

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.

Government launches G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council

- Liz Truss appointed Ministerial lead, with Sarah Sands as Chair
- Council will make recommendations to the G7 on policy to drive women's empowerment, with a particular focus on science and technology.
- Members will include Prof Sarah Gilbert – who led work on the AZ/Oxford vaccine – and other high-profile women from the world of tech, science and engineering.

The government has today announced the creation of a new advisory council – led by Liz Truss at ministerial level – to lead the UK's gender equality work at the G7.

The Gender Equality Advisory Council will produce recommendations to drive women's empowerment across the world to ensure women are at the heart of the build back better agenda as we recover from COVID-19.

Distinguished journalist and author, Sarah Sands, has been appointed as the Chair of the GEAC, with further members set to be announced in the coming weeks. Sands' career has showcased an ability to drive forward the UK's news agenda and hold politicians to account, both of which will support the work of the Council.

The Prime Minister has asked Truss to lead the work of the Council at ministerial level, which he sees as a crucial part of the UK's broader work as G7 president this year. With the role of women in science, tech and engineering amplified by the UK's vaccine development and rollout, Ministers will also use the G7 to encourage more women and girls to take up STEM based careers or education opportunities.

Building on the foundations laid by the Canadian and French G7 presidencies, the GEAC will champion the core principles of freedom, opportunity, individual humanity and dignity for women and girls around the world. They will produce an independent report and set out recommendations as to how the G7 should work together so that women across the globe drive and benefit from the pandemic recovery.

International Trade Secretary and Minister for Women & Equalities, Liz Truss, said:

"The UK has long been a leading champion of women and girl's rights at home and around the globe.

"We have today announced a fantastic Chair of the GEAC and will assemble a

council of world leaders in fields from science and health to economics, education and technology.

“Women are at the forefront of our recovery from COVID-19 and the work of GEAC will advance these efforts on a global scale, helping women build back better everywhere.”

Chair of the Gender Equality Advisory Council, Sarah Sands, said:

“The G7 is an opportunity to tear down the hurdles that hold women back.

“Across the world we share common objectives: protection from violence, the liberating force of education and economic empowerment.

“I am honoured to chair the GEAC council and delighted that women are placed at the centre of the UK’s global vision.”

Against the backdrop of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 GEAC will focus on supporting action on education, economic empowerment and ending violence against women. This will build on the government’s commitment to build back better, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

The UK is determined that gender equality is viewed as vitally important throughout this year’s presidency, which is why GEAC members will report to G7 Leaders, whilst being invited to support each G7 ministerial group in integrating gender equality across all of their actions.

On International Women’s Day, the UK will unite to recognise the role of women in combating the pandemic, whether that is on the front line in healthcare and retail roles, providing unpaid care work or playing a crucial part in developing vaccines. The GEAC will build on this, putting gender equality at the heart of the recovery effort across the world.

Further Information:

Council members will be selected based on the wide-ranging experiences and perspectives on gender equality they can bring to the G7 Summit themes: COVID-19 response and recovery, prosperity and trade, climate and environment, and global values. The GEAC will include members from each G7 country.

Full membership of the Council will be announced in the coming weeks.

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe: Foreign](#)

Secretary statement

Press release

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab comments on the removal of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's ankle tag.



Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

We welcome the removal of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's ankle tag, but Iran continues to put her and her family through a cruel and an intolerable ordeal.

She must be released permanently so she can return to her family in the UK. We will continue to do all we can to achieve this.

We have relayed to the Iranian authorities in the strongest possible terms that her continued confinement is unacceptable.

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Contact the FCDO Communication Team via email (monitored 24 hours a day) in the first instance, and we will respond as soon as possible.

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Schools and colleges to reopen from

tomorrow as part of Step One of the roadmap

The Prime Minister has today hailed the collective efforts of the public to bring infection rates down so we can start Step One of the roadmap, with pupils across England returning to school and college from tomorrow.

Throughout the pandemic, the Prime Minister and Chief Medical Officer have been clear of the benefits that being in school brings to the physical and mental health of children and young people. Getting children back to face to face education has remained the national priority throughout lockdown.

The sacrifices that have been made by each and every member of the public by staying at home whilst the most vulnerable in our society have been vaccinated, has meant that we can now begin the cautious easing of restrictions. Millions of children and young people will be reunited with their friends and teachers, with schools returning from tomorrow.

Many secondary schools and colleges have already started inviting students for their first rapid lateral flow test, with schools and colleges having discretion on how to stagger the return of their students over the next week to facilitate testing and their safe return to the classroom. After three initial tests on-site students will be provided with two rapid tests to use each week at home.

Nearly 57 million lateral flow tests have already been delivered to schools and colleges across the country. Over 5 million lateral flow tests have been conducted across education settings during lockdown, with nearly one million last week alone.

Prime Minister, Boris Johnson said:

The reopening of schools marks a truly national effort to beat this virus. It is because of the determination of every person in this country that we can start moving closer to a sense of normality – and it is right that getting our young people back into the classroom is the first step.

