

# [Letter from the Health and Social Care Secretary on COVID-19 vaccination in people with learning disabilities](#)

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## [Business grants data published](#)

The government has published its latest round of [business grants data](#) today (24 February), showing the government funding delivered to each council in England to support their local businesses.

Since August last year, the government has provided councils with £7.8 billion for businesses who have needed support the most, through Local Restrictions Support Grants, Christmas Support Payments and Additional Restrictions Grants, targeting those who were required to close or had severe restrictions in place during the pandemic.

Local authorities are responsible for administering the various grants, including deciding which businesses and activities to support in their area through the discretionary schemes as well.

Some local authorities have decided on eligibility criteria and application processes quickly, while others have taken longer to do so. The government has issued clear guidance to local authorities and is working tirelessly with them to ensure that funds are paid out as quickly as possible to those that need it.

This funding is part of one of the most comprehensive and generous packages of business support in the world totalling £280 billion, including grants of up to £4,500 every 6 weeks to closed businesses, a one-off payment of up to £9,000 to closed businesses for the current period of national lockdown, VAT relief, various loan schemes, a business rates holiday, as well as the extended furlough scheme.

Small Business Minister Paul Scully said:

Throughout this crisis, we have provided generous support to as many businesses as we can to help see them through these tough times.

I know from speaking to businesses just how much they have benefited from government grants, which have enabled them to cover their fixed costs, adapt and plan to build back better from the pandemic.

We are working closely with council leaders across England to ensure that this much-needed support gets to hard-pressed businesses as soon as possible.

At the upcoming Budget, the government will outline further detail on economic support to protect jobs and livelihoods across the UK. That has been our priority throughout the past year and it will be the priority for the year to come.

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## [Dr Gillian Tully steps down as Forensic Science Regulator](#)

News story

Rupert Shute to act as Interim Forensic Science Regulator.



Dr Gillian Tully demitted office as Forensic Science Regulator on 16 February 2021.

The recruitment competition for her replacement is currently ongoing and will be completed as soon as possible. The Home Secretary has appointed the Home Office Deputy Chief Scientific Adviser, Rupert Shute, to act as Interim Forensic Science Regulator until such time as the new Regulator is appointed. The Regulator can be contacted by emailing [FSREnquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:FSREnquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk)

## [UK Automotive looks to ex-military personnel to upskill industry on brink of electrification](#)

The pledge commits [SMMT](#) to promoting best practice, fostering a culture and ethos of inclusivity, and making the commercial case for automotive companies to also sign up to the Covenant.

The signing reaffirms the work done through [Mission Automotive](#), an initiative dedicated to placing veterans in jobs across the sector, set up in partnership with the Royal Foundation of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, the forces' charity Mission Motorsport, and supported by the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

Watch the short video about [Mission Automotive](#).

Read the full [Mission Automotive transcript](#) (ODT, 5.01KB).

Making the process as easy as possible, SMMT has helped members create tailored engagement programs, guiding and aligning their interactions with the armed forces community across brand, corporate and HR areas to support their own business strategies. Some 55 SMMT member companies already work with the armed forces community, employing veterans, service leavers and their spouses across all parts of the automotive supply chain, from cars to commercial vehicles, across design, manufacturing, repair and through to retail and logistics.

Alex Fogg, former Royal Engineer and Arrival Logistics Store Manager said:

With the help of Mission Motorsport and the Mission Automotive initiative I have a career that has not only changed my life but is also incredibly therapeutic for me. I couldn't be happier.

Mission Automotive is already working to place personnel with highly relevant skills in the UK automotive industry.

Johnny Mercer MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence People and Veterans, said:

The skills and training military personnel bring to civilian employers are incredibly important. By signing the Armed Forces

Covenant, employers are harnessing the value that the Armed Forces community contributes to business. That is why it is vitally important that employers publicly pledge their support for the armed forces community – it means a lot to the cohort that we are trying to represent. In this field, it is hard to find a better exemplar of best practice than SMMT.

As the UK looks to secure battery gigafactory investment ahead of the 2030 phase-out of sale for new conventional petrol and diesel engine cars and vans, the automotive industry hopes to help fill the skills gap with service leavers, offering opportunities for development and mapped-out career paths which translate military skills into qualifications required by the sector. Many service personnel are uniquely suited to this industry, with experience of high voltage equipment and other technologies. Veterans, therefore, are potentially some of the best candidates for roles working in electric and hydrogen vehicle manufacturing and engineering.

The past year tested the auto industry's resilience as the country battled coronavirus, with the sector keeping essential services and key workers moving, supporting the vulnerable and even manufacturing ventilators. Many automotive companies worked with veteran volunteers to redeploy vehicle fleets across the country to transport medical supplies and PPE.

