[PM call with First Ministers: 28 May 2020](#)

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke with the First Ministers of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as the deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland.

This afternoon the Prime Minister had a call with the First Ministers of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as the deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland.

The PM made clear that as we begin to move to the next phase of tackling this virus, he remains determined to work closely with the devolved administrations. This continues to be a UK-wide approach, even though we may travel at slightly different speeds based on the scientific evidence.

He also stressed the importance of particularly close engagement on programmes that must be UK-wide to be most effective. This includes contact tracing, where coordinated systems across the UK will be critical to the next phase of our efforts. They also discussed the important work of the UK Joint Biosecurity Centre in making the response across the country increasingly targeted.

They all agreed that continued engagement is vital and that they will remain in close contact in the days and weeks ahead.

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[International supercomputer pact set to fire up UK COVID-19 research](#)

- The UK becomes the first country outside the US to join the COVID-19 High-Performance Computing consortium set up in response to the pandemic
- the consortium will allow UK researchers to bid for access to some of the world's fastest supercomputers
- UK commits to working with G7 nations to tackle coronavirus, including sharing research and identifying novel solutions

The UK will be the first country, outside the US, to join the global [COVID-19 High Performance Computing](#) (HPC) consortium, Science Minister Amanda Solloway announced today (Thursday 28 May).

The consortium, launched by the US in response to the global pandemic, will allow the UK's world-leading researchers and scientists to gain access to the world's largest and fastest supercomputers and perform complex calculations quickly. This will rapidly accelerate UK coronavirus research, helping further treatments, knowledge and understanding of how the disease behaves through advanced modelling.

Bringing together government, industry, and academic leaders, the consortium has 40 members including IBM, US Department of Energy, Google and NASA. It has already supported 59 research projects, all running on high performance computing machines – including London based AI start up, [Kuano](#), which is using the facilities to gain insights from diseases similar to COVID-19, such as SARs, to help design a new drug to defeat the virus.

The announcement was made during the G7 Science and Technology Ministerial held today, with the UK represented by Minister Solloway and John Whittingdale, Minister for Media and Data.

During the virtual meeting of science and technology ministers, the G7 nations set out a shared vision on tackling the pandemic. As a result, the UK committed to enhancing cooperation on shared COVID-19 research priority areas and launching a global partnership on artificial intelligence.

UK Science Minister, Amanda Solloway said:

> Tackling coronavirus requires a joint and strong international effort and the very best minds in science and technology sharing their research and knowledge.
>
> By joining this consortium, our leading researchers will be able to access some of the most advanced computers in the world to speed up their research, gain access to new developments, and share the UK's world-class computing technologies to find a solution to this virus.

UK Data Minister, John Whittingdale said:

> The UK has a longstanding reputation for innovation so it is fantastic to see our researchers and scientists working with the world's fastest supercomputers to accelerate the treatment, research and understanding of the coronavirus.
>
> We are determined to use the power of data and emerging technologies to improve people's lives and the UK will make a vital contribution to the consortium.

The UK's access to the High-Performance Computing consortium will be led by [UK Research and Innovation](#) (UKRI). The consortium will also ensure that the UK's other high performing computing facilities are contributing to the global effort against COVID-19, with the Met Office and UK Atomic Energy Authority providing capabilities.

Notes to editors

Visit the High-Performance Computing (HPC) consortium website to see [its full membership](#).

[Sheffield's River Sheaf screen gets £3m upgrade](#)

Work has started on a £3 million project to improve the screen and replace the mechanical arm used to clear it.

The upgrade work is being done while adhering to strict Government guidelines on social distancing and is expected to be complete by the end of the year.

The Sheaf Screen prevents debris from travelling underground along the river where it may become lodged, creating a blockage. Blockages underground, in culverts, which are tunnels that carry water under roads, railways and buildings, are very difficult to clear and can result in flooding to the local area.

The screen currently needs regularly clearing using a combination of the mechanical arm controlled by an operator and manual labour, which can be very resource intensive during an incident. The current screen is in poor condition with some of the screen bars damaged or missing, so the screen is being replaced and two 'grabs' will be installed on an overhead monorail, making it easier to clear debris when it collects on the screen.

Phil Rogers, project manager at the Environment Agency said:

This upgrade work for the Sheaf screen is critical to help modernise this important piece of flood risk reduction equipment. The improvements mean that the grabs will work automatically around the clock to remove debris from the river and place in a skip for removal, significantly reducing the need for Environment Agency staff to be on site.

