

# PM call with Prime Minister Draghi of Italy: 4 March 2021

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi this afternoon.



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The Prime Minister congratulated Prime Minister Draghi on his recent appointment and both leaders agreed there were big opportunities to enhance the UK-Italy bilateral relationship, particularly in a year where the UK is hosting the G7, Italy is hosting the G20 and our countries are partnering to host COP26.

The leaders discussed the important role the G7 and G20 will play in helping the international community build back better from the coronavirus pandemic. They agreed on the importance of a coordinated agenda between the two summits to learn lessons from the pandemic, roll out the coronavirus vaccine around the world and prepare for future pandemics.

The Prime Minister and Prime Minister Draghi also talked about the important role this year's COP26 Summit will play in preserving and delivering on the Paris Agreement.

The Prime Minister highlighted the UK, Italy and Sweden's cooperation on our Future Combat Air System as an example how our relationship is working to make our people safer and our societies more prosperous.

On Libya, the leaders agreed they were closely aligned on the situation in the country and resolved to work together to support the new interim executive and build a more peaceful and stable future for Libya.

The Prime Minister and Minister Draghi looked forward to meeting in person soon.

## [Jenrick welcomes Budget package to level up communities and support the nation's recovery from the pandemic](#)

The measures were unveiled by the Chancellor as part of yesterday's [Budget](#) which set out how the nation will build back better from the pandemic, level up opportunity and prosperity in communities across the UK, as well as help more families on to the housing ladder.

The Budget underlines the government's immediate priority of helping communities prosper again by supporting jobs and business as we emerge from the pandemic, in line with the Prime Minister's Roadmap.

Crucially it sets out how we will go further and faster levelling up communities through three major new funding programmes as the government makes the biggest changes to the way we support local economic growth for a decade.

The Levelling up Fund, the UK Community Renewal Fund and the Community Ownership Fund will target over £5 billion of investment across the UK to regenerate our town centres and high streets, improve local transport links, invest in local culture, and give communities the power to take over cherished local places that might otherwise be lost.

These investment programmes will also see the UK government driving investment to where it's needed most across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

A further 45 Town Deals have also been announced totalling over £1 billion, and eight new Freeport areas will also create trade, jobs, investment and innovation across the country as part of the levelling up agenda.

Businesses are the backbone of our economy and supporting them is central to the nation's bounce back from the pandemic. As part of the announced £5 billion Restart Grants – the government will also be providing all English councils with an additional £425 million of discretionary grant funding, on top of the £1.6 billion already allocated. This will be available to all local authorities across England to bid into who can demonstrate they have local businesses in need.

This Budget is also outlining measures to support the most vulnerable in our society with £4 million funding for a pilot to provide specialist support to

give vulnerable homeless women access to safe spaces. This funding comes on top of the £125 million for local authorities delivering the Domestic Abuse Bill's new statutory duty to provide support to victims and their children within safe accommodation

Further measures to help turn 'Generation Rent' into 'Generation Buy' have also been outlined with a new mortgage guarantee scheme and extension to the Stamp Duty cut going towards helping people realise the dream of owning their own home.

Secretary of State for Communities Robert Jenrick said:

Our priority is to support communities as they recover from the pandemic and to help the nation Build Back Better.

This is a Budget that delivers for communities with multi-billion investment to help level up all areas of the UK by supporting businesses, creating new jobs, helping increase home ownership and spreading opportunity.

We are putting communities in control by making town centres and high streets ready for the future, investing in local public transport and giving a helping hand to local people to save much loved places from disappearing.

## **Further support for homeownership**

The Chancellor has announced a new policy to support homeownership and change 'Generation Rent' into 'Generation Buy' with a government-backed mortgage guarantee scheme. First-time buyers and existing homeowners across the UK will have the chance to secure a 95% mortgage on homes of up to £600, 000 with just a 5% deposit. [Read more details](#).

The government is also extending the Stamp Duty cut by another three months, helping more people to realise their dream of home ownership.

## **Levelling Up Fund**

As part of his [Budget speech](#), the Chancellor set out more details of the Levelling Up Fund which was announced during the [Spending Review in November 2020](#).

