each project will be able to bid for up to £4 million in funding, or up to £5 million for bids from the multi-site demonstrator projects that will showcase new biomass feedstock production projects in multiple locations across the UK.

25 projects located across the country, from start-ups and family-run

businesses to research institutes and universities, have already received a share of £4 million under Phase 1 of the programme. Under Phase 2, the projects will be developed from the design stage into full demonstration projects, showcasing new methods to grow biomass materials, which can be used to produce low-carbon energy.

The Biomass Feedstocks Innovation programme, part of the government's £1 billion [Net Zero Innovation Portfolio](#), is designed to increase the production of sustainable UK biomass feedstocks, and accelerate the commercialisation of the innovative biomass production technologies supported through the programme.

The projects supported under Phase 1 included a range of biomass production ideas, such as producing algae using wastewater from breweries and dairy industries, farming seaweed off the North Yorkshire coast, and increasing the planting and harvesting capacity for willow.

With this new £26 million government funding announced today, the Biomass Feedstocks Innovation Programme will lead to a greater supply of organic materials from domestic sources rather than using imported matter, with the successful projects supporting rural economies across the UK, providing jobs and encouraging private investment, while helping the UK on the path to net zero.

- The Biomass Feedstocks Innovation Programme aims to increase the production of sustainable UK biomass feedstocks
- under Phase 1 of the programme, 25 projects were awarded a share of £4 million government funding to produce project plans for innovations that, if implemented, would make a positive material contribution to UK feedstock supply
- see the [list of the successful Phase 1 projects](#)
- Phase 2 will build on Phase 1, taking projects from the design stage through to the demonstration stage. This means Phase 2 will only be open to applications from the projects that were supported under Phase 1. Applicants can [apply for Phase 2](#)
- the Biomass Feedstocks Innovation Programme is funded through the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's £1 billion [Net Zero Innovation Portfolio](#), which aims to accelerate the commercialisation of innovative clean energy technologies and processes through the 2020s and 2030s

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## [UK tech sector achieves best year ever as success feeds cities outside London](#)

- New levelling up power tech league revealed

Cambridge is the leading regional tech city in the UK thanks to its combination of high levels of VC funding, venture capital rounds, advertised tech salaries, number of unicorns (tech companies worth more than \$1 billion) and futurecorns, according to new analysis for the UK's Digital Economy Council by Dealroom and the smarter job search engine Adzuna.

Manchester was only narrowly beaten by Cambridge to the number two position, and Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast are also in the top ten for capital raised, showing how the tech sector has spread across all regions and countries in the United Kingdom. The number of jobs in Manchester increased by 164.6% in 2021 and the highest advertised average salaries outside London were in Edinburgh – £58,405.

With more money than ever flowing into UK tech – £29.4 billion this year, up 2.3x from last year's figures of £11.5 billion – almost £9bn of all VC invested went into startups and scaleups outside London and the South East and the regions are home to nine of the 29 unicorns formed this year. The combined value of UK tech companies founded since 2000\* is now £540 bn, after the biggest year-on-year increase since 2013/14.

Levelling Up Power Tech League 2021:

1. Cambridge
2. Manchester
3. Oxford
4. Edinburgh
5. Bristol
6. Leeds
7. Birmingham
8. Newcastle
9. Cardiff
10. Belfast

## **Record investment in UK tech**

This regional growth took place against the backdrop of an incredible year for the UK tech industry. Tech investment grew 2.3x this year, the highest growth since 2013 to 2014 when it grew from \$2 billion (£1.5 billion) to \$4.6 billion (£3.5) billion.

## **UK tech captured more than a third of investment into Europe**

The £29.4bn raised by UK startups and scale-ups was double the figure raised in Germany (£14.7billion) and almost three times that raised by France companies (£9.7 billion). UK tech investment accounted for a third of the total £89.5 billion that flowed into the European tech ecosystem this year.

UK venture capital firms have also had a record year and raised £7 billion with record-breaking fundraisings from London firms including Index Ventures, Balderton Capital, 83North and Eight Road Ventures.