We are being cautious in our approach so that we do not undo the progress we have made so far and I urge you all not to give up on your efforts to keep your families and others safe. Get the vaccine, get tested, and remember that we are all in this together.

The government has confirmed twice-weekly testing using lateral flow tests will be given for free to all adults in households with primary, secondary school and college-aged children and young people, including childcare and support bubbles, to help find more Covid-19 cases and break chains of transmission. One in three people who have coronavirus have no symptoms and

will be spreading it without realising it, so rapid regular testing offers a reliable and effective additional tool to help keep schools safe. Twice-weekly testing will also be offered to adults working in the wider school community, including bus drivers and after school club leaders.

As we move towards a more normal way of life, testing will be a key part of continuing to protect loved ones and the community. As the Health Secretary set out earlier this week, our roadmap is built on the principle of replacing the protection that comes from lockdown with the protection that comes from vaccines and regular testing.

Lateral flow testing detects cases quickly – in under 30 minutes – meaning positive cases can isolate immediately. This could be the difference between finding and isolating cases and their close contacts, or a whole school being sent home due to an outbreak. It could also be the difference between a workplace having to close for a period, or being able to stay open and running.

Secondary school and college students are also being asked to wear face coverings wherever social distancing cannot be maintained as an additional safety measure through to Easter.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Tomorrow will mark a moment of joy for millions of people across the country – from the students going back to class to the teachers who can't wait to get them back – as young people walk through their school and college gates and are reunited with their friends.

I do not underestimate how challenging the last few months have been with some children in class and most at home, but I do know how important it is for all children to be back in school, not only for their education but for their mental health and wellbeing.

Over the last few days I've been visiting schools and speaking to staff who have been preparing for the full return and their sheer dedication and selflessness has shone through.

I'd also like to thank children, young people, their families and carers for their patience and resilience in the face of the challenges the pandemic has posed.

Existing safety measures also remain in place, including maintaining distance between staff and students where possible, good ventilation and regular hand washing.

Dr Susan Hopkins Covid-19 Strategic Response Director to Public Health England and Chief Medical Adviser to NHS Test and Trace said:

Schools re-opening for all students is important for children's

wellbeing and mental health as well as their learning.

Scientific studies show that rates of COVID-19 infection in schools reflect rates in the community and schools have reduced the risk of transmission. With extra precautionary measures and twice-weekly testing in place and the lowest rate of infection since September 2020 it's better that students are now back in the classroom.

Outside of schools, it remains crucial that current restrictions are followed.

The return to face to face education has been supported with a £1.7 billion package, focusing on an expansion of one-to-one and small group tutoring programmes across all age groups, summer provision for those pupils who need it the most, and flexible additional one-off funding for schools to use in the best interests of their most disadvantaged pupils.

The National Tutoring Programme that was set up to reach the most disadvantaged young people with one-to-one or small-group tutoring has already reached over 125,000 young people this academic year, and will continue to expand thanks to the extended funding package. This targeted intervention is proven to boost progress by up to three to five months from just a single block of tutoring.

[Mental health toolkit rolled out across entire Royal Navy fleet](#)

A CD version of digital content has been distributed across the Royal Navy Fleet, Submarine Service, the Royal Marines and Royal Fleet Auxiliary and will be available for those deployed with Carrier Strike Group 2021 as it sets off across the globe. The offline platform will benefit personnel without internet access on operations.

Designed specifically for the defence community, HeadFIT provides round the clock access to self-help tools that can enhance mood, drive and confidence whilst reducing stress levels.

Minister for Defence People & Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

We're committed to ensuring our Armed Forces receive the mental health support they deserve.

By rolling out HeadFIT across the entire Royal Navy fleet, we've

taken another vital step in ensuring our people have the tools they need to maintain their mental fitness wherever they are in the world.

HeadFIT builds on an existing suite of measures including increased spending on mental health services, a 24-hour hotline for service personnel and their families and the introduction of mandatory mental health training for all personnel this spring.

The CD, which mirrors the digital HeadFIT App launched online last year, works in personal laptops and computers. It helps personnel maintain good mental health with various techniques including breathing exercises, body posture and mental visualisation.

Using a mix of audio and visual aids, the platform also provides exercises and advice on everything from goal setting to distraction techniques. These proven methods are easily integrated into daily life and help create positive mental health habits.

Second Sea Lord, Vice Admiral Nick Hine said:

It is absolutely critical to me that we prioritise activities to support and improve the mental fitness and resilience of our internationally deployed team.

HeadFIT – as an offline tool – will empower individuals to access expert support services in improving their own mental wellbeing.

Our ambitious Transformation programme is integrating technology and smart ways of working to optimise Human Performance and this is one step in the journey.

HeadFIT, which was developed in partnership with the Royal Foundation's Heads Together campaign, the Ministry of Defence and King's College London, is designed for all defence personnel, whether they are long serving or new recruits, veterans, civilian staff or those in uniform.

Each of the single services and Civil Service have a number of initiatives to support their mental health and fitness and HeadFIT is designed to support the messages in these existing programmes.