The fund will be available to communities in all UK nations, with up to £4.8 billion available for local infrastructure across the UK.

It will be allocated competitively to be used to invest in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities – including regenerating town centres and high streets, investing in local transport schemes, and upgrading local culture and heritage assets.

See more [details on the bidding process](#).

The government has also launched the prospectus for the £220 million UK Community Renewal Fund. This is a transition fund to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and replaces the European Regional Development Funding.

The fund is an open competition and is UK wide so that people in every region and nation of the UK can benefit. It will run from 2021-22 and will accept applications from local authorities who want to pilot programmes that meet local challenges and local need in urban, rural and coastal areas across the UK.

To ensure that funding reaches places that need it most, 100 places have been identified based on an index of economic resilience to receive capacity funding to help them co-ordinate their applications.

Find more [information on how to bid](#).

Further details on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will be announced later this year.

The government has launched a new £150 million [Community Ownership Fund](#) to help ensure that communities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can support and continue benefiting from the local facilities, community assets and amenities most important to them.

From Summer 2021 community groups will be able to bid for up to £250,000 matched-funding to help them buy or take over local community assets at risk of being lost, to run as community-owned businesses. In exceptional cases, up to £1 million matched-funding will be available to help establish a community-owned sports club or help buy a sports grounds at risk of being lost without community intervention.

The Community Ownership Fund will help ensure that important parts of the social fabric, such as pubs, sports clubs, theatres and post office buildings, can continue to play a central role in towns and villages across the UK.

More on how to bid for funding will be announced shortly.

## **Towns Fund**

The Towns Fund was set up to ensure local areas can grow their economies, create and sustain local jobs whilst also carving out new opportunities to reshape the look and feel of their area.

It has been announced that 45 towns will receive up to a £25 million share of over £1 billion as part of the Towns Fund. This means that over half of the 101 chosen areas have had their funding confirmed which will help them to build back better after the pandemic.

This funding round sees large urban areas such as Rochdale, Bolton, Milton Keynes and Preston receive offers, investments have also been made in rural and coastal areas such as Southport, Lowestoft, Skegness and Margate.

See [further details on all the towns which will receive funding](#).

## **Freeports**

The Chancellor has announced 8 Freeports from 8 regions in England. The successful bids are: East Midlands Airport, Felixstowe and Harwich, Humber, Liverpool City Region, Plymouth and South Devon, Solent, Thames and Teesside.

Freeports will be national hubs for international trade, innovation and commerce, regenerating communities across the UK; attracting new businesses, spreading jobs, investment and opportunity to towns and cities across the country.

Subject to agreeing their governance arrangements and successfully completing their business cases, these 8 Freeports will begin operations from late 2021.

## **Respite Rooms**

The Budget has announced £4.2 million funding alongside £15 million to tackle violence against women and girls.

This funding comes on top of the £125 million for local authorities delivering the Domestic Abuse Bill's new statutory duty to provide support to victims and their children within safe accommodation.

The new funding will pilot a programme to provide up to 132 new bed spaces for around 1100 homeless and extremely vulnerable women a year, across London and 9 other areas and will build on the success of 'The Green Room' in London.

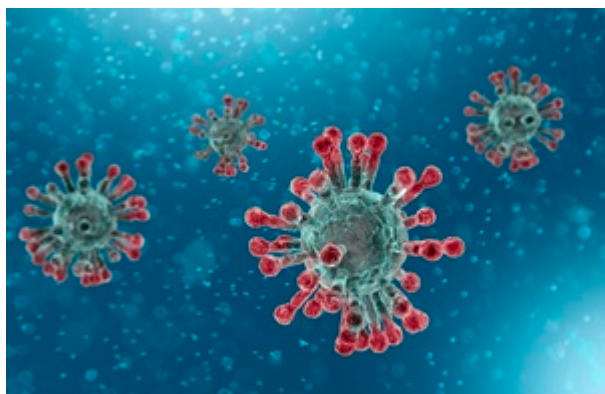
These Respite Rooms will provide support for women who are affected by violence and abuse suffering multiple disadvantage in areas where the prevalence of rough sleeping is high. They will provide a safe, single gender space for a short period of time with intensive, trauma informed support to make choices and decisions around next steps for recovery. The funding will address a gap for a particularly vulnerable group of women who have experienced violence and abuse and provide them with a safe space and access to specialist support.