## **More US investment**

The majority of the money coming into UK tech is from the US, with 37% of all funding coming from the States, up from 31.5% last year, with the majority of it going into fintech and health tech companies. Over 28% of UK venture funding came from domestic capital. Competition for deals among VC funds is heating up as more US venture funds launch offices in the UK, including Bessemer Venture Partners, General Catalyst, Lightspeed Venture Partners and Sequoia Capital.

## **More unicorns created than ever before + more than France and Germany combined**

More funding means more unicorns, with 29 created this year including the e-commerce platform Depop, car selling platform Motorway, insurance disrupter Marshmallow, and the challenger bank Starling Bank. This takes the UK's total unicorn figure to 115 meaning 25% of the UK's total unicorns were created in 2021 alone. The UK has more unicorns than France (31) and Germany (56) combined.

## **30% of new unicorns created this year are outside of London**

Nine out of the 29 unicorns created this year are outside of London including Interactive Investor in Glasgow, Vertical Aerospace in Bristol and Touchlight Genetics in Hampton. Of all the unicorns created in the UK, 35% are outside of London and 35% of futurecorns are also based outside of the capital, suggesting that the growth in tech in the regions will continue strongly in the next five years.

## **Record IPO capital raising in London since 2007**

The publication of Lord Hill's UK Listings Review in March supported a strong year for the London markets, with 118 companies choosing to list in the UK raising over £16.8bn (YTD), the most capital raised since 2007. This made the UK the most active venue globally for IPOs outside the US and Greater China.

The London Stock Exchange has hosted more than twice as many transactions as the next most active European market, with a combined £49.0bn raised through IPOs and Follow-On Issuance. The 37 tech and consumer internet companies that have listed this year achieved a combined market cap of £31bn. The London Stock Exchange has also supported 30 founder-led companies to list this year.

Standout performers such as Oxford Nanopore and Wise have demonstrated the significant appetite from investors for quoted high-growth companies and this positive momentum is set to continue into 2022. The value of UK tech companies that exited via IPO, SPAC or acquisition reached a record £84bn, in a year which saw IPOs and SPAC listings for companies including Deliveroo, Darktrace, Cazoo, Arrival, Babylon and Depop.

## **More job opportunities in London and outside**

The increased levels of money going into UK tech also mean companies are in

need of trained technical and business staff. There has been a 50% rise in overall UK tech job vacancies advertised this year compared to 2020's figures, with advertised tech vacancies hitting 160,887 in November. Currently, tech vacancies make up 12% of all available jobs in the UK, with just over 50% of these jobs available outside of London and the South East.

Software developers are still the most in-demand tech job across the UK. These positions make up 9% of all tech jobs with prospective developers being offered an average salary of £64,318, a 12% increase on 2020's figures. Specialist staff such as java developers and IT systems architects continue to be able to command high salaries with the average advertised wage for these roles being £80,076 and £93,004 respectively.

## **Remote jobs spread tech success**

The UK tech industry continues to lead the way when it comes to hiring practices since technical jobs are well positioned to be carried out remotely. In fact, 21.6% of all job ads in the IT sector are advertised as remote roles. This is also contributing to the spread of the UK tech ecosystem beyond London as businesses can hire across the country and find the staff that they need, regardless of location.

## **Increase in R&D**

The government has increased its investment in R&D to £20bn by 2024-25, in order to support the UK's research institutions, universities and businesses with an aim to increase this to £22bn by 2026-27. This investment is aimed at securing the UK's future as a global science superpower, supporting businesses as they transition to becoming more innovative and productive and creating highly skilled jobs across the country. At the same time, there has been increased private investment in deep tech firms, totalling £6.2bn in 2021, up from £2.8bn in 2020. One of the biggest deep tech deals of the year was the £396m Series D raise by AI drug discovery company Exscientia, of Oxford, which helped the company achieve unicorn status.

Digital Minister Chris Philp said:

It's been another record-breaking year for UK tech with innovative British startups helping solve some of the world's biggest challenges.

