

UK's top female entrepreneurs backed by government to fire up economy through innovation

- 40 of the UK's leading women innovators to scale up their innovations to help the UK recover from COVID-19 and tackle global challenges
- from Belfast to Bristol, pioneering ideas will receive a £50,000 government grant to scale up their plans
- investment comes on International Women's Day and the start of British Science Week, and is part of the government's bold ambition to build back better through innovative science and research

Visionary British female entrepreneurs are receiving government backing to drive forward their novel innovations and business ideas, as the UK builds back better from the COVID-19 pandemic and progresses its climate change ambitions.

Announced today (Monday 8 March 2021) by Science Minister Amanda Solloway to mark International Women's Day, 40 of the country's top female innovators will be awarded a cash injection of £50,000 each, as well as bespoke mentoring, to scale up and bring to market their disruptive business ideas, many of which have been borne out in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Located right across the UK, from Scotland to Salisbury, business innovations receiving government backing include a company creating sustainable green interior furniture for the airline industry, an app to make emergency services more accessible for those suffering from domestic abuse and an innovative technology to help large organisations to manage and reduce their waste.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

As we build back better from COVID, it is a priority of mine to continue equipping our brightest female innovators with the tools they need to succeed, while encouraging a new generation of women to come forward and pursue their ambitions.

Today we are supporting 40 of our most trailblazing female entrepreneurs, helping them to turn their innovative ideas and aspirations into a reality, creating the products and services that will help improve our lives and boost our economy.

Among the entrepreneurs being backed today are:

- Joan D'Arcy, founder of Plastic@Bay in Durness, North West Scotland, who aims to help protect the UK's environment by developing Local Ocean

Plastic Recycling Facilities (LOPRF) in coastal communities up and down the UK. These facilities will be capable of recycling ocean plastic quickly onsite and at a low cost, converting plastic waste into construction materials. As well as tapping into a local source of material, these facilities will also provide local employment and training opportunities for young people, with each recycling facility employing at least 3 people to use and maintain the low tech recycling machines

- Samantha Bunyan co-founder of Cecence in Salisbury, who is decarbonising the aerospace industry by providing eco-friendly alternatives to the current interior products of UK aeroplanes. Cecence will use the funding to develop a range of furniture for economy and business class aerospace interiors – all of which will be made with sustainable composite materials, including recycled materials and natural fibres. The funding will also enable the business to develop sustainable aerospace in-flight carry-on items, such as amenity kits, expanding their customer base for clean products beyond businesses to consumers
- Lise Pape, founder of Walk with Path in London who is being backed to develop a first of its kind medical device – Path Feel – a smart insole which aims to improve mobility for older people suffering from chronic conditions such as Parkinson's. The insole responds directly to pressure applied and vibrates to help the user feel the floor and balance, removing the reliance on canes and frames

Today's funding is part of the government's flagship Women in Innovation Awards, delivered by Innovate UK, part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), which seeks to boost the number of UK female entrepreneurs, which could deliver £180 billion to the economy. Each winner will receive a £50,000 cash boost and a bespoke package of mentoring and business support to help drive forward their pioneering products and services.

Emily Nott, Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Innovate UK said:

With 2020 proving to be an incredibly difficult year for everyone, and particularly women, continuing to support female entrepreneurs in 2021 has been a real priority for Innovate UK. We have had an enormous response and we can see some positives from the pandemic, with some of our shortlist inspired to start up a business in response to some of the challenges it has brought.

Working alongside the winners, Innovate UK will help them grow further. We can't wait to see what else these inspiring women achieve and how they can be an example to inspire the next generation and to encourage more women-led businesses in this country as we rebuild and recover. It forms a key part of the government's ambitious [R&D Roadmap](#), published in July 2020, which committed to supporting the UK's innovators and risk-takers by backing entrepreneurs and start-ups with the funding needed to scale up their innovations.

Emma Shaw, co-founder of Library of Things said:

Everyone should have access to quality products that improve their homes, lives and environment, without it costing the earth – whether it's a drill for a DIY job, a tent for a camping adventure or tools for the garden. LoT has been overwhelmed with demand from communities across the UK wanting to bring the scheme to their neighbourhoods – and from local governments and businesses wanting to commission LoT's service to stimulate their local circular economy.

Notes to editors

Other recipients of this year's Women in Innovation awards include:

- Becca Hume, from Belfast, Northern Ireland, founder of TapSOS: Becca is being backed to develop her technology which aims to ensure emergency services are more accessible and inclusive. The TapSOS app provides a non-verbal tool to create alerts to Police, Fire & Rescue, Ambulance and Coastguard. Initially designed for the deaf and those hard of hearing, this investment will enable Becca to expand its services to victims of domestic abuse for discreet reporting when calling 999 isn't safe – particularly in response to the significant rise of domestic abuse as a result of COVID-19
- Sophie Walker from Derbyshire, co-founder of DSPOSAL: Sophie set up her clean technology company, DSPOSAL, to empower people to make better decisions with their resources and waste, to help clean up our environment. She will use the funding to develop new digital software which will enable waste managers at large organisations, such as the NHS, to better manage their waste supply chain, and tackle waste crime, which costs the UK economy £1 billion a year. The software will be piloted at Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust, one of the largest NHS Trusts in the country.
- Emma Shaw from London, co-founder of Library of Things: Emma aims to scale up her business Library of Things, the first and only household product rental kiosk operator in the world, helping people to save money and reduce waste by affordably renting over 50 quality DIY products including drills, hedge trimmers and gazebos. The business aims to unlock a new, 'circular' model of consumerism in cities across the UK, where borrowing is better than buying – more affordable/convenient for individuals, more rewarding for communities and kinder to the planet. They plan to have established over 100 kiosks across the UK by 2025.
- Sarah Henley, founder of NextUp, a comedy organisation in London will

use the funding to champion and support live UK comedy, which like many industries, has been severely impacted by COVID-19. As lockdown restrictions begin to ease, NextUp will develop an innovative streaming technology that will allow for an in-person and live-streamed 'Hybrid Audience' – all of whom can interact with the comic and enjoy the 'live' experience. Not only will this open up an additional revenue stream for venues and performers, but it will also make live music more accessible for those unable to make the performance in person – for example due to health conditions, or COVID restrictions.

About Women in Innovation

Innovate UK launched Women in Innovation in 2016, after research revealed that just 1 in 7 applications for Innovate UK support came from women. Boosting the number of female entrepreneurs could deliver £180 billion to the economy.

The aim was to get more women with excellent ideas innovating within UK businesses. Women in Innovation is part of Innovate UK's [commitment to promote greater diversity and inclusion in business innovation](#).

The programme seeks to find women with exciting, innovative ideas and ambitious plans that will inspire others. The awards are for female founders, co-founders or senior decision makers working in businesses that have been operating for at least one year. The programme support includes a £50,000 grant for each individual, as well as a bespoke package of mentoring, coaching and business support.

The campaign and awards programme in 2016 and 2018 have had a huge impact so far. The number of women applying to Innovate UK's funding and support has increased by 70%. The Women in Innovation Awards 2020/21 will build on this success.

For more details see: ktn-uk.org/programme/women-in-innovation/

About Innovate UK

Innovate UK drives productivity and economic growth by supporting businesses to develop and realise the potential of new ideas, including those from the UK's world-class research base. They connect businesses to the partners, customers and investors that can help them turn these ideas into commercially successful products and services, and business growth.