

£8 million government boost for manufacturers across England to go digital

- SMEs across England to benefit from £8 million to adopt cutting-edge, digital technology
- projects supported to date include the world's first smart black pudding factory and adopting 3D printing for stop-motion animated puppets
- new funding will help businesses build back better by increasing productivity and reducing emissions

New £8 million government funding for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to help them modernise, go digital and create new jobs.

The funding, part of the government's Made Smarter Adoption programme, will support up to 1,000 small and medium sized manufacturers, across the North West, North East, Yorkshire and the Humber and the West Midlands regions, in adopting digital technology.

A pilot of the programme launched in January 2019 in the North West and has already worked with more than 1,000 firms and directly supported over 500 businesses to use digital technology to overcome challenges or access opportunities to grow their business.

The additional funding announced today (18 February 2021) will allow businesses in the North West to continue to access support and, starting in the coming months, for more manufacturers across other parts of England do the same.

The Bury-based Black Pudding Company is already using support from Made Smarter to help create the world's first smart black pudding factory by using automation and digital tools to increase product quality and substantially reduce waste.

Meanwhile, Altrincham-based Mackinnon and Saunders, the stop-motion animators who worked on Postman Pat and collaborated with Hollywood directors Tim Burton, have received support to adopt digital technology such as 3D printing to keep up with bigger, global rivals.

Minister for Investment, Lord Grimstone, said:

The proof is in the pudding and for the companies that have adopted the latest digital technology they are already reaping the rewards.

To help level up the country, we want to ensure businesses have the right tools for the job so that they can build back better and greener from the pandemic.

By supporting adoption of industrial digital technology, such as robotics and automation, additive manufacturing or the Internet of Things, the programme can help level up regions by enabling manufacturers to increase their productivity, create high-skilled well-paid jobs and reduce their emissions.

Chairman, Accenture UK & Ireland, and Made Smarter Commissioner, Olly Benzecri, said:

Having been actively involved in the North West pilot we have seen the power of this scheme to help a broad range of manufacturers exploit industrial digitalisation to increase productivity and employment. It is great to see this approach now being made available more nationally, building on the strong foundation developed and proven in the North West over the past 2 years.

Made Smarter Commissioner and Managing Director of ATEC Engineering Solutions in Salford, Andrea Hough OBE, said:

This support plays a vital role in helping manufacturing SMEs like mine understand the advantages of adopting digital technology. My own firm has seen first hand the importance of digitalisation.

I have supported the pilot programme in the North West since it launched and am pleased that its work will continue and will be rolled out to three new regions to help even more businesses benefit from technology.

Made Smarter Commissioner and Chairman of ICW in Wakefield, Margaret Wood, said:

The rollout of Made Smarter Adoption support is a much needed booster in these changing times. I am happy to see that government is making this investment to enable a new era in manufacturing and to develop the possibilities for a new, digitalised industrial landscape.

By rolling out support across the North of England and the West Midlands, this will help increase regional productivity and innovation, helping to unleash countless possibilities.

Chief Executive of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, Helen Golightly, said:

Despite the rapid pace of digital adoption during the coronavirus pandemic, many SMEs still need support to introduce new technologies within their businesses that can improve productivity, efficiency and performance.

The Made Smarter Adoption Programme will help businesses in the North East adapt to a new, smarter way of working by embracing digital.

Innovation Lead for the West Midlands Combined Authority, Jamie Elliott, said:

This funding is a step in the right direction. We have 14,500 SME manufacturers in the West Midlands many of which would benefit from access to new technologies, which would both boost the region's economy, help create skilled jobs and contribute towards a cleaner, greener West Midlands.

Rolling out the 'Made Smarter Adoption' programme to additional regions is set to help more manufacturers, with support for firms in the North West continuing.

Other projects that have benefitted from support in the North West include:

- Preston-based, nutrition supplement manufacturer Nutree Life has adopted state-of-the-art automation technology to enable faster and more accurate production whilst improving efficiency. This has helped the firm to meet increased demand and allowed them to double their workforce
- Wirral-based Parity Medical has used their support from Made Smarter to develop a virtual showroom for their specialist medical technology that will reduce sales team travel by 30,000 miles a year and accelerate their demonstration process from two days to just one hour

The government's Made Smarter Adoption programme includes free impartial, expert advice, funded digital internships, access to specialised leadership and management training, as well as match funding for digital transformation projects.

SME manufacturers in the North West can continue to access Made Smarter Adoption support.

More information about Made Smarter Adoption support in the North East, the West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber will be made available in the coming months as local partners gear up to work with SMEs to help them take advantage of digital technology.

Alongside support for adoption, government is also investing £147 million through a Manufacturing Made Smarter Challenge to drive innovation in new digital solutions for manufacturers.