Capitalising on this fantastic investment across the country is a crucial part of our mission to level up, so we are supporting businesses with pro-innovation policies and helping people to get the skills they need to thrive in this dynamic industry.

Saul Klein, partner and co-founder at LocalGlobe, said:

It's taken 20 years for UK tech to get to the starting line and things start to get interesting in the next 20 years. We have all

the ingredients to become the leading tech ecosystem in the world, with record levels of R&D, financing and established tech hubs across the country from New Palo Alto in Kings Cross, to Cambridge, Edinburgh and Manchester. But the key differentiator for investors in future will be a willingness to take an ethical approach to building businesses. We can be world-class in this and over the long term this will set our companies apart from those built in the US and China.

Yoram Wijngaarde, founder and CEO at Dealroom, said:

The UK tech ecosystem has exploded in the past year, with an increasing number of mega rounds minting new unicorns and futurecorns every day. This is significant because we know from research that employees at \$1b+ companies often go on to found their own startups, some of which become unicorns themselves, which helps to shore up the ecosystem and lead to a new generation of global companies.

Andrew Hunter, co-founder at Adzuna, said:

The growth of tech companies across the UK has led to a surge in hiring across the country. The number of IT job openings is higher than its ever been and is consistently growing week on week. In particular, it's great to see strong hiring in cities like Manchester and Birmingham which are showcasing some of the highest figures outside of London. The struggle for businesses across the country is having enough skilled staff to fill these positions to allow them to keep growing.

Gerard Grech, founding Chief Executive, Tech Nation, said:

With such a record tech investment year, it's becoming increasingly evident that the UK is very good at rearing and cultivating startups and scale-ups into successful global companies right across the UK, unlike its continental European neighbours, where it tends to be more in capital cities. A true network of digital excellence is emerging right across the country through entrepreneurship, driving new job and wealth creation. Tech Nation is committed to identifying and fueling the growth of these high-potential businesses through its programs and initiatives, removing geographic and financial barriers as quickly as possible.

Luisa Alemany, Associate professor of management practice in strategy and entrepreneurship at London Business School's Institute of Entrepreneurship and Private Capital, said:

The UK startup and scale-up sector is very attractive right now and investors don't want to miss out on this opportunity. We are living in a 'founders' market' and investors want to be there at the very beginning. We have seen top series A and B VCs moving into seed during 2021. What's notable compared to other countries in Europe is that talented founders are starting companies right across the UK. Given that difficulty hiring is one of the main headaches for growing tech startups, this geographic spread should translate into another structural advantage for UK tech.

Eileen Burbidge, Partner at Passion Capital, said:

Every day more and more ambitious entrepreneurs are launching the startups in the UK that will become future category-defining businesses to improve customer outcomes. With more and more investment capital directed at the UK, it's clear that even more businesses with global ambitions will be created here and at Passion we are thrilled to be able to continue supporting the earliest-stage companies that make this ecosystem such a brilliant place to be.

Ronan Harris, VP and MD, UK and Ireland, Google, said:

It's wonderful to see how UK tech has thrived this year, despite the ongoing challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. It's important that we continue to harness the opportunities that technology brings to everyone through digital skills initiatives so anyone, regardless of their location, can be a part of this rewarding industry.

Julia Hoggett, CEO of London Stock Exchange plc, said:

Intent matters and the changes to listing regime have supported a great year for the London Stock Exchange. We have seen a diverse range of companies list in London raising over £16.8bn, the most IPO capital raised since 2007. Of these, 37 have been tech and consumer internet companies representing the continued evolution of the exchange. It has also been pleasing to see 30 founder-led companies list. It provides a platform for an equally exciting 2022.

Susannah Odell, CBI Head of Digital Policy, said:

It's great to see the UK retain its crown as a world-leader in tech, bringing in record-breaking investment this year. From

Cambridge to Manchester, the digital economy is unlocking vast opportunities and growth across the country. To ensure businesses continue to grow, scale, and invest, equipping the workforce with the right digital skills, and ensuring regulation supports innovation and builds trust in tech, will be essential.

