

UK and US launch innovation prize challenges in privacy-enhancing technologies to tackle financial crime and public health emergencies

Today, the UK and US governments launched a set of prize challenges to unleash the potential of privacy-enhancing technologies (PETs) to combat global societal challenges. Announced at the Summit for Democracy last year, innovators from academia, industry, and the broader public will have the opportunity to participate in up to two separate tracks (improving detection of financial crime and forecasting an individual's risk of infection during a pandemic) as well as the option to design one generalised solution that works for both scenarios for broader applicability.

Competing for cash prizes from a combined UK-US prize pool of \$1.6 million (£1.3 million), innovators will develop privacy-preserving federated learning solutions that enable artificial intelligence models to be trained on sensitive data without organisations having to reveal, share, or combine their raw data. Winning challenge solutions will be showcased at the second Summit for Democracy, which President Biden plans to convene in the first half of 2023.

The first track – aimed at transforming financial crime prevention – will spur technological innovation to tackle the challenge of international money laundering. According to United Nations' (UN) [estimates](#), money laundering costs up to \$2 trillion each year, undermining economic prosperity and financing organised crime. PETs can be harnessed to facilitate privacy-preserving financial information sharing and collaborative analytics, allowing anomalous payments to be identified without compromising the privacy of individuals.

Innovators will work with synthetic global transaction data created by SWIFT, the global provider of secure financial messaging services. Registered challenge participants will receive access to data that is realistic, but artificial, and therefore does not run the risk of revealing private information.

To provide regulatory context important for understanding the potential of these maturing technologies to counter illicit financial activity, the prize challenges will provide opportunities for innovators to engage with regulators on both sides of the Atlantic, including the UK's Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), and the U.S. Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN). Innovators will also engage with the UK National Economic Crime Centre.

The second track of the challenges – aimed at bolstering pandemic response capabilities – will strengthen global readiness for ongoing and future public

health emergencies by developing privacy-preserving solutions that can forecast an individual's risk of infection. Innovators will have access to a synthetic dataset created by the University of Virginia's Biocomplexity Institute, which represents a digital twin of a regional population. As with the financial dataset, the pandemic response dataset is synthetic and will not reveal private information. Challenge participants will be able to engage with staff from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), NHS England, and the UK Research and Innovation DARE UK (Data and Analytics Research Environments UK) programme.

Nadine Dorries, Secretary of State for the U.K. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, said:

I'm delighted that we are today launching joint UK-US prize challenges to accelerate the adoption of privacy-enhancing technologies (PETs). These cutting-edge technologies can help us to harness the power of data to tackle global challenges like international money laundering and to plan for subsequent public health emergencies, while respecting citizens' rights. This partnership demonstrates the UK and US' commitment to working together to address transnational challenges, as well as to ensuring that our vision of the tech revolution – one that is open and democratic – prevails.

Dr. Alondra Nelson, head of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, said:

These prize challenges will catalyze talent and ingenuity on both sides of the Atlantic to advance privacy-enhancing technology solutions and enable their potential to tackle global challenges like those of cross-border financial crime and pandemic response.

This important initiative reflects our common purpose of developing technologies and driving innovation in a manner that reinforces our commitment to and expression of democratic values and the fundamental right to privacy.

Dr. Sethuraman Panchanathan, Director of the National Science Foundation (NSF), said:

Building on decades of NSF research investment in the field, these prize challenges will accelerate the translation of game-changing privacy-enhancing technologies. In this way, these prize challenges – supported by NSF's Directorate for Computer and Information Science and Engineering and the new Directorate for Technology, Innovation and Partnerships – illustrate the synergy of foundational research and translational activities in moving research to practice. By harnessing innovation across national

lines and strengthening a transatlantic community of innovation, the US-UK prize challenges will demonstrate the value of international collaboration to develop technologies in ways that uphold our shared values.

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo said:

We are on the cusp of solving some of the world's most intractable problems and improving our quality of life with the power of artificial intelligence, but we must do it responsibly by upholding our shared values around privacy,

I'm thrilled that we're launching these joint UK-US privacy-enhancing technology prize challenges and motivating our best researchers in industry and academia to innovate on protecting privacy so that we can all reap the benefits.

John Edwards, UK Information Commissioner, said:

Bringing the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) into the start of these prize challenges ensures peoples' privacy and trust are at the heart of the design process. People can have confidence in the power of personal data to save lives and stop financial crime.

Privacy-enhancing technologies allow for great innovation when used in the right way. We're looking forward to supporting these solutions and the final outcomes that will ultimately help the public.

Planning for the challenges is being led by the U.K. Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation (CDEI) and Innovate UK, and the U.S. White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF). The U.S. challenge is funded and administered by the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology and the U.S. National Science Foundation.

