

[Letter from Minister Keegan on the Further Education Workforce Data Collection](#)

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[New £30 million competition to make UK a pioneer in building 5G networks](#)

- £30m to put UK at the cutting edge of developing new tech for 5G mobile networks
- Scheme is a key part of government's 5G Diversification Strategy
- Comes as ex-Fujitsu chair Simon Blagden is named as lead for Diversification Advisory Council

The scheme will tackle the world's over-reliance on a small number of telecoms vendors by developing new, innovative solutions right here in the UK. It will help build confidence in the security and resilience of new 5G technology as it delivers incredible social and economic benefits for people and businesses.

The [Future RAN Competition \(FRANC\)](#) will fund innovative R&D projects across the UK to speed up the adoption of a new breed of wireless communication technology – Open Radio Access Network (Open RAN) – which allows equipment from multiple suppliers to be used in 5G networks and will end their current dependence on one company's technology to function. But there are still barriers to Open RAN being used over more traditional mobile network technology.

To receive a share of the £30 million, tech and telecoms innovators are encouraged to submit proposals for projects that will help to fast-track the availability of viable Open RAN products and suppliers and create a stronger case for government and business investment in the technology.

Proposals could include exploring issues around power efficiency, the management of radio wave 'spectrum' resource, the availability of advanced

software platforms, systems integration and security.

The government hopes the competition fosters research collaboration between international and new homegrown players in the UK's public telecoms networks.

Its launch follows the opening last week of a new government-backed £1 million high tech [lab](#) to help accelerate the adoption of Open RAN technology.

Both schemes are major pillars of the government's £250 million [5G Diversification Strategy](#) which was published alongside a timetable for the removal of Huawei equipment from 5G networks.

The strategy aims to build a more secure and innovative telecoms supply chain which is fit for the future, less reliant on a small number of multinational suppliers and more accessible for new market entrants. This will help the UK capitalise on 5G's potential to improve people's lives with lightning fast connectivity and revolutionary data capacity.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman said:

This competition aims to get some of our most creative minds helping the UK safely and securely deliver the amazing benefits of 5G for people and businesses.

It is a major part of our plans to harness the country's tech prowess, open up the telecoms market, and create new jobs and investment as we build back better from the pandemic.

Matthew Evans, Director of Markets, techUK, said:

Today's announcement is another positive step in driving forward the UK's telecoms diversification agenda, with concrete action to help support the development of innovative new products for our mobile network infrastructure. It is a clear signal that the UK has a world-leading market in which to innovate and invest, as well as spurring the opportunity for UK tech companies, SMEs and academia to take advantage of this growing global market.

We find ourselves at the start of a challenging period of time, with pressure on rolling out 5G at pace whilst ensuring our networks are resilient, secure and future proof. That's why it's important that government bring forward further plans on supporting open and disaggregated networks, from technical standards to a long term R&D roadmap.

The government today also announces the former non-executive chair of Fujitsu UK, Simon Blagden, as the chair of the new Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council, an independent expert body to succeed the Telecoms Diversification Taskforce.

The taskforce was commissioned by the government to provide advice on how to effectively deliver a more competitive and diverse 5G telecoms market and submitted its final report in April.

The government today publishes its [response](#) to the report and outlines how it will take forward the taskforce's [recommendations](#) across four areas as well as its activity to date.

One of the taskforce's recommendations was to establish a permanent external body to advise on the delivery of the diversification strategy and wider related issues, including potential supply chain issues in other telecoms equipment such as fixed broadband. The new Advisory Council will fulfil those roles.

Simon Blagden CBE, Chair of the Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council, said:

I am greatly enthused to be joining as Chair of the new Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council. I am looking forward to working with the Minister, Advisory Council members and the team at DCMS to contribute towards this important agenda.

The Taskforce also recommended investment in R&D that addresses key technical barriers to high-performance Open RAN – a challenge that the FRANC and high tech SONIC lab will take on.

