

Government announces cutting-edge new telecoms lab for Solihull

- New research for Birmingham Tech Week shows West Midlands is one of the UK's fastest growing tech sectors – valued at £15.3 billion, up from £11.5 billion in 2021
- Hiring by Birmingham tech firms is up by a fifth in 2022 and a third across the West Midlands, with over 2,300 startups and scaleups in the region

A new state-of-the-art UK Telecommunications Lab will be based in Solihull, creating dozens of high-skilled jobs for the region, Tech Minister Damian Collins has announced today.

The first of its kind in the country, the Lab will act as a secure research facility bringing together telecom operators, suppliers and academics to research and test innovative new ways of boosting the security, resilience and performance of the UK's mobile networks. It will help close the digital skills gap locally as well as nationally by creating dozens of specialised jobs in telecoms and cyber security.

New research out today, which has been commissioned by the government for Birmingham Tech Week, also shows a large increase in the number of tech startups and scaleups across Birmingham and the West Midlands.

There has been a 21.3 per cent increase in tech jobs in Birmingham in the seven months to July 2022, rising to 31 per cent across the West Midlands region, according to analysis by smarter job search engine [Adzuna](#) for the UK's Digital Economy Council.

There are now over 144,000 people employed in tech startups and scaleups across the West Midlands, with over 56,000 in Birmingham alone. The boost to hiring follows a sharp increase in the value of West Midlands tech companies, with the region's tech ecosystem now valued at £15.3 billion, up from £11.5 billion in 2021, according to new data from Dealroom.

The analysis shows the West Midlands has become one of the UK's biggest digital sectors – with health, transport and sports tech companies flourishing in particular. Since 2020, West Midlands tech companies have raised over £850 million in venture capital funding.

Tech Minister Damian Collins said:

After this summer's stunning Commonwealth Games it is great to feel the buzz in the city yet again in Birmingham Tech Week.

Fast-growing firms are cementing Birmingham's status as a tech powerhouse – boosting jobs and spreading economic growth right across the West Midlands.

As a result, there is no better home for the new UK Telecoms Lab, which will turn the region into a centre for expertise and innovation in the security of next-generation mobile networks.

New cutting-edge telecoms test lab

The ever-increasing speed and reliability of mobile and broadband networks has supercharged the UK's economy, but it also means we are more dependent on telecoms infrastructure.

As the demand for 5G grows and next-generation 6G is on the horizon, having a new national research facility in one location will enable telecom companies and suppliers to test their equipment – such as radio network infrastructure and the software which underpins it – in a realistic environment.

The UK Telecoms Lab will help get faster mobile technology rolled out quicker and ensure people can continue to have full confidence in UK networks by identifying national security risks and vulnerabilities and ensuring vital equipment and software are protected against cyber attacks.

The lab will help new businesses enter the UK telecoms market by testing to ensure equipment is fully 'interoperable', meaning it can connect to kit supplied by different manufacturers, which is increasingly important to the government's £250 million strategy to diversify the UK 5G telecoms market.

The Lab will be based in the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull. The government will announce further details about the Lab in due course.

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, said:

Tech is one of the most exciting and fastest growing sectors in our region. This fantastic announcement that Solihull will be the home of the new UK Telecoms Lab yet again underlines the strength of this important sector for us here in the West Midlands. The Lab will bring a wide range of stakeholders together to drive innovation and create high quality new jobs for local people.

As we mark Birmingham Tech Week, it's a great time to remember that we are at the cutting edge and – with our tech sector already valued at over £15 billion – we have an exciting future ahead of us.

[**Update to DBS customer contact centre**](#)

services – 17 to 30 October

Planned industrial action by staff from contractors Hinduja Global Solutions (HGS) is set to affect Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) customer contact centre services between 17 October 2022 and 30 October 2022.

Customers contacting DBS during the period of industrial action by telephone, email, or webchat may face some disruption and delays. This is due to industrial action by staff working for HGS. HGS is contracted to provide DBS customer contact centre services as well as a certain number of DBS administrative functions.

During the industrial action, HGS is putting additional resources in place to try and minimise the inconvenience to customers as much as possible.

The industrial action is not expected to have any significant impact on turnaround times for DBS checks or barring decisions. Our core services will not be affected, and employers and customers should continue to access them as normal.

During the industrial action from 17 October to 30 October 2022, the times of the customer contact centre will be reduced to:

- Monday – Friday – 9am to 5pm
- Saturday and Sunday – Closed

Customers can still contact DBS during the period of industrial action, but they may face some disruption and delays. The main options to contact DBS are by:

To ensure your query is dealt with as quickly as possible, please provide your full name, address including postcode, and telephone number. Please also include any DBS reference numbers if relevant.