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Notes to editors:

- The multi-stage competition involves a white paper submission, prototype

development, and a red-teaming phase. Innovators have until Monday 19 September to enter the competition. More information about the prize challenges can be found at petsprizechallenges.com.

- The UK-US collaboration on the prize challenges was first [announced](#) at the first Summit for Democracy in December 2021.
- PETs allow sensitive personal or commercial data to be shared and/or analysed, while protecting individuals' privacy and proprietary information. PETs include maturing technologies, such as privacy-preserving federated learning, which allows machine learning models to be trained on high quality distributed datasets, without having to share the raw data.

[The Sizewell C Project development consent decision announced](#)

The application involves the construction of a new nuclear power station producing reliable, low-carbon electricity to help Britain achieve Net Zero. It is intended that Sizewell C will generate enough low-carbon electricity to supply six million homes.

The application was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration by NNB Nuclear Generation (SZC) Limited on 27 May 2020 and accepted for Examination on 24 June 2020.

Following an Examination during which the public, Statutory Consultees and Interested Parties were given the opportunity to give evidence to the Examining Authority, recommendations were made to the Secretary of State on 25 February 2022.

This is the 114th Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and 69th energy application to have been examined by The Planning Inspectorate within the timescales laid down in the Planning Act 2008.

The Planning Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Sarah Richards said:

"The Planning Inspectorate has now examined more than 100 nationally significant infrastructure projects since the Planning Act 2008 process was introduced, ensuring local communities have had the opportunity of being involved in the examination of projects that may affect them.

"This Examination took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions and the Examining Authority worked hard to ensure that local

people, the local authorities – East Suffolk District and Suffolk County Council – and other Interested Parties were able to fully participate.

“The Examining Authority listened and gave full consideration to local views and the evidence gathered during the Examination before making its recommendation.”

The decision, the recommendation made by the Examining Authority to the Secretary of State and the evidence considered by the Examining Authority in reaching its recommendation are publicly available on the project pages of the [National Infrastructure Planning website](#).

ENDS

Journalists wanting further information should contact the Planning Inspectorate Press Office, on 0303 444 5004 or 0303 444 5005 or email: Press.office@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Notes to editors:

The Planning Inspectorate’s [National Infrastructure Programme of Projects](#) details the proposals which are anticipated to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate as applications in the coming months.

Government to strengthen and modernise reservoir safety regime

The Government has today committed to improving reservoir safety through reforms to the regulatory regime and modernisation of the Reservoirs Act 1975 as it [accepted all of the recommendations](#) of the [second part of an independent review by Professor David Balmforth](#).

With the review recognising the strong safety track record of reservoirs in England, the reforms will help to ensure that the regulatory regime remains effective and robust in securing the ongoing safety of such critical infrastructure so that those living downstream of reservoirs are protected from flooding which could risk their lives and property.

They will build on action already being taken to improve reservoir safety following the incident at Toddbrook Reservoir in 2019, including the [government’s full implementation of the recommendations](#) of the first part of the independent review.

Environment Minister Steve Double said:

The safety of those living and working near reservoirs must always

be a priority. By modernising and reforming legislation and regulation regimes, we will help to protect communities and provide them with increased peace of mind.

Professor Balmforth's review provided us with a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the reservoir safety regime, and the progress that is needed to ensure it is fit for the future, with safety standards consistently applied across all our reservoirs.

Caroline Douglass, Environment Agency Executive Director for Flood and Coastal Risk Management, said:

England has a strong reservoir safety record, but we are always be looking for ways to improve our approach, especially in the face of a changing climate.

We look forward to working with Defra, reservoir owners, and engineers to implement these reforms and ensure that reservoirs are regulated using a modern risk-based approach.

Reform of the regulatory programme will be delivered in collaboration with reservoir owners and engineers over the coming years, with a timeline that will ensure that the changes can be managed by industry while maintaining ongoing reservoir safety management.

In 2022/23 and 2023/24, reforms will be made through existing powers, guidance and training, including:

- improving enforcement options and flexibility using civil sanctions;
- introducing review of engineers' reports by the Environment Agency;
- developing proposals for a proportionate charging scheme to improve recovery of regulatory costs; and
- introducing a free registration scheme for owners of small raised reservoirs during 2022/23.

In 2023/24, a consultation on the modernisation of the Reservoirs Act will look at:

- developing a new risk/hazard classification and how it could operate;
- developing proposals to make the future supply of reservoir engineers more sustainable;
- developing proposals for regulating small raised reservoirs within the new safety regime, for consultation.