Alex Ferrara, partner, Bessemer Venture Partners, said:

We know great companies can come from anywhere, but the UK's track record as the leading tech hub in Europe is so consistent that we are delighted to be here on the ground in London. The UK is forging a reputation for itself in many sectors, not least cloud computing, financial technology and DeFI, and we think that many more outstanding global companies will be born here.

Dayo Akinrinade, founder and CEO of Wisdom, based in London said:

It is great to see an increased number of underrepresented founders getting a share of VC funding. As a black woman in tech, I am passionate about providing a level playing field to access opportunities across the UK's tech ecosystem. In 2021, I raised capital to grow Wisdom – a social audio community that connects mentors to knowledge seekers, with a mission to democratise access to mentorship. I am excited to see this momentum continue and for more overlooked founders to thrive in 2022 and beyond.

Sandy McKinnon, Partner at Pentech Ventures, based in Edinburgh said:

Edinburgh has steadily been growing as a tech hub over the past few years and this list recognises that. The combination of world-class universities, established IT businesses and unicorns like Skyscanner and FanDuel means there is a lot of exciting talent and innovation in the city. We're seeing this with newcomers like TravelNest, Desana, Amicus, Biomage and many others that are disrupting traditional industries – there really is so much potential around the city.

Ashley Ramrachia, co-founder of Academy, based in Manchester said:

While acknowledging the huge achievements the UK tech sector has made, we also need to realise that difficulty recruiting and retaining talent could affect the success of an increasing number of scaling tech companies. That is why we urgently need to reinvent recruitment and development by putting diversity and inclusion at its heart.



Nigel Toon, Co-Founder and CEO at Graphcore, based in Bristol said:

There is no longer any debate over whether you can build a multi-billion dollar tech business in the UK. The investments made over the past few years into startups and scaleups across the country are producing outstanding results and I look forward to seeing how ecosystems like Bristol's grow and thrive over many years to come.

Matthew Scullion, CEO of Matillion, based in Manchester said:

These figures are evidence that high-growth start-ups are thriving all across the UK, and it's no surprise to see Matillion's home of Manchester appearing so highly. While the city has not always had the playbooks, flow of capital, or awareness that we can build unicorns, the data shows that's changing and doing so rapidly. We're very proud to have played our part in this upwards trajectory, as the region's most recent (and only enterprise software) unicorn, and we hope we can play our part in making the flywheel spin even faster in over the coming years.

## **ENDS**

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## **About DEC**

The Digital Economy Council is a non-statutory advisory committee of independent members set up to provide advice to the government. Its purpose is to harness the expertise of industry and the wider tech community to develop a world-leading digital economy that works for everyone.

## **About Dealroom**

Dealroom.co is the foremost data provider on startups, growth companies and tech ecosystems in Europe and around the globe. Founded in Amsterdam in 2013, Dealroom.co now works with many of the world's most prominent investors, entrepreneurs and government organizations to provide transparency, analysis and insights on startups and venture capital activity.

## **About Adzuna**

Adzuna is a smarter, more transparent job search engine used by tens of millions of visitors per month. We love using the awesome power of technology to bring together every job in one place, help match people to better, more fulfilling jobs and keep Britain working.

Adzuna supplies real-time data to the Number 10 Dashboard, the Cabinet Office and Office for National Statistics labour market indices. In 2018, Adzuna won the contract to run Find a job, one of the British government's most used

online services.

Adzuna.co.uk was founded in 2011 by Andrew Hunter and Doug Monro, formerly of eBay, Gumtree, Qype and Zoopla and is backed by leading Venture Capital firms Passion Capital, LocalGlobe, Index Ventures and Smedvig Capital. It has spent a decade developing smarter, more transparent job search so jobseekers worldwide (in 16 countries) can zero in on the right role faster.