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## **[Surge testing to be deployed in targeted areas in Stockton and Brent](#)**

Press release

Further targeted areas will have additional testing made available to control and suppress the potential spread of the COVID-19 variant first identified in South Africa.



Working in partnership with the local authorities, additional testing and genomic sequencing is being deployed to targeted areas within Stockton-on-Tees (TS19) and Brent (North Wembley), where the COVID-19 variant first identified in South Africa has been found.

The increased testing is being introduced in addition to existing extensive testing. In combination with the public following current lockdown rules and [‘Hands. Face. Space’](#) advice, it will help to monitor and suppress the spread of the virus. Positive cases will be sequenced for genomic data to help increase our understanding of COVID-19 variants and their spread within these areas.

Enhanced contact tracing will be used for individuals testing positive with a ‘variant of concern’. This is where contact tracers look back over an extended period in order to determine the route of transmission.

People living within the targeted areas are strongly encouraged to take a COVID-19 test when offered, whether they are showing symptoms or not.

People with symptoms should [book a free test online](#) or by phone so they can get tested at a testing site or have a testing kit sent to them at home.

Those without symptoms should [visit their local authority website](#) for more information.

Published 4 March 2021

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[Stephen Gibson confirmed as preferred](#)

# candidate for Chair of Regulatory Policy Committee

Following an open competition, Stephen Gibson has been named as the government's preferred candidate to the post of Chair of the Regulatory Policy Committee.

The Secretary of State has invited the Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee to hold a pre-appointment hearing and to report on Mr Gibson's suitability for the post. This is in line with the government's commitment to strengthen the role of Parliament in scrutinising major public appointments.

Pre-appointment hearings enable select committees to take evidence from preferred candidates for major public appointments before they are appointed. Hearings are in public and involve the select committee publishing a report setting out their views on the candidate's suitability for the post. Pre-appointment hearings are non-binding but ministers will consider the committee's views before deciding whether to proceed with an appointment.

The Regulatory Policy Committee is an independent body, sponsored by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The Regulatory Policy Committee assesses the quality of evidence and analysis used to inform regulatory proposals affecting the economy, businesses, civil society, charities and other non-government organisations. Its independent advice and scrutiny helps ensure that ministerial policy decisions are based on accurate evidence, and helps to produce better regulation.

Mr Gibson has over 25 years' experience as a professional economist across a range of regulated sectors including post, water, ports, rail, aviation, energy, broadcasting, advertising and telecoms, working as a consultant and from both sides of the regulatory fence. In 2011 he set up SLG Economics, a consultancy providing expert regulatory and competition economics advice to regulators, regulated companies and consumer bodies.

Mr Gibson is a Member and current Interim Chair of the Regulatory Policy Committee and Director of SLG Economics. He is also a Member of the CAA (Civil Aviation Authority) Senior Advisory Board advising on the regulatory framework for Heathrow and NATS and is on the expert panel for ICCAN (the Independent Committee on Civil Aviation Noise). He also lectures in economics at Birkbeck University. Stephen's previous roles include: Chief Economist at Postcomm, Interim Chief Economist at Ofwat, Principal Economist at Ofcom and Deputy Chair of Bowel Cancer UK.

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# Building back better through innovation

Most people have heard of Thomas Edison. Fewer people, I suspect, have heard of Joseph Swan.

A resident of Sunderland in the north-east of England, Swan made his first prototype of the lightbulb in 1850 – although he didn't demonstrate it until almost 30 years later.

Swan is among 21 people who might reasonably have claimed to be the inventor of the lightbulb – along with inventors from Belgium, Canada, Russia, Germany and many others.