Sheffield has a history of river flooding, with the city experiencing floods in 1973, 1991, 2000 and 2007. Flooding from the River Sheaf in 1991 extended to the central train station and closed the East Coast mainline for four days. This flooding is caused because of blockages at culverts and bridges especially in the urban reaches of the River Sheaf and Porter Brook where large sections of the rivers are culverted.

Sheffield's Victorian-engineered underground waterway, known as 'The Megatron', was built in the mid-1800s below the city centre and boasts an impressive network of cathedral-like brick archways and interconnecting darkened tunnels to contain the overflow of water from a storm.

The Sheaf Screen in Sheffield city centre is located at the upstream end of a 750m culvert which carries the River Sheaf below the central train station and the markets area. It joins up with the Porter Brook which is also largely hidden from view in the city and heads towards its confluence with the River Don.

As well as natural vegetation, the Sheaf Screen regularly collects larger objects including mattresses, tree trunks, bikes, branches and pipes. If these weren't caught by the screen they could cause a significant blockage and increase the risk of flooding to the city.

While the work is in progress Sheaf Walk will be closed between Duchess Road and the A61. One lane of the A61 will occasionally be closed for deliveries to site. We apologise for any disruption this may cause while we carry out the work.

[Sheaf screen proposed works](#)

[Regulating the waste industry during the coronavirus pandemic](#)

Press release

The Environment Agency is continuing to protect people and the environment during coronavirus (COVID-19).

Remote ways of working have been used to carry out checks of permitted waste sites throughout the Midlands

It is using technology to carry out its role as an effective regulator where face-to-face visits are restricted due to government guidelines.

Whilst regulatory visits to sites that could cause serious environmental harm are continuing in the pandemic, in certain instances the organisation has carried out virtual inspections of permitted waste sites to check they are complying with regulations.

Using online services such as Zoom, checking CCTV video footage and requesting specific evidence to prove the sites are storing waste correctly, the Environment Agency has been successfully carrying out its inspections.

These remote ways of working have been used to carry out checks of permitted waste sites throughout the Midlands, including Tom White Waste, which has 3 permits for its two sites in Coventry.

David Hudson, Area Environment Manager for the Environment Agency, said:

> We've been able to innovate and use technology to continue to regulate throughout this pandemic. Working remotely, we have received all of the necessary paperwork and photographs from Tom White Waste and carried out a meeting with them on Zoom, which included a site tour via their real time CCTV, to check their sites comply with the regulations of their permits. In this case we were satisfied the company has shown good practice and complied with the regulations.

> Coronavirus is not an excuse to operate illegally. We are continuing to work closely with businesses and industry to help them meet their legal requirements and we are continuing to enforce regulatory requirements, while following the government's guidance on social distancing.

> We make clear in our approach to regulation and enforcement that we expect operators to take all reasonable steps to comply with regulatory requirements using contingency plans to help them

comply.

Businesses and householders should carry out checks to ensure that they are using legitimate companies to deal with their waste. To check if a waste carrier is genuine visit the Environment Agency's [public register](#).

Anyone who suspects a company is operating illegally can call the Environment Agency 24/7 on 0800 80 70 60 or report it anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Notes to editors

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[New funding for Defence Innovation Priorities](#)

News story

£1m of Defence Innovation funding has been set aside for civil sector support for the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) innovation priorities.

Industry and academia are being urged to submit their ideas to help MOD with its most pressing problems to face future threats.

The Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) will oversee the [Innovation Focus Areas](#) and is particularly keen to hear from those who've never before worked with Defence.

Last year, MOD outlined its five [innovation priorities](#) which were considered to be the priority themes and topics, with shared risks and issues. The challenges are to:

- Integrate information and physical activity across all domains: how can we integrate information and physical activity across domains (particularly space and cyber), and synchronise with wider government to increase understanding and operational tempo?
- Deliver agile command and control: how can we deliver agile command and control, to make faster, better decisions and generate decisive advantage in complex operations?
- Operate and deliver effects in contested domains: how can we operate and deliver military outcomes in denied and contested domains?
- Defence people, skills, knowledge and experience: how can we access people with the right skills, knowledge and experience?
- Simulate future battlespace complexity: how do we represent future battlespace complexity and higher levels of integration in training, wargaming and experimentation?

Suppliers can bid for funding by submitting their ideas through the [Open Call for Innovation](). If you have an idea and aren't sure if it fits the bill, DASA's Innovation Partners are [on hand to advise]().

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