## **Methodology**

To create the Levelling Up Power Tech League we gathered data for each city on venture capital (VC) funding, the number of VC rounds, the number of available jobs, the average salary, the number of Unicorns and the number of Futurecorns for each of the regions. For each category, we ranked each region from 1 to 10. We then calculated the sum of the rankings for each category within each region, and the region with the lowest overall ranking was the winner.

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## **Education Secretary calls for ex-teachers to return to classrooms**

The Government is asking former teachers who have the skills and time to return to the classroom [to sign up](#) from today.

The Omicron variant is expected to continue to cause increased staff absence levels in the spring term, and some local areas may struggle to find sufficient numbers of supply teachers available unless former staff come forward.

It remains important the same comprehensive checks go ahead as they always would for anyone working with children. Potential teachers are therefore encouraged to get the process started as soon as possible and ideally before Christmas Eve to be ready to join the workforce from January.

Those who are recently retired, or trained as a teacher and moved career, are asked to consider whether they can find even a day a week for the spring term to help protect face-to-face education.

Targeted communications will begin to go out from today across a range of government, stakeholder and direct channels to encourage those eligible to apply.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

It has been my absolute priority since day one in the role to do

everything in my power to protect education – which is why today I am asking any teachers no longer in the profession to come forward if they are available to temporarily fill absences in the new year.

Although 99.9% of schools have consistently been open this term, with cases of Omicron increasing we must make sure schools and colleges have the teachers available to remain open for face-to-face education.

Anyone who thinks they can help should get the process started now [on the Get Into Teaching website](#), and everyone should get boosted now to help reduce the amount of disruption from the virus in the new year.

Supply teacher agencies across the country will continue to manage local supply and demand to help make sure schools and colleges do not need to close as a result of lack of staff.

Former teachers are encouraged to approach those agencies identified on the sign up page as being registered on the Government's framework. This guarantees fair business practices and the agency's support in completing pre-employment checks to ensure they can be placed in schools and colleges as soon as possible, but those eligible can approach any agency they prefer.

The Government is providing social media and communications support to schools and colleges, trusts, local authorities, teaching unions, supply teacher agencies, and sector organisations such as Teach First to help them engage with their networks and contact databases to reach those who are most likely to be able to answer the Education Secretary's call.

The Government will also be working to reach former teachers through its own communications channels, including through Get Into Teaching, the Teacher Pension Scheme and internet search advertising.

Department for Education staff eligible to come forward will be released to do so, as long as they are not working on the Department's own covid response.

The Disclosure and Barring Service has confirmed it will be ready to meet any spikes in demand for its service, continuing to meet its current turnaround times of 80% of Enhanced Checks issued within 14 days, of which 30% are issued within a day.

The Government is also working with Teach First to explore how those of their alumni who have trained as teachers but currently work outside the profession could make a temporary return to the classroom to support the resilience of the wider school workforce in the new year.

Russell Hobby, CEO of Teach First said:

Teachers have gone above and beyond throughout the pandemic, doing

an inspirational job to support their pupils and communities in the face of adversity. Yet the disruption to school life and extended periods at home mean pupils' education has inevitably suffered, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Given the challenges that schools now face, we want to see what more can be done to help – including how we, and those of our alumni who have trained as teachers but currently work outside the profession, may be able to support schools to remain open safely in the new year.

Many areas are also facing pressures with high absence among social care staff. A temporary register was set up in March 2020 during the first peak of the pandemic to support former social workers to return to frontline practice. Any social worker who left the profession in the previous two years, was fit to practise and had not opted out was automatically added. Those individuals who remain on the temporary register are encouraged to contact their local authority children's social care team or sign up with a local agency if they can support at this time.

It remains vital for everyone to get their primary and booster vaccination doses as soon as possible to help stem the spread of Omicron, reducing the number of absences faced by schools and across education in the new year.

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## Outdoor weddings and civil partnerships consultation launched

- Temporary measures introduced in summer could be made permanent
- Religious weddings would also be allowed outdoors under plans
- Will provide greater flexibility and choice to couples and the weddings sector
- The location for the ceremony must be assessed to be dignified

It follows temporary legislation introduced in July, which allowed outdoor civil wedding and partnership ceremonies for the first time.