But Edison gets all the credit. And in so many ways, it's justified. Because he understood that the product – the lightbulb – was simply the first step. It's innovation that allows it to take off.

And at the heart of innovation is iteration. Edison used some 6,000 different materials, before eventually settling on Japanese bamboo fibres for his filament.

Innovation is very rarely about that 'eureka' moment where everything just clicks into place.

It's a collective process of gradual and incremental improvement.

Much has changed in the 150 years since Edison and Swan.

We're now on the cusp of a fourth industrial revolution – one that builds on our digital revolution, blurring the lines between the physical, the digital and the biological.

And few things reflect the spirit of this new age better than our life sciences sector – which sits at the intersection of all 3.

But what hasn't changed for centuries is the role of iteration in innovation.

I'm passionate about innovation. Not simply because I am, quite literally, the Minister for Innovation.

It's a personality trait. I am an optimist. For others the drabness of today – for me the sunlit uplands of the future.

In my previous life, before becoming a Minister of Innovation, I ran the Ministry of Sound, a start-up before the words start-up were even invented.

We rode the tiger of the first great internet bubble of the 1990s, powered by the sound of house music. We had a great data business before Facebook and GDPR had been invented. NatWest told us we cleared the first online retail

purchase in the country. And we were live to the global internet directly from the club each weekend, pioneers of internet broadcasting.

But what I experienced, here and in the United States, is that the businesses that really took off were the ones that could change direction on a dime.

When we launched our first album, it was enough to stick the famous portcullis club logo on the front cover to top the charts. There were loads of clubs – Cream, Gatecrasher, Renaissance, even School Disco had an album. So the battle was for the big-name DJs – Pete Tong, Carl Cox, Sasha and Digweed. They soon oversold themselves, and the competition came for tracks. And so it went on. The Ministry of Sound thrived because we were ahead of each consumer twist.

Iteration is the difference between your start-up succeeding or stumbling.

Clinical trials are no exception to this.

The Silicon Valley mantra – “fail fast, fail often, fail forward” – applies here too.

It’s something my friend, the science and economics writer Matt Ridley, sets out in his fantastic book, ‘How Innovation Works’, where he argues in defence of incremental, iterative processes, noting that the Wright brothers succeeded because they didn’t expect to build a flying machine at the first attempt.

But as well as the power of iteration in innovation, he argues that, for people like me in government, it’s the barriers to entry we have to watch out for.

It’s my personal mission to ensure you have the right conditions to iterate, to innovate and, ultimately, to succeed – and that means taking a hard look at those barriers to entry.

And, for me, a key part of that is to help you make clinical trials cheaper, faster and more accessible.

## **Clinical trials plus COVID**

In normal times, this would be a challenging mission. But it feels especially challenging now, as we are still grappling with the biggest public health emergency in a generation and its impact on our life sciences sector – something I won’t shy away from.

There have, of course, been some amazing victories.

The pandemic has shown, beyond measure, the value of robust clinical trials, identifying vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics that work – and, crucially, ruling out the ones that don’t.

Like the UK’s RECOVERY trial, the largest of its kind anywhere in the world, with over 38,000 participants, which revealed the life-saving benefits of

Dexamethasone – something that has gone on to save countless lives, here and around the world.

Or the REMAP-CAP study, for which the UK has recruited 60% of trial patients globally, a study that showed how drugs ordinarily used for arthritis can also increase survival from COVID-19.

These are great achievements.

But there's no getting around the fact that the pressure on our health and care system this past year has been immense, with real consequences for non-COVID studies. We've seen research programmes put on pause – or even cancelled.

There are therapeutics that would have been developed in 2021 that simply haven't materialised because of the pandemic.

There's no question we've lost something – and I share in that profound sense of loss.

So the question for people like me – indeed, for people like all of us here – is how do we catch up?

I want us to be able to look back in 5 years' time and say we made up the ground.

## **Build back better**

The first natural step is to restart what we've stopped.

Our 'Restart Framework' that we've built with the NIHR has supported the recruitment of over 230,000 participants in non-urgent public health studies since last April.