Made Smarter is a national movement to drive growth amongst UK makers and advance the UK economy. Backed by world-renowned businesses and the UK government, it will improve the development and adoption of emerging technologies, making a real, everyday difference to people from the boardroom to the factory floor.

Made Smarter was formed following a nationwide review into UK manufacturing that recommended 3 key changes: more ambitious leadership, more innovation in developing new technologies, and faster implementation and adoption of those technologies. It will be boosting the digital skills of industry leaders, bringing businesses and research development together to develop new technology, and helping makers embrace new digital tools. In doing so, we'll inspire the next industrial revolution and make the UK a leader in digital technologies.

For more information, visit madesmarter.uk.

Report by OSCE Chief Observer Ambassador Varga: UK response

Thank you Madam Chairperson. Thank you Ambassador Varga for sharing your report with the Permanent Council and providing a detailed insight into the activities of your Mission. We are very grateful for the vital work you and your team of observers carry out to provide the international community with impartial and transparent reporting, particularly given the additional challenges posed by COVID-19.

Unfortunately, your ability to monitor continues to be severely restricted. Your mission remains present at only two checkpoints along over 400 kilometres of the Ukraine-Russia state border, outside of Ukrainian government control. This is far from the comprehensive border monitoring foreseen under the Minsk agreements.

The challenges faced by your mission are further compounded by unacceptable restrictions placed upon your freedom of movement. Your report outlines that these restrictions create "blind spots" at the two check points and limit your ability to observe persons in military-style outfits in vehicles, ambulances crossing the border during night hours, trains at Gukovo border crossing point and to assess whether vehicles are crossing into Ukraine or not – to name just a few issues. You are also still prohibited from using binoculars, cameras and other observation tools.

Despite these restrictions, the Mission continues to provide useful insight to the international community, including to inform us about the so-called "humanitarian convoys". From its deployment in July 2014 until 2 February this year, the Mission has reported 99 Russian convoys. In the reporting period, the Mission observed three separate Russian Federation convoys crossing into Ukraine via the Donetsk border checkpoint. These so-called humanitarian convoys cross without Ukraine's permission and therefore violate its sovereignty. The UK once again calls on Russia to cease this practice and to facilitate the safe delivery of international aid based on an agreed international mechanism, as foreseen under the Minsk agreements.

This is just one example of how Russia has shown a blatant lack of respect for the Ukraine-Russia border. Between 17 September and 31 December 2020, the SMM observed on two occasions at least five vehicles in areas near the international border outside government control in Donetsk region, where there are no border facilities. One instance was on 16 October 2020 when two convoys met in an area close to the border near Manych. 22 people were seen unloading cargo from the vehicles, after which one vehicle was seen driving towards a compound in central Donetsk city and the other to exit Ukraine. SMM reports have repeatedly indicated that further violations would be revealed if the Observer Mission was allowed to comprehensively monitor along the full stretch of the Ukraine-Russia State border.

We will continue to support the work of this Mission, including by calling for an end to unnecessary limitations on your operations and supporting a longer mandate extension period. We join our international partners in calling again for an expansion of the Mission to the entirety of the uncontrolled section of the border. If Russia has nothing to hide, it should have no objection to this.

Finally, the UK reiterates our unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, including its territorial waters.

Expansion of prison kitchen training scheme to cut reoffending

- the Clink Kitchens training programme to expand to up to 70 prisons
- training reduces reoffending rates by 32% and will transform the lives and prospects of thousands of offenders
- part of government's commitment to build back safer by cutting reoffending, which costs the taxpayer £18 billion a year

Over the next 3 years, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and [The Clink](#) charity have agreed to extend their training programme, currently already operating in HMPs High Down, Cardiff, Brixton and Styal, to offenders working in an additional 70 prison kitchens.

Following successful pilots, training will continue at HMPs Bristol and Styal and from the end of April they will be first joined by Eastwood Park, Send and Downview with a steady further rollout creating opportunities to help as many as two thousand offenders into employment and away from crime for good.

Boosting access to work and [safe accommodation](#) for prison leavers will also help build back safer communities by cutting crime and reducing reoffending, which costs the taxpayer £18 billion each year.

Prisons Minister Lucy Frazer MP, said:

This expansion of the catering programme is testament to the thousands of training and job opportunities it has provided for offenders over the years.

Cutting reoffending and its vast cost to society is a priority for this government. Training within prison leads to employment on release, which we know has such a positive impact on ex-offenders, their families and communities, and ultimately reduces crime.

The Clink's training scheme is proven to significantly cut rates of reoffending, with offenders 32% less likely to go on to commit further crimes compared to those who did not receive training. This success means for every £1 invested, The Clink Charity is likely to generate at least £4.80 back to the prison service, government and society in reduced reoffending rates.