The reforms will build on actions which are already being taken to improve reservoir safety following the incident at Toddbrook Reservoir in 2019, including a Ministerial Direction requiring all large raised reservoirs to have on site emergency flood plans, new guidance on spillway inspection and management, new guidance for reservoir engineers about carrying out

inspections and supervision, and research to improve the future supply of engineers.

[Easier access to locally-applied HRT to treat postmenopausal vaginal symptoms in landmark MHRA reclassification](#)

For the first time ever in the UK, postmenopausal women will be able to access a low dose Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) product from their local pharmacies without prescription, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) announced today.

Gina 10 microgram vaginal tablets (containing estradiol) are used for the treatment of vaginal symptoms such as dryness, soreness, itching, burning and uncomfortable sex caused by oestrogen deficiency in postmenopausal women aged 50 years and above who have not had a period for at least 1 year. This product is locally-applied, meaning it is inserted into the vagina and not taken orally.

The decision to reclassify these vaginal tablets follows a safety review by the MHRA, independent advice from the [Commission on Human Medicines](#) (CHM), and a [public consultation](#). The UK regulator sought views from patients, pharmacists, prescribers and a wide range of stakeholders including the Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists, the Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare, the British Pharmacopoeia Commission and the British Menopause Society.

Low-dose vaginal estradiol has been widely used for the treatment of postmenopausal vaginal symptoms as a prescription medicine since 1991 and has a well-established safety profile. The product will be supplied from a pharmacy when it is considered safe and suitable to do so, following consultation with a pharmacist.

Pharmacists are trained healthcare professionals. They will have access to training materials and a checklist that will enable them to advise women on whether these low dose vaginal tablets are appropriate and safe for them to use and to give the information they need, so they can make informed choices. Other vaginal tablets that also contain estradiol, including Vagifem 10 microgram vaginal tablets, will still be available on prescription.

Dr Laura Squire, Chief Healthcare Quality and Access Officer at the MHRA,

said:

This is a landmark reclassification for the millions of women in the UK who are going through the menopause and experience severe symptoms that negatively impact their everyday life. Women will be able to safely obtain a local vaginal HRT product without a prescription, which increases women's access to treatment and gives them greater control over their choices while relieving pressure on frontline GP services.

In reaching this decision, we have seen positive support from a wide range of people, including many women aged 50 years and above who could benefit from this decision. We would like to thank everyone who submitted their view in our public consultation.

We will continue to improve women's access to medicines for menopausal care when it is safe to do so, and to place their views at the centre of our regulatory decisions.

Minister for Health, Maria Caulfield, said:

Menopause affects hundreds of thousands of women every year, but for some its symptoms can be debilitating and for many they can be misunderstood or ignored.

Making Gina available over the counter is a huge step forward in enabling women to access HRT as easily as possible, ensuring they can continue living their life as they navigate the menopause.

We're putting women's health to the top of the agenda – our Women's Health Strategy published today is testament to that. More widely we're continuing to work with suppliers and manufacturers to secure sustainable short-term and long-term access to HRT and our UK-wide menopause taskforce will tackle taboos and issues surrounding menopause.

Systemic HRT medicines circulate in the blood and are used to treat hot flushes and other menopausal symptoms. They include oral tablets and patches (transdermal patches) and gels which are put on the skin. Local HRT such as Gina is applied directly to the vagina and gradually releases into the vaginal tissue with very little absorption into the bloodstream.

Notes to Editors

- [Consultation outcome](#) – The public consultation received 1229 responses, with over 88% being in favour of the reclassification. All the responses received were carefully considered.
- [Public assessment report for the prescription only medicine to pharmacy reclassification of Gina 10 microgram vaginal tablets.](#)

- We are committed to widening access to medicines for the benefit of public health when it is safe to do so. Further information on reclassification can be found [here](#) and the criteria for prescription control can be found [here](#).
 - Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is responsible for regulating all medicines and medical devices in the UK by ensuring they work and are acceptably safe. All our work is underpinned by robust and fact-based judgements to ensure that the benefits justify any risks. MHRA is an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care.
 - The Commission on Human Medicines (CHM) advises ministers on the safety, efficacy and quality of medicinal products.
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Crackdown on corrupt elites abusing UK legal system to silence critics

- courts to be given new powers to protect free speech and journalists' rights
- new three-part test to help spot and strike out meritless cases more quickly
- costs cap to protect people from threat of expensive legal battles

The Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab has today (20 July 2022) set out a package of measures that take aim at so-called 'Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation' (SLAPPs).

This includes a new mechanism to allow courts to throw out baseless claims quicker and a cap on costs to prevent the mega-rich, such as Russian oligarchs, from using expensive litigation as a weapon to silence their critics.