It is heartening to see that 76% of paused commercial studies have now reopened.

We know the challenges facing these studies continue to be great, and we are exploring strategies to better enable the full recovery of our non-urgent public health studies.

And now, with the success of our vaccine roll-out, and our roadmap out of lockdown, the sector can realistically look to the future.

But that future cannot simply be business as usual.

So our second step must be bigger and bolder.

The only way we can truly hope to catch up is to take a totally new approach, by reducing the barriers to entry, dramatically increasing the velocity of innovation in the sector, and building back better.

Not only will this help us catch up, but it can also help us tackle some of

those seemingly intractable challenges, like treatments for Alzheimer's and dementia that have eluded us for so long.

And, for me, there are 3 ways we can do that.

## **1. Making trials more accessible**

First, by making trials more accessible. Fundamentally, we have to centre our studies around patients.

Like the RELIEVE IBS-D study, which used new tech and virtual trial designs to enable rapid recruitment and safe participation from home.

At a single NIHR site in Newcastle, for example, where they used a virtual approach, recruitment was 67% faster, compared to the 28 sites using a traditional approach.

Clearly that's the way forward.

We can also make trials more accessible if we continue to embed research within the NHS and local care pathways, so research and trials are not a burden but an essential pillar of effective patient care.

And I'm delighted our 5 NIHR national patient recruitment centres are already making it quicker and easier for life science companies to deliver late-phase clinical research – at scale and at pace – through the NHS.

## **2. Internationally competitive and collaborative**

Second, we need to be both internationally competitive and collaborative.

Now, that might sound like a contradiction in terms, but here's what I mean by that:

We can be more competitive, by using our newfound regulatory freedom, now we've left the EU, to embrace new opportunities – something we've seen so brilliantly through the pandemic as our regulatory system has got innovative trials off the ground in record time.

I want us to attract more research to these shores – and get more UK patients to the front of the queue for new treatments.

But equally, we have to stay collaborative.

Just imagine what Edison could have achieved if he worked with the other 20 people around the world who were also developing light bulbs!

While there are many successful trials, not enough are set up in a way that can benefit the whole world.

It's frustrating when the clinical trials in different countries aren't recognised, because data and insights can't be properly integrated across national boundaries.

We need to be more co-ordinated about how our trials are set up.

And we know that's possible.

For example, at the start of the pandemic, there were no international assay standards for vaccines.

It made it harder to compare results from vaccine trials and meant that work was sometimes duplicated – or worse, unusable.

One of the reasons the UK was the first country in the world to vaccinate is because our regulator worked so hard to overcome some of these challenges.

We must continue to strengthen the frameworks that underpin clinical trials, with shared standards, so the creation and delivery of clinical trials can be as seamless as possible around the world.

Third, and finally: we have to embrace digital tools and big data.

It's something that was done so brilliantly when we made millions of people's coronavirus test results available to the PRINCIPLE trial.

It's an example of how safe and ethical data access can offer up many more opportunities to work as a system.

Few things demonstrate the UK's commitment to the principles of data sharing than the fact that 40% of sequences shared in the international database GISAID are from the UK. It's a staggering number.

And it shows: we believe in sharing data. We believe in the power of AI to make sense of it. And we believe in genomics too, and with ever greater collaboration and innovation in this field, I believe we can make real and meaningful breakthroughs on major challenges, from cancer to kidney disease, and even in the area of population health where data, digital tools and the use of real-world evidence enable us to undertake large-scale trials and investigations at pace across the country to reduce inequalities in areas such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes that have a significant health burden for our population.

## **Conclusion**

In closing: there is much to do – especially as we continue to recover from COVID.

I don't think we can hide away from the challenges we face. But neither must we shy away from the solutions.

We need a new approach – with cheaper, faster and more accessible clinical trials, staying competitive – but remaining collaborative and embracing the digital tools of the future.

This is the way that, when we meet in 5 years' time – hopefully in person – we can reflect that, after COVID, not only didn't we lose anything but we

gained something too.

That must be the mission.

I'm so thrilled I have this chance to work with you to make that happen.

Thank you.