The deadline for applications for the FRANC is 27 August 2021, with winning projects expected to be announced in the autumn.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- The FRANC is just one part of a longer-term programme of Open RAN R&D. Two other Open RAN projects announced in the Diversification Strategy are already underway and delivering results and learnings.
 - Thanks to £1 million of government funding, last week the SmartRAN Open Network Interoperability Centre (SONIC), a joint programme between the Digital Catapult and Ofcom, launched a new facility based in Brighton and London. The SONIC Lab will enable telecoms equipment manufacturers to examine how their kit behaves in a fully interoperable, technology-neutral mobile network.
 - NeutrORAN, led by Japanese supplier NEC and with £1.6 million government funding, is developing a testbed in North Wales for multiple vendors and mobile operators to come together to test Open RAN neutral host in a live outdoor rural environment.

- Biography: Simon Blagden CBE

Simon Blagden serves as non-executive Chairman of Larkspur International and has 30 years experience in the IT, Telecoms and Digital industry. He was previously non-executive Chairman at Fujitsu Telecommunications UK, a post he held for 14 years. His career began at GEC where he was International Commercial Manager. In 1991, he joined Quante AG as UK Managing Director and then joined the Main Board in 1995 as CEO, managing operations worldwide. In 2000 he joined Spescom in Johannesburg as CEO to head up its international telecoms and IT business.

[Notice of withdrawal of recognition for natural mineral water](#)

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[PM welcomes Angela Merkel on final UK visit as German Chancellor](#)

- The Prime Minister will welcome Angela Merkel to Chequers for her final visit ahead of stepping down as Chancellor later this year.
- PM has announced new award for British and German women in science in honour of Chancellor Merkel.
- Leaders will agree to hold annual joint UK-German Cabinet meetings and Chancellor Merkel will address a meeting of the British Cabinet

German Chancellor Angela Merkel will make her final visit to the UK today (2 July 2021) before she steps down from her post later this year. This will be her 22nd visit since taking office in 2005.

Germany is the UK's second-largest trading partner and every day 730,000 people in the UK go to work for German companies or vice-versa. More than 21,000 Germans study or work at UK Universities.

Collaboration between the UK and Germany improves and saves lives. During the coronavirus pandemic, for example, University College London teamed up with Mercedes-AMG to develop and produce new breathing aids for patients with major respiratory problems that are now being used in over 130 NHS Hospitals.

The number of links between the UK and Germany have only grown during Angela Merkel's time as Chancellor, and during her visit today the Prime Minister will announce the creation of a new academic medal in her honour.

The award of £10,000 will be given every year to a UK or Germany-based female scientist who has excelled in the field of astrophysics. The medal will be named after Caroline Herschel, a German-born British astrophysicist who was a pioneer in the field.

Chancellor Merkel is herself a scientist by training. She was honoured in 2010 by the Royal Society with the King Charles II Medal, which is awarded to foreign Heads of State or Government who have made an outstanding contribution to furthering scientific research in their country.

Today Chancellor Merkel will visit Chequers for discussions with the Prime Minister on deepening the UK-Germany relationship. The Chancellor will also address a virtual meeting of the British Cabinet – the first foreign leader to do so since President Clinton addressed Cabinet in 1997.

The Prime Minister and Chancellor are expected to agree a number of new initiatives to expand the links between the UK and Germany across a range of sectors, including:

Annual joint meetings of the UK and German Cabinets. This will be the first arrangement of its kind for the UK and an opportunity to share expertise and expand joint working between the governments of our countries. The establishment of a new UK-German Cultural Dialogue which will meet annually to bring together cultural figures from both our countries and create new opportunities for talented young people. Underlining their shared support to youth exchanges and collaboration between Germany and the UK, including an intention to increase future funding to the UK-German Connection, a bilateral programme which 4,300 young people participated in in 2019.

Speaking ahead of the visit, the Prime Minister said:

The UK and Germany have a steadfast friendship and a shared outlook on many issues. Our scientists, innovators and industrialists work together every day to make the world a better place.

Over the 16 years of Chancellor Merkel's tenure the UK-Germany relationship has been re-energised and re-invigorated for a new era. And the new joint ventures we will agree today will leave a legacy that will last for generations.