SLAPPs typically involve wealthy individuals or large businesses using the threat of endless legal action and associated costs – sometimes totalling millions of pounds – to muzzle their opponents under defamation and privacy laws. This tactic is increasingly being used to intimidate journalists, authors, and campaigners into limiting or abandoning critical stories or books. Most cases never make it to court because authors often back down under a barrage of aggressive legal letters – many retract stories in fear of financial ruin.

Responses to a government call for evidence unveiled today revealed that this is having a chilling effect. Journalists, media organisations and publishers reported that they no longer publish information on certain individuals or topics – such as exposing serious wrong-doing or corruption – because of potential legal costs.

Ministers are determined to put an end to this bullying and protect the UK's free press and will legislate at the earliest opportunity.

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

We won't let those bankrolling Putin exploit the UK's legal jurisdiction to muzzle their critics. So today, I'm announcing reforms to uphold freedom of speech, end the abuse of our justice system, and defend those who bravely shine a light on corruption.

Under the reforms, a court will apply a new three-part test to determine whether a case should be thrown out immediately or allowed to progress.

First, it will assess if the case is against activity in the public interest – for example investigating financial misconduct by a company or individual. Then, it will examine if there's evidence of abuse of process, such as whether the claimant has sent a barrage of highly aggressive letters on a trivial matter. Finally, it will review whether the case has sufficient merit – specifically if it has a realistic prospect of success.

Anyone subject to a suspected SLAPPs case will be able to apply to the court to have it considered for early dismissal.

Crucially, ministers will also introduce a new costs protection scheme to level the playing field between wealthy claimants with deep pockets and defendants.

The move seeks to shield those fighting lawsuits from crippling costs and enable meritless cases to be properly defended. The Government will consult the Civil Procedure Rules Committee as necessary and set out the design of the scheme and the precise level of cost caps in due course.

Earlier this year, the High Court dismissed a libel claim against the British journalist, Tom Burgis, brought by a Kazakh-owned mining firm for his book 'Kleptopia: How Dirty Money is Conquering the world', but often the purpose of SLAPPs is to suppress publications without a case ever coming to court and being reported.

Michelle Stanistreet, General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists said:

The NUJ has long been campaigning at national and international level against the use of defamation legislation to crush journalists and journalism.

Publication of these proposals is a significant step in tackling the deployment of SLAPPs and other forms of lawfare designed to stymie journalistic investigations. Abuse of the law by the sly and mighty, who deeply resent the legitimate work of the media in

calling them to account, is a scourge which must be eradicated.

A free media is vital to the functioning of a democracy. That freedom is severely curtailed when those with deep pockets are allowed to use the law to threaten the very future of media organisations.

Dawn Alford, Executive Director of the Society of Editors said:

The Society welcomes the announcement by the government of a package of measures to tackle SLAPPs. For too long wealthy and powerful individuals and corporations have been able to weaponise and abuse the legal system to avoid public scrutiny while journalists, academics and authors have faced fear and harassment when carrying out their important roles.

The introduction of a new mechanism to allow the courts to throw out meritless cases more quickly and a cap on costs are essential protections that should deter the wealthy from using the threat of expensive litigation to silence their critics and should allow journalists and others the ability to fulfil their roles as the public's watchdog without bullying or intimidation.

Meanwhile, the government's Bill of Rights will further strengthen freedom of the press and freedom of expression. It will introduce a stronger test for courts to consider before they can order journalists to disclose their sources.

Today's announcement follows a new clamp down on misconduct of solicitors and lawyers. The Solicitors Regulation Authority will have powers to fine rule-breakers up to £25,000, increased from £2,000. The regulator will also be able to penalise them for a broader range of offences – from lower-level cases involving inadequate staff training to those with more serious consequences including failure to implement the appropriate checks required to uncover signs of money laundering by clients.

The government has also committed to looking further into the case for reform to defamation laws.

Earlier this year the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act was expedited through Parliament which includes strengthened powers to crack down on corrupt elites and ramp up pressure on Putin's regime.

Notes to Editors

- In March, the government launched an urgent call for evidence in response to the increasing use of a form of litigation known collectively as SLAPPs – Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation.
- Today it has published its response, setting out major reforms to

protect the UK legal system from abuse.

- The new early dismissal mechanism requires primary legislation. The government will legislate at the earliest opportunity.
- The proposed cost protection scheme can be introduced via secondary legislation. The government will consult on proposals before setting out next steps.
- [Bill of Rights](#) to strengthen freedom of speech and curb bogus human rights claims.
- [Extra powers for regulators](#) to clamp down on rule-breaking solicitors.
- The [Economic Crime Act](#) was expedited through Parliament earlier this year. It enables the Government to move more quickly to impose sanctions against oligarchs already designated by our allies, as well as intensifying our sanctions enforcement.