Mike Hawes, SMMT Chief Executive, said:

Upskilling our industry will be crucial as new technologies transform the sector, and ex-military personnel are an often-untapped talent pool that can provide these in-demand skills. We are incredibly proud to support Mission Motorsport in helping service leavers embark on new career paths and signing the Armed Forces Covenant cements SMMT's long-term commitment to this cause. As events of the past year have shown, the veteran community is a real asset to automotive businesses and will be central not just to a successful and sustainable recovery, but to our future success as we transition to a connected, autonomous and zero emissions future.

James Cameron, Mission Motorsport CEO, said:

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise, a commitment to ensure that those who have served in the armed forces, and their families, should not be disadvantaged by their service to the country. Service leavers and veterans are a national resource, and SMMT has been innovative in helping its members to share best practices, support each other, and harness that potential. By helping to make the commercial case for companies, SMMT's engagement and advocacy through its Mission Automotive initiative will encourage other industry bodies to follow suit and this should be celebrated.

Companies that want to find out more can visit the [Mission Automotive website](#) or contact [info@missionautomotive.org](mailto:info@missionautomotive.org) for more information, and an induction pack.

## Related content

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# [UK Government signs agreement for £250m investment in the North West](#)

Secretary of State Brandon Lewis, alongside Northern Ireland Executive ministers, and local partners, will sign the Heads of Terms for the Derry/Londonderry and Strabane City Deal later today (Wednesday 24 February).

Signing the Heads of Terms on the Derry/Londonderry and Strabane City Deal is an important milestone towards the completion of this major investment package for the North West.

This Deal will boost the economic potential of the region and support a more prosperous, united community and stronger society. The UK Government's investment in digital and innovative projects will deliver a step change in the North West's economy, spread opportunity and empower the North West to become an engine for growth.

The UK Government is investing £105m in capital over 15 years through this economic package. This investment has secured match funding from the Northern Ireland Executive which, supplemented by up to £40m in private sector and local council contributions, provides a total investment for the region of up to £250m.

The UK Government's investment will support the new Graduate Entry Medical School at Magee as well as a suite of projects that leverage the North West's existing advantages in digital communications and reflect priorities identified in the UK's Industrial Strategy on artificial intelligence, data and the future of healthcare.

### **Northern Ireland Secretary, Brandon Lewis MP said:**

I am absolutely delighted to sign the Heads of Terms for the Derry/Londonderry and Strabane City Deal. The UK Government has committed £105 million of capital funding to support and encourage economic development across the region, creating jobs, boosting opportunity and encouraging further inward investment.

Today's announcement is part of the UK Government's commitment to

developing and delivering a comprehensive and ambitious set of City Deals across Northern Ireland and delivering a stronger economy that works for everyone.

It is hoped the investment package will see the delivery of ten major projects, with a focus on Innovation, Digital and Health projects alongside Renewal and Regeneration initiatives. The proposed projects have the potential to deliver an additional 7,000 jobs, increase GVA by £210m per annum, drive growth in output and wages and provide a population boost as further people are attracted to come to the City region to work and study.

**Speaking on behalf of the City Deal partners, the Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council, Brian Tierney, said:**

The signing of the Heads of Terms marks the single largest investment by the Government to our region and is a significant step forward in our City Deal journey. A funding package of this scale and magnitude will be felt not only in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area, but across the wider North West region and beyond, and will deliver a stronger, more resilient and regionally balanced economy.

**Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government, Luke Hall MP said:**

This is a transformative Deal for the Derry/Londonderry City and Strabane region and provides an opportunity to deliver real change for people in Northern Ireland. This Deal will bolster innovation, productivity and prosperity across the region, and provide business and communities with the opportunities they need to thrive

## **Notes to Editors**

Click below for the full Heads of Terms document which sets out further details of the projects being proposed. All projects will be subject to the approval of final business cases.

Alongside Ulster University, Western Health and Social Care Trust, Clinical Translational Research and Innovation Centre (C-TRIC) and the North West Regional College, the Deal delivers a truly collaborative investment programme which will help to drive economic development across the region, boosting jobs, creating opportunity and encouraging further inward investment. Some of the 10 proposed projects include:

- **Centre for Industrial Digitisation, Robotics and Automation (CIDRA)**

This will support industry and commerce in their adoption and exploitation of industrial digital technologies, robotics and automation

promoting innovation and accelerating new applications in the service sectors.

- **The Cognitive Analytics Research Laboratory (CARL)**

This is a transformational new cutting-edge Applied Research Centre that brings together data analytics and Artificial Intelligence expertise which are key technologies for future innovation.

- **The Transformation Healthcare Research Innovation Value Based Ecosystem**

Building on the existing C-TRIC, this is a research-led, community and industry-facing facility developed in recognition of the global opportunities that exist in the area of personalised and genomics medicine.

## [Heads of Terms](#)

PDF, 192KB, 13 pages

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