Collaboration between the UK and Germany is already helping tackle some of the greatest challenges of our time, including defeating the coronavirus

pandemic and tackling climate change, and today the Prime Minister and Chancellor Merkel will reaffirm the importance of that work.

This includes support for 'Neuconnect', a new electricity interconnector that will create an energy highway between the UK and Germany. Neuconnect is the largest UK-German investment project currently underway and will allow our energy grids to share excess power – making sure renewable energy is not wasted and helping both our economies decarbonise more rapidly.

Earlier this month Ofgem confirmed key licence details for the project, which is funded by £1.4bn of private investment from Meridiam, Allianz Capital Partners and Kansai Electric Power.

[Brand new rail tech to 'pandemic proof' train travel](#)

- new tech to encourage passengers back to the railway post-COVID-19 has received government backing as part of the First of a Kind competition
- a 360-degree immersive journey planning app, interchangeable train interiors and an app connecting passengers to the world outside their train
- 30 projects to share £9 million investment to launch tech to improve rail journeys, increase passenger confidence and make the network even greener

A virtual reality immersive journey planning app for trains and stations could soon make journeys easier by reducing passenger anxiety and helping passengers to understand their journey ahead of travelling.

The technology is one of the [winners of the latest round of the First of a Kind \(FOAK\) competition](#) announced today (2 July 2021) by the Transport Secretary. This year, the competition has been aimed at making the railways cleaner, greener and more passenger-friendly.

The Department for Transport (DfT), in partnership with [Innovate UK](#), has funded 30 ground-breaking projects with a share of £9 million.

The competition is focused on developing pioneering technology and exceptional ideas that can improve journeys for travellers, encourage passengers back onto the network and reduce the environmental impacts of rail as we build back better from COVID-19.

Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps, said:

I am delighted to announce the winners of the 2021 First of a Kind

competition. These winners will hopefully play a role in putting passengers at the centre of our railways as we build back better from COVID-19.

The competition always throws up surprises and the ideas shown today could transform how we travel in future.

The creative problem solving on display in this competition will be further encouraged by the reforms brought about by the [Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail](#).

The expertise and innovation of the private sector will improve efficiency, making it easier and cheaper to plan maintenance, renewals and upgrades – unlocking new benefits for passengers.

Winners include a revolutionary app that connects rail travellers to the world outside their window and brings the route to life. As passengers travel, the app uses geo-location to immerse them in the history and stories of the places they travel through, making even the morning commute a train ride back in time.

Other winning projects include:

- a system to monitor people flow, congestion points and behaviour at stations, so operators can remove bottlenecks and deploy countermeasures, helping people avoid crowds and restoring passenger confidence in the rail system post COVID-19
- a scheme that provides an interchangeable interior train carriage for quick, deep cleaning and allows operators to rejig a train's seating layout at short notice – reacting to demand, keeping passengers safe and freeing up space
- a project that uses electromagnetism to deliver safe and predictable braking in harsh conditions, while improving acceleration
- a scheme that aims to deliver a train running on hydrogen and a hydrogen gas blend promising low emissions and an even greener railway

Simon Edmonds, Deputy Executive Chair and Chief Business Officer, Innovate UK, said:

As we move ever closer to getting past the pandemic, passengers are returning to the railway. To give them ever greater confidence that rail is safe and sustainable, we called upon UK innovators to come up with fresh ideas.

Yet again the response has been fantastic. Not only will passengers benefit from these great innovations, but business prospects are bright in this sector too.

Now in its fifth round, the competition was open to inventors from across the nation, regardless of the organisation's size or stature, which allows small companies with bright ideas to be recognised.

Previous winners include the LoCe (Less oil, Cleaner exhaust) project that secured £398,000 in 2020. The project has developed new diesel exhaust technology that reduces nitrogen oxide emissions by around 80%. The technology has been fitted to a Porterbrook-owned Class 170 Turbostar, operated by East Midlands Railway, and has subsequently reduced harmful engine emissions.