A consultation launched today seeks views on making this change permanent. It will also examine extending it to religious weddings so that these can take place outdoors at places of worship for the first time for most faiths, such as in the grounds of a church or chapel. Around 55,000 weddings a year would be affected by this change – in 2017, 96% of these were Christian ceremonies. No religious group would be obliged to provide outdoor ceremonies, and existing protections to safeguard religious freedoms would remain in place.

Prior to last summer's legislation, civil ceremonies at an approved premise

such as a hotel had to take place indoors or otherwise within a permanent structure, such as a bandstand.

Couples can now have the whole ceremony outside in the grounds of such a venue – providing greater flexibility especially during the pandemic when there are important public health considerations to take into account.

**Justice Minister Tom Pursglove said:**

A wedding is one of the absolute highlights of a person's life and it is right that couples should have greater choice in how they celebrate their special day.

Our proposals would afford them that choice whether they choose a civil or religious ceremony, and would mark a huge boost for those planning a wedding over the coming years.

Crucially, this will also support the wedding sector by ensuring venues can continue to safely meet the demand for larger ceremonies.

**George Buchanan, of Hodsock Priory in Nottinghamshire, said:**

We converted an old tennis court into a licensed venue for civil ceremonies in November 2020. The first ceremony was held in June 2021 and it is immediately the most popular choice for our brides as their chosen place on site to say 'I do'.

Outdoor ceremonies will continue through the winter – the autumn colours are spectacular for this weekend's weddings. Guests love it as it feels romantic and is COVID safe so I would say it's a positive experience and asset to our venue.

The proposed changes in fact reflect medieval weddings, when it was common for ceremonies to take place outside the front of the church. This is why many churches from that period have a projecting porch.

Ministers would like to hear from professionals, religious bodies and couples who have used the current provisions or who would consider using the provisions in the future, in order to understand how they have worked or might work in practice and whether they should remain in force beyond April 2022.

A Law Commission review will separately present options for further marriage reforms to the Government. Things under consideration include:

- how ceremonies could take place in a broader range of locations;
- who can solemnise a marriage;
- how marriage by humanist and other non-religious belief organisations

could be incorporated; and

- how provision could be made for the use of independent celebrants.

The Law Commission is due to report back by summer 2022.

## Notes to editors:

- The [consultation](#) will run for six weeks.
- As with the initial changes which took effect on 1 July 2021, we propose that the new legislation for civil ceremonies will also be introduced via amendments to the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005 to allow legal outdoor civil weddings and civil partnership registrations to take place within the grounds of Approved Premises.
- The Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 came into force on 1 July 2021. These were time-limited amendments to the 2005 Regulations and will expire on 5 April 2022.
- Subject to the outcome of the consultation, the detail of the proposal is essentially the same as the changes made in July, however with the addition of proposals to extend the policy of permitting outdoor ceremonies to religious bodies and couples seeking a religious wedding.
- Since the proposal relating to approved premises is subject to this consultation and ordinary SI procedures, the Government cannot guarantee that a further SI would be in force by 6 April 2022. However, this is the Government's proposal and intention, and the Government will make every effort to provide a seamless transition from the current rules to the replacement rules.
- We intend that the proposed changes regarding religious ceremonies would be made through a legislative reform order under the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006.
- All churches and chapels in which Church of England or Church in Wales weddings are held and all current registrations of certified places of worship as buildings for the solemnisation of marriages under the Marriage Act 1949, would be deemed automatically to include the outdoor areas within the property boundary. It would be a matter for the religious bodies to determine whether such weddings could or should be held and if so, at which locations and/or in what circumstances.
- In 2017, 54,346 weddings were celebrated according to religious rites. The majority of these (74%) were Anglican weddings. The next most popular form were Roman Catholic weddings, accounting for 11% of religious weddings, and a further 11% were celebrated by other Christian denominations. Only 4% were conducted according to non-Christian religious rites.
- In order to hold legal outdoor civil weddings and civil partnership registrations, a venue would have to be approved or must become approved under the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005, as amended.
- Previously, premises which sought approval must have comprised a permanent built structure (or permanently moored vessel) with at least one room which was to be approved for civil weddings and civil partnership registration. Under the amended regulations laid in summer,

such premises, if approved, could also use any outdoor areas linked to the same venue to hold these ceremonies without having to re-apply for approval, subject to certain conditions. The consultation proposes continuing this policy.