If you are contacting us about an application, please provide 5 of the following: full name, address including postcode, date of birth, position applied for, name of employer, National Insurance Number, a previous address, place of birth and/or your 'E' or 'F' reference.

In addition to the above, Registered Bodies will also need to provide their 'Registered Body reference number' and 'Countersignatory reference number' to confirm their identity.

For answers to general queries that are not related to a specific application, customers can also contact DBS via social media:

Customers can access more help and advice by reading our customer factsheet: [Advice for customers during HGS industrial action](#) (MS Word Document, 19.1 KB)

OSCE report on combating trafficking in human beings: UK response, October 2022

Thank you, Special Representative Richie, for preparing this report and for your and your team's work during this particularly challenging time.

I welcome your office's reaction to Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine and prioritisation of this most pressing issue and its possible consequences for human trafficking.

As Russia continues its war of aggression against Ukraine we are used at this council to hearing about the terrible price innocent Ukrainian civilians pay for Russia's bloody war. For those living in temporarily Russian-controlled areas life can be unbearable in many ways, but reports that Ukrainian parents are being separated from their children are particularly heart breaking.

The [second Moscow Mechanism report](#) documented large-scale deportations of people to Russia against their will, and cases of orphaned children brought to Russia, whose whereabouts are now unknown.

Ukrainians forced to flee their homes are vulnerable to human trafficking. The UK is helping these people through our [Ukraine Family Visa](#) and [Homes for Ukraine](#) scheme. We recognise that there are organised criminals who would exploit vulnerable refugees entering the UK, which is why our foreign ministry works closely with our visa issuing agency and housing ministry to mitigate these risks.

Dear Val,

Your response to the war in Ukraine was quick and effective. We welcomed the immediate policy responses to enhance anti-trafficking prevention and the specific recommendations for cyber and trafficking police, technology companies, and NGOs working to prevent and combat online exploitation. The existing guidelines for the identification and referral of victims among migrants and refugees was also a useful tool following Russia's invasion.

We share your assessment of the highly gendered and toxic demand for sexual services that resulted from the migration flows, as criminals preyed on the vulnerability of those fleeing. We welcome your gender-sensitive approach. The specific needs of women and children are also factored into our humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine.

The UK is pleased to be able to financially support your office's project to respond to the increasing risk of trafficking as a result of the migration from Ukraine, particularly targeting destination and transit countries.

At the [Alliance conference](#) this year, we were grateful for the conference's specific focus on migration risks from Ukraine and the needs of victims, especially on methods for identifying victims, the scale of the problem, and the types of support that victims in these cases may require.

Ensuring victims get the support they need and are empowered requires us to better understand drivers and vulnerabilities. This is done by listening to survivors, and having their voices shape the support and protection we can offer, which is why the UK has commissioned independent research through the Modern Slavery Policy and Evidence Centre to inform our approach. We look forward to sharing the findings of this research with you all at a later date.

We support your office's efforts to focus on partnerships. Indeed, modern slavery is not an issue that can be fought alone. Earlier this year G7 leaders continued the focus on supply chains from the UK's Presidency in 2021. New commitments included calling on others to align to the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights, the ILO Principles, and the OECD Guidelines for responsible business.

In concluding, I was pleased to see you were able to resume travel this year, and completed country visits to Poland, Moldova, Romania and Hungary, working with national and local governments and civil society organisations to raise awareness, offer targeted advice, and develop project proposals.

We look forward to welcoming you and your staff next month for your country visit to the UK, and the helpful and constructive recommendations and findings that we are sure will result.

Thank you again, Val, to you and your team for your tireless work and this report.

[CMA issues proposals to address overcharging for emergency service radio network](#)

- Home Office and emergency services appear to be locked in with monopoly provider
- Provisional assessment finds lack of competition is allowing Motorola to make around £160 million excess profits a year
- CMA proposes price control on Airwave Network to ensure lower cost for taxpayers
- Long-term future of the Airwave Network to be resolved by the Home Office

The Airwave Network provides the essential separate mobile network that enables the police, fire, ambulance and other emergency services to communicate securely.

A market investigation by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), led by an independent group of experts, has provisionally concluded that Motorola, which operates the network, appears to be able to charge the Home Office (which represents the emergency services) prices well above competitive levels, resulting in higher costs which are ultimately paid by taxpayers. The CMA has therefore outlined a set of proposed changes to limit the price that Motorola can charge to a level that would apply in a well-functioning, competitive market.

The Airwave Network was originally commissioned by the Home Office through an open procurement exercise in 2000. The original contract, which was due to end in late 2019 or early 2020, was to build and operate the Airwave Network – and the network was expected to be shut down and replaced by a new secure communications solution using a commercial 4G mobile network, the Emergency Services Network (ESN), when the contract ended.