The expansion to more prisons marks a new era for the partnership with HMPPS, which over a decade has helped more than 2,500 ex-offenders find employment.

The training sees serving prisoners work in professionally run kitchens for up to 35 hours a week, preparing and cooking up to 80,000 daily meals for fellow prisoners. Trainees will work towards gaining City and Guilds National Vocational Qualifications Levels 1, 2 and 3, while improving their confidence, teamworking and communication skills.

The scheme will be funded entirely by The Clink through generous donations from many organisations and supporters.

Finlay T K Scott, Chairman of The Clink Charity said:

Reducing crime and improving all of our lives is at the heart of what The Clink does. This latest initiative in partnership with HMPPS underlines the tremendous impact The Clink program has had over the last ten years.

We will build upon the success of our innovative integrated program and roll it out across the prison estate. This platform will dramatically increase the number of students we are able to rehabilitate with the subsequent impact upon reoffending figures.

The partnership with The Clink Charity is one of many government schemes aimed at supporting offenders into employment with the ultimate aim of cutting crime. Other initiatives include work placements for dozens of offenders as the construction of HMP Five Wells gets underway, as well as the new prison at Glen Parva.

Notes to editors

- Justice Data Lab figures show the rate of reoffending for prisoners who participated in the scheme was 15%, compared to 22% for those who did not. This is a difference of 32%.
- Over the next 3 years New Futures Network, the specialist part of HMPPS which works to create employment opportunities for serving prisoners and prison leavers, will help The Clink deliver their sector-led training program. The Clink Charity is unique as it not only delivers training inside the prison but carries on with full support and mentoring post-release to help them reintegrate back into society, gain full-time employment and ultimately reduce reoffending.
- For interviews with The Clink Charity please contact mediaenquiries@theclinkcharity.org

Drinks company that falsified accounts to get £300,000 wound up

Liquor World (Scotland) Ltd was wound up in the public interest on 11 February 2021 by order of Lord Clark in the Court of Session. Julie Tait and Stuart Preston of Grant Thornton UK LLP have been appointed joint interim liquidators of the company.

The company, which appeared to have traded as a retailer and wholesaler of alcoholic beverages, came to the attention of the Insolvency Service after concerns were raised about the accuracy of its filed accounts.

Following confidential enquiries, investigators found evidence that the company had used false and misleading documents to obtain loans and finance from lenders.

During 2019 and 2020 Liquor World filed accounts that showed a dramatic, and unexplained, improvement in its financial position. The drinks company then used this improved position to make several applications to lenders for various types of credit including loans, asset finance and invoice factoring finance.

Investigators established that to support some of the finance applications, Liquor World provided lenders with bank statements that falsely showed significantly higher levels of transactions than was actually the case. Other false or misleading documents were also produced to lenders by the company.

Whilst a number of the finance applications were rejected by lenders, investigators discovered that Liquor World successfully secured finance totalling more than £300,000.

The court wound up the company on the grounds that the company had been misused as a vehicle to obtain credit, operated in a manner that has caused harm and loss to credit providers, filed false and misleading accounts, and failed to maintain or produce adequate accounting records with its director failing to cooperate with the investigation.

Liquor World's current director, appointed in around April 2019, failed to co-operate with the investigation.

David Hope, Chief Investigator for the Insolvency Service, said:

Liquor World has blatantly and cynically used false and misleading information to persuade lenders to advance funds to it resulting in those lenders suffering a significant financial loss.

By acting swiftly in bringing winding up proceedings, we have prevented any further harm taking place at the hands of this company.

All public enquiries concerning the company should be sent to the joint interim liquidators: Julie Tait and Stuart Preston, Grant Thornton UK LLP, 7 Exchange Crescent, Conference Square, Edinburgh, EH3 8AN, tel: 0131 229 9181.

Liquor World (Scotland) Ltd – company registration number SC472891 – was incorporated on 19 March 2014. The company's registered office is at 15, Unit B/3 Edison Street, Hillington Park, Glasgow G52 4JW.

The petition was presented under s124A of the Insolvency Act 1986 on 22 January 2021 and Julie Tait and Stuart Preston of Grant Thornton UK LLP were appointed by the Court as joint provisional liquidators on 26 January 2021 before being appointed as interim liquidators on 11 February 2021 on the making of the winding up order.

Company Investigations, part of the Insolvency Service, uses powers under the Companies Act 1985 to conduct confidential fact-finding investigations into the activities of live limited companies in the UK on behalf of the Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS). [Further information about live company investigations is available here.](#)

[Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct, is available here.](#)

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

ESFA Update: 10 February 2021

Published 10 February 2021

Last updated 18 February 2021 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 18 February 2021

We have updated the mid-year funding claim articles with additional information on subcontracting in the further education and local authorities editions of ESFA Update.

2. 10 February 2021

First published.