- It is proposed that civil ceremonies would continue to be able to take place fully outdoors or under a partially covered structure if this has at least a 50% open area. Requirements for public access and signage must also be met.

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## Levelling up boost for Yorkshire as new National Infrastructure Commission site announced in Leeds

- New office will support the Government's drive to distribute investment and opportunity across the country
- Move is part of Government's commitment to level up the UK and make more decisions outside of London

The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) is opening a new office in Leeds, Chancellor Rishi Sunak has announced today, as the Government continues to deliver on its levelling up agenda.

The NIC, which provides impartial, expert advice to government on major long-term economic infrastructure challenges, will have a new site in the city by the end of 2023. It will also keep a presence in London. The Commission carries out in-depth studies into the UK's major infrastructure needs – covering transport, energy, water, flood protection, waste and digital infrastructure – and makes recommendations to the government.

There are currently around 50 staff working for the NIC, and the new office will ensure that those advising on future infrastructure are more representative of the public they serve.

The move will help bolster the NIC's role in addressing regional differences in infrastructure needs. It is part of the government's commitment to move 22,000 civil service positions out of London and the South East by 2030, through the Places for Growth programme.

The NIC joins the UK Infrastructure Bank which opened its headquarters in Leeds in June. The Bank is tasked with accelerating investment into ambitious infrastructure projects, cutting emissions and levelling up every part of the UK.

## **Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak said:**

We are committed to delivering high-quality infrastructure across all regions of the UK – and the National Infrastructure Commission plays an invaluable role in this.

That is why it's fantastic to announce that the National Infrastructure Commission will be opening a new office in Leeds. This will help distribute investment and opportunity right across the country as we level up opportunities, boost the economy and help create jobs.

## **Sir John Armitt, Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission, said:**

It's great to be establishing a second base in Leeds. It is not only a great city to live and work in, but the move underlines the Commission's role in advising government on the role infrastructure can play in boosting local economies and improving quality of life right across the UK.

We look forward to continuing to work with local leaders as the Commission starts work on our next major assessment of the country's infrastructure needs for the future, to be published in 2023.

Last year the Government kickstarted an infrastructure revolution by publishing the National Infrastructure Strategy which laid out plans to upgrade road, rail and digital infrastructure.

Since then, the Government has committed over £130 billion to economic infrastructure, including £5.7 billion over five years to eight city regions in order to boost urban transport connectivity. We've also committed £5 billion to support the rollout of gigabit-capable broadband in hard to reach areas through Project Gigabit, completed over 90 per cent of the £850 million M4 Junction 3-12 upgrade, which will be open in spring 2022, and launched the UK Infrastructure Bank, which is expected to unlock more than £40 billion of infrastructure investment.

Alongside that, a further 15 Town Deals were confirmed in July, allocating £335 million to revitalise towns across England, as part of the government's plan to level up English regions.

## **Further information**

- Around 40 per cent of staff are expected to be Leeds-based in the future.
- Last month, the NIC publicly launched its work on the second National



Infrastructure Assessment (NIA 2) due to be published in the second half of 2023. In the NIA 2, the Commission will make recommendations to address the key challenges for the UK's economic infrastructure for the coming decades.

- The NIC's ground-breaking 2018 National Infrastructure Assessment (NIA) of the country's infrastructure needs, and specific studies such as those on rail, towns, freight, and resilience, have played an essential role in the government's infrastructure policy.
- The analysis the NIC has provided has supported the government's ambition to deliver a radical improvement in the quality of the UK's infrastructure to help level up the country, put the UK on the path to net zero emissions by 2050 and deliver for all parts of the UK.