However, because the new ESN network was not ready for switchover as planned, and is not expected to be ready until 2026 and possibly later, the emergency services continue to rely on the Airwave Network, which is a monopoly provider of these essential communications services.

The CMA opened its investigation in October 2021 following concerns that the market might not be working well, resulting in a more expensive service. One concern was the Home Office's weak bargaining position when it came to the network; another was Motorola's dual role in providing the current network and in helping to deliver the ESN to replace it. The CMA also wanted to understand if the significant profits Motorola could earn from the Airwave Network affected its incentive to support (and not to delay) the delivery of ESN.

Martin Coleman, chair of the CMA's independent inquiry group, said:

"It is vital that the market for critical mobile radio network services used by our emergency services works well and provides an excellent service at a fair price.

"As far as the price is concerned, the market does not appear to be working well at the moment. Our current view is that the Home Office and our emergency services are locked in with a monopoly provider which can charge much more than it could in a properly functioning market, while taxpayers foot the bill. We are therefore proposing a direct intervention through a price control to stop this and lay the basis for the Home Office to decide how it intends to ensure these vital services are to be delivered in future."

In its provisional findings, published today, the CMA has found that the Home Office is being charged more by Motorola to use the Airwave Network than should be the case. The price set under the original agreement entered into in 2000 included the capital costs of building the network. By the time the

period covered by the original agreement ended, that cost should have been recouped, and the price should have fallen substantially at that point – in the same way that consumers can get cheaper mobile deals after they have paid off their handset. This did not happen, and prices remained at substantially the same level. But unlike consumers, the emergency services have no choice of an alternative supplier.

The CMA's provisional estimate is that Motorola could make in the region of £1.1bn excess profit from the operation of the network between January 2020 and December 2026. If the roll-out of the new ESN continues to be delayed, Motorola could make around a further £160m excess profit each year after 2026.

Recent figures suggest while the Airwave Network accounts for around 7% of Motorola's global revenues, it makes up around 21% of Motorola's global pre-tax profits.

The CMA has also recommended that the Home Office puts in place a clear plan as soon as possible to ensure that a new, upgraded network, or more competitive arrangements, replace the existing set-up by the end of 2029.

The CMA is inviting comments on its provisional findings and expects to make a final decision later in the year. For more information, visit the [Mobile radio network services case page](#).

1. For media enquiries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or press@cma.gov.uk.
2. Motorola Solutions, Inc. (Motorola) is the ultimate parent company of Airwave Solutions Limited, the entity through which it owns and operates the Airwave Network. Motorola gained its dual role when it bought Airwave Solutions in a merger deal in February 2016, 2 months after it had entered into a contract with the Government to provide software for ESN. The merger was cleared by the CMA, in part because of the general expectation that the Airwave Network would be shut down by 2019.
3. As a bespoke, integrated network fully dedicated to emergency services communications covering the whole of Great Britain, the Airwave Network is operated by a single supplier. No alternative network providing similar services exists.
4. Excess profits mean profits over and above what would be expected in a well-functioning market.

[Award win for data visualisation](#)

News story

The Operational Support Team at 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic) have

received the Best Data Visualisation award at the 2022 DataIQ awards.



The Operational Support Team at 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic) having received the Best Data Visualisation award at the 2022 DataIQ awards.

Beating competitors including British Airways, Ikea, and Specsavers, the team received the prestigious title for their visualisation of data which is now used on a global scale.

From military deployments across the world to major scale events in the UK such as COP26, Platinum Jubilee and the Commonwealth Games, the work of the team has been crucial in speeding up and increasing the effectiveness of decision-making.

The data visualisation allows commanders of troops deployed in Estonia and Mali to understand complex situations and explore possible options in a way more effective than paper maps previously used.

The capabilities also offer benefits on a much broader scale than operations, with data being vital to the success of the COVID-19 mass testing and forming the dashboard of key assets for the Duke of Edinburgh's funeral.

Due to the effectiveness of the new visualisation tools, the methods are now being adopted by the NATO geospatial community expanding the benefits to partner nations to bolster our combined security.

Speaking about the team's win Caroline Bellamy, the Chief Data Officer for Defence, said:

The incredible data and digital work that is done right across the military and wider MoD is of the highest order. It's superb to see this and be part of amplifying not only what we do but how important it is.

Team Commander, Captain Damon Mitchell, expressed his pride in the team's success saying:

I am extremely proud to be part of a small team that are able to be

recognised and compete against the likes of British Airways. To win an award in recognition for the support we provide to teams across UK and global operations is an honour and something the team and our regiment are very proud of.

Alongside the team's success, four individuals from the wider Royal Engineer (Geographic) diaspora were announced as finalists across the spectrum of awards for the work they do in harnessing the power of spatial data for users across Defence.

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